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

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## V

*The Retreat Remembered and  
Rediscovered***Introduction**

“**H**istory had never seen such a thing, an entire army, the king, the parliament, the government, people, administrative departments ... the whole state left *itself* and went into exile” — so says the introduction to the 2005 Serbian documentary, “Where the Yellow Lemon Tree Blooms”.<sup>1166</sup> This is generally the Serbian view of the Retreat — it was an exceptional, unique event in the history of Serbia — if not the world — which became legendary almost as soon as it ended. Nevertheless, the official commemoration and memorialisation of the Retreat, and of the other important events from the First World War over the decades that followed it, would be unsystematic and erratic, as well as government and regime dependent. As previously discussed, the interwar years saw the building of several memorials: the *Victor* in Belgrade, the monument to the Defenders of Belgrade, the monument to the Unknown Hero ... but no memorial to the Retreat. Relations with Albania were never sufficiently

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1166 “Gde cveta limun žut” [“Where the Yellow Lemon Tree Blooms”], *Košutnjak Film*, 2006.

stable to allow for the building of any memorials *in situ*.<sup>1167</sup> The ossuary in Vido, to be discussed in this chapter, is often considered as fulfilling the function of the Retreat memorial. Today, it is one of the three main pilgrimage destinations for Serbs seeking to pay their respects to the dead of the Great War, the second being the military cemetery of Thessaloniki, and the third the Kajmakčalan Peak chapel on the Graeco-Macedonian border. Interest in visiting these Serbian *lieux de mémoires* has increased in recent years,<sup>1168</sup> despite all three sites being outside Serbia. During the Great War centenary years 2014 – 2018, in the context of the general resurgence of interest in memorial culture, much is being remembered and rediscovered — as well as misremembered and reinterpreted — and alongside official commemorative agendas, there are remarkable personal initiatives and projects. There are private citizens' endeavours to pay tribute, commemorate or otherwise memorialise the fallen in the Great War and in the Retreat, consisting of simple or creative acts of remembrance performed by self-appointed and inspired actors of remembrance. Some have attracted public attention and admiration, and will be discussed further. Also in this chapter, we will examine the cultural memory of the Retreat expressed through museum exhibitions. There have been theatre performances, book promotions, films, and conferences, which have attracted genuine interest and generated discussions, and some have been mentioned previously. But most of all, we cannot examine the topic of cultural memory and individual acts of memory without highlighting the Great War songs, which all Serbs know the lyrics to, and the pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the revered Serbian dead, where these songs are sung.

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1167 There are around a dozen locations in Albania with derelict cemeteries containing the remains of Serbian soldiers from the Balkan Wars and the First World War, according to the Institute for the Protection of Monuments. There are no memorials or monuments. There is an ossuary in Tiranë with remains of the Serbian soldiers from the First Balkan War.

1168 From sources in Corfu 2017.

## 1. Musical Storytelling — The Soundtrack of the Retreat

“There, far away, far away from the sea,  
This is where my village lies, this is where Serbia be,  
There, far away, where the yellow lemon tree blooms,  
There was the only way for us, for the Serbian Army to pass.”<sup>1169</sup>

According to the numerous articles published in the Serbian press in May 2013, in the 70th year since Nikola Tesla’s death, the great scientist’s last wish was to have two songs played at his funeral: Schubert’s *Ave Maria*, and the traditional Serbian song from the Great War, *Tamo daleko*, “There Far Away”.<sup>1170</sup> For Serbs, this was other proof — if more was needed— of Nikola Tesla’s devotion to the old country.<sup>1171</sup> Consequently, when reportedly resurfaced footage of Tesla’s funeral with the accompanying music appeared on a Serbian news site, it quickly spread to others, and then did the rounds of regional social media for a couple of weeks, drawing comments and exchanges between viewers, mostly related to Tesla’s ethnic origin rather than to his scientific legacy.<sup>1172</sup>

Music is a powerful storyteller. When music is related to a specific historical context, well-known and familiar to all, then it only takes a few chords to produce the (desired) effect: sadness, joy, despair, elation. Music not only rouses emotions that transcend the present to situate us in the past, but it also conveys vivid images that stay in our mind. *Tamo*

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1169 *Tamo daleko* (There, Far Away) *YouTube* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SV7YqM71\\_co](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SV7YqM71_co) (accessed May 20, 2019) This translation by A.T.

1170 S. Šulović, “Nova dokumenta o geniju: Tesla sahranjen uz “Tamo daleko”” [“New documents about the genius: Tesla buried with “There far away””], *Blic*, 20 May 2013 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/nova-dokumenta-o-geniju-tesla-sahranjen-uz-tamo-daleko/5jbnh1j> (accessed May 15, 2019).

1171 Nikola Tesla was born in the Lika region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in present-day Croatia, and there are occasional heated exchanges between Serbs and Croats as to who he *belongs* to. Be that as it may, there are *Nikola Tesla streets* in *all* the parts of the former Yugoslavia.

1172 Nikola Tesla’s funeral in 1943, *Vimeo* <https://vimeo.com/210453956> (accessed May 15, 2019); also *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSQ1gPBr9kA> (accessed May 15, 2019).

*daleko*, a song about home, perhaps more than any other song from Serbia's Great War, has this power to mesmerise the audience into joining in, almost as if it was a sacred collective ceremony. This ritual, once started, has to be completed — the song has to be sung to the end by all present. *Tamo daleko* is thought to have originated in Corfu as the Serbian Army was recovering from the ordeal of the Retreat, and where many other troops stationed on the island also adopted it.<sup>1173</sup> In his book on the music and songs of Serbia's Great War,<sup>1174</sup> composer and musicologist Žarko Petrović presents the lyrics for nine different versions, not counting the French, English, Greek, and Czech versions of the song.<sup>1175</sup> In English, it was known as "Far away over there" and in French "Là-bas au loin". According to Ljubomir Saramandić, author of the book *The Pilgrimage to Corfu*, it was also taken up by Italian, Moroccan, and Senegalese troops.<sup>1176</sup> The lyrics of the different versions in Serbian are similar, with variations relating to how the "There, far away", i.e. *home*, is defined. There is a version "far away from the sea", or "far away, where the blue Danube shines", or even, "far away near the sea", as sung by volunteers from Dalmatia, according to Petrović.<sup>1177</sup> The music of *Tamo daleko* is a gentle, melancholy waltz, and the lyrics are achingly evocative, reminiscing about a far-away village left behind in Serbia. The song conveys an intense longing for home, born from the distance between the singer and his family.<sup>1178</sup> It is a quintessential song of *nostalgia*, or homesickness, a condition recognised as a disease in the 17th century, first discovered among soldiers who had travelled far from home.<sup>1179</sup> The song is also about

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1173 Ljubomir Saramandić, *Hodočašće na Krk* [Pilgrimage to Corfu] (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2004), 50.

1174 Žarko Petrović, *Tamo daleko — Solunske pesme* [There far away — Salonika songs] (Knjaževac: IO Nota, 1988).

1175 Petrović, 1988, 48-50.

1176 Saramandić, 2004, 50.

1177 Saramandić, 2004, 50.

1178 Different versions of this song continue to be recorded. There is even a Chilean version, sung by former political prisoners. See *Cantos Cautivos — Far Away (Tamo daleko)*. <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10684> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1179 David Anderson, "The soldiers who died of homesickness", *The Conversation*, 30 September 2016. <https://theconversation.com/the-soldiers-who-died-of-homesickness-65910> (accessed May 20, 2019). Reportedly, in 1918 a US soldier sent to France to fight, was the last person who died with "nostalgia" which was cause of death on his death certificate.

loss, of “the father and son” who gave their lives for their country, and of living in Corfu, “without the homeland”. In some versions of the song, Serbian soldiers in Corfu are admonished “not to kiss Greek girls” as their “Serbian womenfolk are waiting at home.” Despite the sad tone of the music and the lyrics, almost every version finishes with the exhortation: “Long live Serbia!”, indicating the ultimate goal — the soldiers returning home. The song is often linked to the Retreat, although it is about being in Corfu and far away from home, rather than about crossing Albania. The song does not symbolise a struggle for survival, it is about what happened afterwards, and embodies a yearning for home which comes across strongly through the music too, which may explain its appeal to troops from other nations. Today the song is ubiquitous in all the *lieux de mémoire* related to the First World War. It is played at commemorations, at ceremonies in cemeteries, in front of monuments, at museum exhibitions, in plays, documentaries, amateur videos, and television programmes. In November 2013, as a preamble to the centenary years, a play based on the last part of the *Serbian trilogy* by the Serbian author Stevan Jakovljević, was produced by Belgrade’s National Theatre.<sup>1180</sup> The play focuses on a unit of Serbian soldiers in a trench on the Salonika Front, waiting for the final push over the top. At the end of the play, one of the actors turns to the audience and starts singing *Tamo daleko*. The audience takes it up<sup>1181</sup> and sings along, in effect joining the performance. Despite enthusiastic reviews, and special praise for the use of *Tamo daleko*,<sup>1182</sup> it seemed a trite device to insert into a play, let alone at the end of a play. Because the song has the power to project far more emotion than any context, there is a risk that it might overwhelm the plot of the play, which was indeed the case, even if the critics loved it. It is possible that *Tamo daleko* is used because it never fails to enthuse the audience. When André Rieu, the internationally popular Dutch violinist, the so-called “king of waltz”, played a concert

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1180 *Srpska trilogija* [Serbian trilogy], *Narodno pozorište* [National Theatre] <https://www.narodnopolozoriste.rs/srpska-trilogija> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1181 Performance on 4 May 2014.

1182 For instance in *Novosti*, 23 November 2013 “Sjajna premijera *Srpske trilogije*” [“Excellent premiere of the *Serbian trilogy*”] <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/kultura.71.html:465097-Sjajna-premijera-Srpske-trilogije> (accessed May 20, 2019).

in Serbia, it was only natural that he would also play *Tamo daleko*, having first promoted his upcoming concert with the announcement that the song was on his repertoire.<sup>1183</sup>

“*Kreće se ladja francuska*” [“The French Ship is leaving”]<sup>1184</sup> is again a melancholy and mournful song, another waltz, to be played *moderato*. The music for the song was written by a French composer Nicholas Ballon, and it also exists in the French version as *Le bateau de Salonique*. However, according to Žarko Petrović, it was the Serbian version which was recorded on the French gramophone record *La grande guerre* at the end of the war.<sup>1185</sup> The song describes the transport of the Serbian sick and wounded as a French ship takes them elsewhere to convalesce. Just like *Tamo daleko*, this song too is sung in several different versions. That the French were already seen at the time as the saviours of the Serbs is clear from the line at the end of the second verse of the most popular version: “Long live brotherly liberty! Long live brotherly France!”<sup>1186</sup>

These two songs represent the *sacrificial narrative* part of the formula which forms the general Serbian perception of the Great War, even of their whole history: the Serbs *fought* and they *suffered*. While these two songs have a mournful tone and an atmosphere that may be unusual for war songs, the most famous Serbian tune of the First World War represents the *fighting* and *heroic* part of the Serbian narrative formula. *Marš na Drinu* [“March on the Drina”] is a true war song, a military march, written by a soldier for another soldier. It was composed by Captain Stanislav Binički<sup>1187</sup> on the battlefield, in the honour of the Cer Battle victory, in August 1914. Binički

1183 ANDRE RIEU Serbia – “Tamo daleko” *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yITCTu5XZZU> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1184 “Kreće se ladja francuska” *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBbN7kdc4pI> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1185 Petrović, 1988, 11.

1186 Petrović, 1988, 11.

1187 Stanislav Binički (1872–1942) was the son of a former Austro-Hungarian officer decorated at Könniggrätz, who defected to Serbia in 1868 as a supporter of the Illyrian movement for the establishment of a South Slav State. See Nenad Novak Stefanović, “Kad pada kiša doboša” [“As the drumbeats are raining”], in *Vodič kroz ljubavnu istoriju Beograda* [Guide through the Love History of Belgrade] (Belgrade: Laguna, 2017), 176.

dedicated it to the commander of the 2nd Regiment of the Drina Division, the so-called *Iron Regiment*. The commander, Colonel Milivoj Stevanović Brka who was Binički's friend, died in the battle.<sup>1188</sup> Composed in *Tempo di marcia*, it is a military march which has a distinct Serbian *kolo* at its core,<sup>1189</sup> a dance music sequence, creating an upbeat melody, combining the solemn part — the march, and the joyful part — the *kolo* — thus creating a “lyrical charge”.<sup>1190</sup> *March on the Drina* is an *extremely* popular tune in Serbia and is often performed in different contexts, including traditionally for Serbian New Year's Eve.<sup>1191</sup> For many nations, it is the song “Auld Lang Syne” which marks the New Year. In itself, it is symptomatic that the Serbian soundtrack for a new beginning should be a First World War tune. Being the “mythical war”, the Great War provides constant inspiration. The *March* represents not only the essence of heroism that the Serbs wish to be known for — the Cer Battle was the first Entente victory in the war — but also their *authentic being*. We could almost call it a proof of *appellation d'origine contrôlée*: the music is Serbian, the cause is Serbian — it is a symbol put to music. As such, *March on the Drina* was played at the ceremony of the 1961 Nobel Prize for Literature to Ivo Andrić,<sup>1192</sup> a Yugoslav writer who is today claimed by Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians. *March on the Drina* was traditionally played when young men were leaving home to begin their military service.<sup>1193</sup> *March on the Drina* has also been played in non-Serbian related settings, such as during the 1987 Vienna Philharmonic New Year's concert, conducted by Herbert von Karajan, possibly as just another piece of music that was easy to clap to.<sup>1194</sup> Different orchestras, musicians, and bands recorded this tune, including the English band *The Shadows*.<sup>1195</sup> In Serbia, *March on the Drina* was a candidate for the national anthem. It is

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1188 Stefanović, 2017, 182.

1189 *Kolo* is a traditional dance from South-east Europe.

1190 Stefanović, 2017, 182.

1191 13 January, according to the Julian calendar.

1192 The Nobel Prize in Literature 1961 <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1961/summary/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1193 Obligatory military service was suspended in 2011 and Serbia has had a professional army since.

1194 *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u--BZeL9jzQ> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1195 *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RRvJklrONE> (accessed May 20, 2019).

frequently sung by football supporters,<sup>1196</sup> as well as by sportsmen and women before or after matches, which are then reported in the tabloids as *news*. An interesting controversy regarding *March on the Drina* took place in 2013, when the then President of the UN General Assembly, former Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić (b. 1975), organised a concert at the UN, in celebration of the 67th session of the UN General Assembly and the Serbian presidency, “on the first day of the Orthodox New Year”. The concert was given by a Serbian *a cappella* choir *Viva Vox*. Their performance consisted of a medley of world music, traditional music, as well as pop and rock tunes. At the end of the concert, as an encore, they performed the *March on the Drina*, introduced by the MC as the “march of peace”.<sup>1197</sup> The concert, including the encore, was well received by the audience, and the then Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon was seen clapping to the rhythm. The next day, the *Congress of North American Bosniaks* (CNAB) addressed a protest letter to the UN Secretary General, informing him that the “March” should not have been allowed to be performed as it was symbolic of Serbian nationalism and was played by Serbian war criminals and aggressors in Bosnia in the 1990s.<sup>1198</sup> The UN Secretary General’s spokesperson subsequently apologised to the CNAB for the ovation given to the “militant Serbian nationalist song” and said the Secretary General had not been aware of the song’s context.<sup>1199</sup> In further statements and

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1196 The lyrics were authored by Miloje Popović Kavaja in 1964: “Forward to battle, heroes all, forward and do not regret your life...” “*Kako je nastao Marš na Drinu? Nezvanična himna Srbije, junačka ili agresorska pesma?*” [“How was the ‘March on the Drina’ composed? Serbia’s unofficial anthem, a heroic song or an aggressors’ song?”] *Telegraf*, 15 November 2014 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/kultura/1305377-kako-je-nastao-mars-na-drinu-nezvanicna-himna-srbije-junacka-ili-agresorska-pesma-video-tekst> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1197 The MC’s introduction: “Serbia is a European country. In our part of the world, New Year’s concert traditionally ends with a march *transformed* into a message of peace. So, here is a march, to close this wonderful evening, a great march of peace!”, see Reference link below. One could argue that unpacking this introduction would require a study of its own.

1198 Protest letter to Ban-Ki Moon, UN Secretary General, *Congress of North American Bosniaks* <https://bosniak.org/2013/01/15/protest-letter-to-ban-ki-moon-un-general-secretary/> (accessed May 20, 2019). There is no doubting the popularity of Serbian WWI songs in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, see Robert Hudson, “Songs of seduction: popular music and Serbian nationalism”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 37 (no. 2, 2003), 159-160.

1199 CNAB Welcomes the Apology of the United Nations for Serb Nationalist Song Ovation, Congress of North American Bosniaks, 17 January 2013 <https://bosniak.org/2013/01/17/cnab-welcomes-the-apology-of-the-united-nations-for-serb-nationalist-song-ovation/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

letters, CNAB requested Vuk Jeremić be investigated and suspended, but it seems that no further action was taken. The full concert, including the encore, could still be viewed on the UN TV website in 2019.<sup>1200</sup>

The status of the music of Serbia's Great War prior to the late 1980s was conflicted. Many songs were not played publicly, because Serbian nationalism was seen as a threat to socialist values. Radio stations, all state-controlled in the former Yugoslavia, did not play songs that were considered unsuitable or inappropriate, especially politically. Certainly, songs like "*Rado ide Srbin u vojnike*" ("Gladly goes a Serb to the army"),<sup>1201</sup> or "*Ko to kaže, ko to laže*" ("Who says so, who lies so") were not played publicly, except at weddings, mostly in the countryside.<sup>1202</sup> Another song, "My Milan", ostensibly predates even the Balkan wars, "since Serbia was always at war",<sup>1203</sup> also played when young men were leaving to join the army, could be considered as celebrating an uncharitable sentiment. The song is about a young man, Milan, whose *girl* is calling him and entreating him to pass by her house, before leaving to join the army. In his 1986 epistolary novel *My dear Petrović*,<sup>1204</sup> Serbian writer Milovan Danajlić examines this song as "a song about hate".<sup>1205</sup> She wants him to pass by her house not so that they could embrace one last time, before he leaves, but *so that the neighbours would be envious*: "Come by, wave a kerchief, and let all our foes perish."<sup>1206</sup> These and other songs from this period certainly deserve closer examination and possibly a comparison with the Great War songs from other countries, but this is outside the scope of this research.

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1200 UN Web TV 14 January 2013, <http://webtv.un.org/en/ga/watch/viva-vox-choir-belgrade-new-years-concert-of-the-67th-session-of-the-general-assembly/2094291812001/?term=&lan=original&sort=popular> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1201 The song could be considered a *profession de foi* of Serbian love of war: "Gladly goes Serb to the army ... he thinks of battle as fun and likes to beat the enemy, because gunpowder doesn't frighten him" etc.

1202 From personal experience. The lyrics are: "Who says so, who lies so, that Serbia is small. It's not small, it's not small, three times it went to war."

1203 Petrović, 1988, 64.

1204 Milovan Danajlić, *Dragi moj Petroviću* [*My dear Petrović*] (Znanje: Zagreb, 1986).

1205 Danajlić, 1986, 174.

1206 In Serbian: "Nogom stani, maramicom mani, neka puknu svi naši dušmani".

Žarko Petrović collected over 70 songs that were popular among Serbian troops in the First World War. Most of them were sung in Corfu and later in Salonika. They are thus collectively called *Solunske pesme* (*Songs of Salonika*), because they were sung or listened to by *solunci*, Salonika warriors or veterans. In 1979, the record *Solunske pesme*<sup>1207</sup> was released, followed by *Solunske pesme 2*<sup>1208</sup> in 1982, by *Jugoton*, a record label from Croatia, then still part of Yugoslavia. The two compilations contained most of the well-known Serbian First World War songs, with the exception of the “Who says so, who lies so”, presumably because it was considered *extremely* nationalistic, alluding to the reviled Greater Serbia narrative. *Jugoton* was known as a commercially astute company and there was clearly a market for this music, especially after 1980, the year of Tito’s death, but there was also a limit to what would be allowed. However, with the rise of Milošević in the late 1980s, at the time that Serbs were *rediscovering* their history, all these songs reappeared on radio, in concerts, and live bands in restaurants were happy to play them on demand. Robert Hudson calls it “a process of ethnification”.<sup>1209</sup> It seemed as if this potentially divisive music was liberated from its socialist *brotherhood and unity* constraints, ready to unleash its emotional ascendancy. Today, the songs and the music are still with us — played and sung at the centenary commemorations, concerts, remembrance services, and elsewhere, at football matches and sports celebrations, wherever expressions of belonging are expected.<sup>1210</sup>

Contrary to official commemorative events, explored in the previous chapter, the Great War songs are spontaneously popular. There are no celebrations without the *March on the Drina*, no weddings, no parties.

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1207 *Solunske pesme* (Vinyl, LP, Compilation) <https://www.discogs.com/Various-Солунске-Песме/release/2769169> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1208 *Solunske pesme 2* (vinyl, LP, Album compilation) *Discogs* <https://www.discogs.com/Various-Solunske-Pesme-2/release/6995919> (accessed May 20, 2019). The iconic picture of the Serbian scout, as discussed in the previous chapter, featured on the cover of the first album.

1209 Hudson, 2003, 168.

1210 While other compilations were issued over the past thirty years, the latest compilation issued in 2018, to mark the centenary of the end of the Great War, comprises 24 different songs. “Oj Srbijo, mila mati – Sto godina od završetka Velikog rata 1918-2018” [“Oh Serbia dear mother – Hundred years since the end of the Great War 1918 – 2018”], Belgrade, *PGP RTS*, 2018.

This tells us Serbs are attracted to the events during which these songs were born. They provide joy, pleasure, contentment. More than that, they possibly offer a *frisson* of something that is difficult to define. From observing people while they are either singing *Tamo daleko* or clapping to the *March on the Drina*, we can see that they are not *forced* to do this, there is no visible pressure or obligation, except through imitation of their “choiceless identity” peers. Repeated renditions of the song, in one event after another, do not seem to bother the singers. Some of the songs are popular among football supporters, particularly *March on the Drina*. In fact, this is what some of these songs are reminiscent of as they are sung today — they are football songs, stadium chants. There is a sense of abandonment of individuality that only happens in a crowd singing the same song: it denotes belonging and unity. The reality in Serbia does not quite match this image — there is unemployment, brain drain, domestic violence, widespread corruption and media censorship, to name but a few burning issues. But for a short time, as the crowd lose themselves in a song which relates to past glory, the present is swept aside, at least until the final chord.

In the next part of the chapter, we examine how the Great War and the Retreat exist in the Serbian national consciousness through the educational efforts of museums and special exhibitions. Aleida Assmann spoke of nations *making* their memory rather than *having* one.<sup>1211</sup> In the centenary years, these secular temples of historical experience have provided stories, images, objects to fit into the “network of narratives”, to use Berenskoetter’s term. We look at the most popular themes, how they were presented and whether any unusual or alternative aspects of Serbia’s Great War were shown. More importantly, we examine whether the *mediated history* asked any questions.<sup>1212</sup>

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1211 Assmann, in Tilmans, Van Vree and Winter, 2010, 42.

1212 Winter, 2018, 165.

## 2. The Retreat Mediated — Objects and Images

“Museums are the cathedrals of the 21st century, in that they have filled the void left by the conventional churches as a site in which mixed populations of different faiths or no faith at all, of different origins and beliefs, confront and meditate on sacred themes — sacrifice, death, mourning, evil, brotherhood, dignity, transcendence. War not only belongs in museums; war dominates museum space in much of the public representation of history and will continue to do so.”<sup>1213</sup>

Jay Winter’s article on museums and the representation of war, published just before the centenary years began, starts with the above statement, and goes on to ask the question to which, he admits, the answer will be difficult to provide: “How can war be represented?”<sup>1214</sup> This could be a starting point to explore what war means for people and for communities. How can war be represented is also a question as to how war *should be* remembered. It could open a discussion about how to present war without glorifying it, but also without disrespecting those who had given their lives. In Serbia, this kind of question seems to be rarely, if ever, asked because the narrative is predetermined and the answer is obvious — Serbia suffered and Serbia fought — this is all we need to know.<sup>1215</sup> The meaning of war, especially this war, the Great War, is never questioned. For the centenary years, Serbian museums, galleries, cultural centres, and other institutions, were ready to display *expected* representations of the First World War: the dominant narrative was not to be questioned but *served*.<sup>1216</sup> There may have been new details, perhaps different technology

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1213 Jay Winter, “Museums and the Representation of War”, *museum and society* 10(3) (November 2012), 150.

1214 Winter, 2012, 150.

1215 The commentaries on social media tend to lament Serbia’s current *lowly* status compared to the *glory* of the victories in the First World War.

1216 Some content in exhibitions as well as in public events was reused from previous occasions, e.g. a documentary film on Momčilo Gavrić, child-soldier in the war, produced in 1987, was relaunched in 2014; some themes at commemorations and conferences from 2004, could be seen again in 2014.

was used, new sources were published, artefacts presented with various degrees of creativity, but there were generally no suggestions of different perspectives, only reaffirmation on how Serbia was unjustly attacked, how much she suffered and how valiantly she fought. Some representations were perhaps aiming to find new ways of telling the same story but there was no real attempt to challenge the narrative in any way. In this part of the chapter, we examine how the First World War in Serbia *is* represented in conventional mediated memory repositories that are museums, and whether, in this context, it is possible to have any alternative narratives, let alone counter-narratives.

We reviewed the programme of events at 40 museums throughout Serbia in over 30 towns, ranging in size from around 30,000 to 1.8 million inhabitants (Belgrade), between 2014 and 2018. The word *museum* is used here as an umbrella term, particularly for smaller towns, and may include cultural centres, exhibition spaces, or town galleries. Even when we are talking about museums *au sens propre*, some communities may use them as galleries, concert halls, conference venues, etc. Most have dedicated websites, and some are more social media savvy than others.<sup>1217</sup> In Serbia, there is seemingly no central repository of events held as part of the commemorations of the centenary and it was therefore necessary to direct inquiries at individual museums.<sup>1218</sup> A little over half of the museums contacted as part of the research answered our inquiries promptly with regard to details of exhibitions, special events, conferences,

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1217 Toplice National Museum, in Prokuplje, a municipality of around 44,000 inhabitants, has no website only a Facebook page which is updated on a regular basis showing a remarkable number and variety of activities happening in the museum on a daily basis. [https://sr-rs.facebook.com/pg/Narodni-muzej-Toplice-289939654525932/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://sr-rs.facebook.com/pg/Narodni-muzej-Toplice-289939654525932/posts/?ref=page_internal) (accessed June 28, 2019); The Šabac National Museum also uses Facebook to advertise its events and even co-create content: in February 2014, they invited Šabac citizens to submit documents, photographs and objects to be included in an exhibition on the suffering of Šabac in the Great War.

1218 All the museums are part of the network of Serbian museums *Muzeji Srbije* <https://www.muzejisrbije.rs/2019/04/12/lista-ucesnika-2019/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

and on occasions also provided information on visitor numbers.<sup>1219</sup> Based on these responses, press coverage of the events, websites of museum that did not respond to inquiries, and several personal visits, we have examined a selection of events that allow us to draw some conclusions about how the Great War and the Retreat were represented during the centenaries.<sup>1220</sup>

Between 2014 and 2018, all of the examined museums had one or more special exhibition and/or events about the First World War, and while a small number represented the Retreat as a special event of the war, many more focused on the aftermath (Corfu, Salonika Front) which still required that the Retreat story be presented. What was perhaps surprising was the variety of genres: marking the centenary was done through exhibitions, book promotions — in particular memoirs from the Great War published for the first time and monographs about military leaders — documentary films, conferences, round tables, seminars, lectures, plays, musical performances, inauguration of memorials and monuments, poetry readings and memorial services. From the examined material, it became apparent that almost all, in fact, featured the Retreat as a central event of the war. There were recurring themes that could be found in events throughout Serbia. For example, two of the most common subjects were about two outstanding personalities of the Great War, a female soldier and a child soldier. Milunka Savić, (1892 – 1973) was a female soldier in the Serbian Army in the Balkan Wars and in the First World

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1219 They are: in Belgrade, Army Hall (*Defence Media Centre*), Gallery of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, Serbian History Museum, Air Force Museum, Jewish Historical Museum, Book Museum, Museum of Applied Art; elsewhere in Serbia: Kraljevo National Museum, Valjevo National Museum, Niš National Museum, Negotin National Museum, Srem Museum, Šabac National Museum, Jadar Museum, Toplice National Museum, Smederevo Museum, Pančevo National Museum, Vojvodina Museum, Rudnik-Takovo Regional Museum, Zrenjanin National Museum, Kikinda National Museum, and Knjaževac National Museum. Many of the Great War exhibitions toured the country and were presented in different museums throughout the centenary years.

1220 Sources such as website presentations, email exchanges, virtual tours, programmes, brochures, exhibition posters, catalogues, media coverage, and social media reactions, allowed us to assess the exhibitions where there was no possibility to visit them.

War,<sup>1221</sup> while Momčilo Gavrić (1906 – 1993) was not only the youngest soldier of the Great War, but also the youngest NCO in the world, joining the army at age eight, becoming corporal at ten.<sup>1222</sup> Their stories have been told before but were given special attention during the centenary years. They are truly remarkable and understandably interesting for the public.<sup>1223</sup> Both retreated across Albania, were wounded in combat, and were decorated for bravery. Certain aspects of their lives were covered more in the press<sup>1224</sup> than in the exhibitions — neither was particularly well treated after the First or the Second World War — offering additional commentary on the way Serbs deal with their past. Another exhibition theme, shown in several towns, was about women in the Great War.<sup>1225</sup> There were at least six different events on this subject — exhibitions, readings and book promotions — that were organised in the surveyed museums. Some originated in Belgrade and then toured the country and even went abroad, as was the case with the exhibition *Women in the Great War*.<sup>1226</sup>

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1221 Milunka Savić was wounded nine times and is the most decorated female soldier in history. A documentary film about her life was produced in 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdsaddmOnGs> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1222 After his family was killed by Austro-Hungarian troops in 1914, Momčilo Gavrić joined the artillery regiment of the Drina Division. He participated in the Retreat and the breakthrough at the Salonika Front. A documentary film produced about his life in 1987 was relaunched in 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glc3y7QxZWU> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1223 President Macron laid a wreath on Milunka Savić's tomb during his official visit to Serbia in 2019. She was the recipient of the Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, Officier de la Legion d'Honneur and Croix de guerre 1914 – 1918, the only woman ever to have received it.

1224 Tatjana Nježić, "ZABORAVLJENA HEROINA: Novi detalji iz života Milunke Savić" ["The forgotten heroine: New details from the life of Milunka Savić"], *Blic*, <https://www.blic.rs/riznica/istorije/zaboravljena-heroina-novi-detalji-iz-zivota-milunke-savic/hdpywk6> (accessed June 28, 2019) and "STIDE LI SE SRBI ZBOG OVOGA ŠTO SU URADILI MOMČILU? OVAKO JE PROŠAO najmladji srpski HEROJ koji je oslobodio SRBIJU!" ["Are the Serbs ashamed for what they have done to Momčilo? This is what happened to the youngest Serbian hero who liberated Serbia!"], *Telegraf*, 4 October 2015 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/1754785-stide-li-se-srbi-zbog-ovoga-sto-su-uradili-momcilu-ovako-je-prosao-najmladji-srpski-heroj-koji-je-oslobodio-srbiju-foto> (accessed June 28, 2019) are two among many similar articles on these two subjects.

1225 Ironically, Serbia does not fare well in preventing violence against women. In 2018, 30 women were killed in Serbia by their partners according to the network *Women Against Violence* [https://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/images/pdf/FEMICID-Saopštenje\\_za\\_2018\\_godinu.pdf](https://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/images/pdf/FEMICID-Saopštenje_za_2018_godinu.pdf) (accessed June 28, 2019).

1226 In the original *Žensko lice Velikog rata* [*The Female face of the Great War*]. It was also shown in London in 2015 as part of the *Serbian Culture Days* in Serbian House in London.



The panel above the entrance to the exhibition within the exhibition: *Women in the Great War — The position and role of women in the First World War, Serbian History Museum, Belgrade* (November 2014).

This particular exhibition was conceived at the Serbian History Museum in 2014 as part of the exhibition *Serbia 1914*. The exhibitions such as this one focus on educating visitors as well as celebrating the achievements of certain exceptional people.



Part of the exhibit on women soldiers in the Great War.<sup>1227</sup> (November 2014)

<sup>1227</sup> Serbian History Museum, 21 November 2014.

Much attention was given to the women belonging to foreign medical missions in Serbia, in particular to the *Scottish Women's Hospitals* founded by Dr Elsie Inglis.<sup>1228</sup> Another woman with a prominent place in the exhibition was Flora Sandes, who first came as a nurse to Serbia in 1914, and later fought in the Serbian Army. Three women who had come to Serbia to look after the sick and wounded soldiers, Mable Dearmer, Lorana Ferris and Dr Elisabeth Ross, died in Kragujevac in 1915. Their stories were also featured in the exhibition.

A popular exhibition that also toured Serbia in the centenary years was the exhibition of original photographs from the First World War by the war photographer Rista Marjanović (1885 – 1969). It was first shown in the Gallery of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in October 2014 with the title *Do Not Forget Us*, after an entry written by a Serbian officer and volunteer in his war diary.<sup>1229</sup> Marjanović was the official war photographer of the Serbian High Command, working on the front lines, under the command of Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis of *Black Hand* fame. Marjanović is the author of iconic photographs of the Great War, including the photographs of the Retreat, as well as of the film footage of the Serbian Army crossing the Sava River into the soon to be defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918. The exhibition was extremely popular, attracting 18,442 visitors during the initial four-week exhibition in Belgrade, and went on to tour Serbia.<sup>1230</sup> In 2018, a documentary film about Rista Marjanović was shown both on television and as part of events in a number of museums.<sup>1231</sup> Marjanović's photographs are considered to have

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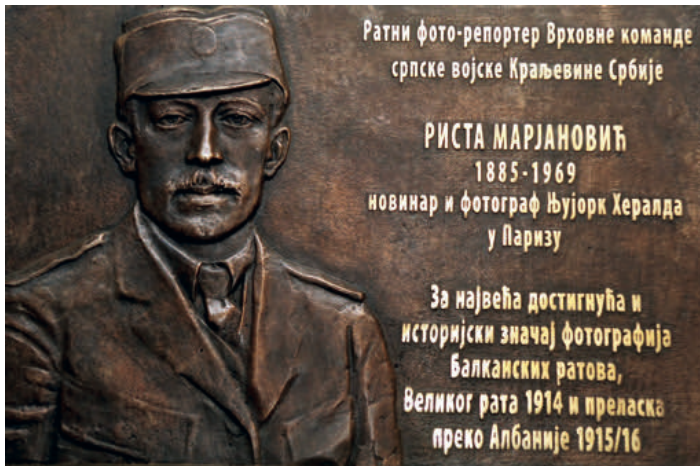
1228 During the centenary years, Dr Inglis was commemorated in Serbia through a series of events, such as concerts, inauguration of memorials and plaques, and a special occasion when her relatives visited Serbia in November 2017 as described by Alan Cumming in an article for "the British Serb magazine" expat *Britić*, "Elsie's relatives' "pilgrimage" to Serbia" <http://www.ebritic.com/?p=635083> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1229 A. Ćuk "Nemojte nas zaboraviti" ["Do not forget us"], *Danas*, 14 October 2014 <https://www.danas.rs/kultura/nemojte-nas-zaboraviti/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1230 From correspondence with the museums.

1231 For instance, *Veliki rat Riste Marjanovića* [Rista Marjanović's Great War], RTS, November 2018 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dg\\_fYK5aW-Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dg_fYK5aW-Q) (accessed June 28, 2019).

“resurrected Serbia”<sup>1232</sup> because of their propaganda value in the wake of the retreat. His photographs are well known in Serbia and many of them — sometimes properly attributed, sometimes not — can be found in different exhibitions on the First World War throughout Serbia.<sup>1233</sup> In 2018, an exhibition of Marjanović’s photographs was opened in the Gallery of *Radio-Television Serbia* (4 – 28 October 2018) under the title *War Photographer Rista Marjanović*,<sup>1234</sup> jointly organised by the RTS, Belgrade Institute for the Protection of Monuments and the Ministry of Defence’s film service. A year before, on 11 November 2017, a memorial plaque in Rista Marjanović’s honour was inaugurated at the army hall in Belgrade by the deputy mayor of Belgrade.



The text on the plaque reads: “War photographer of the High Command of the Serbian Army of the Kingdom of Serbia, Rista Marjanović 1885 – 1969, journalist and photographer of the *New York Herald* in Paris. For the greatest achievements and the historical importance of the photographs of the Balkan Wars, the Great War of 1914 and the Retreat across Albania 1915/16.”<sup>1235</sup>

1232 Dimitrije Bukvić, “Fotografije koje su vaskrsle Srbiju” [“Photographs that resurrected Serbia”], *Politika*, 3 February 2019 <http://www.politika.co.rs/sr/clanak/421888/Fotografije-koje-su-vaskrsnule-Srbiju> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1233 In 1958, Marjanović’s collection containing 8,542 negatives was placed under the protection of the state.

1234 *Ratni foto-reporter Rista Marjanović* [War Photographer Rista Marjanović], RTS, 26 September 2018 <http://www.rts.rs/page/rts/sr/galerija-rts/story/2062/galerija-rts/3270580/ratni-foto-reporter-rista-marjanovic.html> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1235 Photograph from *Slika Vest* <http://www.slikavest.rs/dom-vojske-srbije-spomen-plocu-risti-marjanovicu-prvom-srpskom-foto-reporteru/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

Even small museums had special centenary exhibitions. The Jewish Historical Museum<sup>1236</sup> in Belgrade organised an exhibition on Jews of Serbia in the First World War which toured 15 towns in Serbia and attracted some 5,000 visitors. The museum held lectures and musical performances and issued two books on Serbian Jews in the First World War.<sup>1237</sup>

The Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade organised three exhibitions on the Great War posters, with particular focus on the Serbian propaganda efforts.<sup>1238</sup> Another exhibition titled *War and Humour 1914-1918*, was held at the National Library of Serbia in 2018, and subsequently at the Museum of Vojvodina in 2020 in Novi Sad.<sup>1239</sup>

A number of exhibitions in the centenary years were organised jointly by different institutions, as is the case with Marjanović's photographs, and then shown in different towns. There are also exhibitions that were specifically relevant for one town or region, but were organised with the support of other institutions and were given a high profile, and then went on tour in other towns. One such example is the exhibition authored by the Valjevo National Museum, *Valjevo – Hospital City* from April 2015. It was unusual for a relatively small museum to produce a trailer announcing an exhibition and this is what happened in this case.<sup>1240</sup> A *Facebook* page was created for the exhibition which carefully documented the preparations, and a countdown set up to the launch of the new museum website. After the opening of the exhibition, the page continued to be updated, including the exhibition's tour around the country and in the region.<sup>1241</sup>

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1236 Jewish Historical Museum <http://www.jimbeograd.org/en/> (accessed October 29, 2018).

1237 *Serbian Jews in World War One* (Belgrade, Jewish Historical Museum, 2018) and a reprint of the memorial book of Serbian Jews who died in the Balkan Wars and WWI from 1927.

1238 *War and posters 1914-1918* in 2014, and *Women, war and posters 1914-1918* in 2016, and *Serbia, War and Posters* in 2017.

1239 Vladimir Čeh, *War and Humour 1914-1918* (Belgrade: The Institute of History of Advertising, 2020)

1240 Trailer for the *Hospital City* exhibition *YouTube*, 26 February 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS4dr-jGf0A> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1241 *Valjevo 1914 –1915 – grad bolnica – Facebook* <https://www.facebook.com/valjevohospital/?ref=hl> (accessed June 28, 2019).

The exhibition was designed to illustrate the special status and situation of Valjevo in 1914 and 1915 as one of the main centres of the Serbian Army Medical Service because of its strategic position and the Valjevo garrison.<sup>1242</sup> In 1914, Valjevo was host to several hospitals, all housed in a variety of buildings, such as barracks, schools, courts, hotels, restaurants, and the museum building itself. Following the failure of the third Austro-Hungarian offensive, after a large number of POWs arrived in the town in December 1914, Valjevo became the epicentre of a typhus epidemic that would go on to devastate Serbia in early 1915. Over 170,000 people are estimated to have died in the whole of Serbia, with around 10,000 casualties in Valjevo, soldiers, civilians and POWs.<sup>1243</sup> The exhibition commemorates these terrible events in the Great War and celebrates the work of the international medical missions.



Illustration of the medical situation in Valjevo in 1914 and 1915. At the centre is the figure of Nadežda Petrović (1873 – 1915), the most important Serbian woman painter at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, who died in Valjevo while working as a volunteer nurse.

1242 Dragana Lazarević Ilić and Vladimir Krivošejev, *Valjevo 1914 – 1915 grad bolnica* [Valjevo 1914 – 1915 hospital city] (Valjevo: Valjevo National Museum, 2015), 3.

1243 Lazarević Ilić and Krivošejev, 2015, 3.

The exhibition's opening on 2 April 2015 was an important event for the town of around 174,000 people, with British, Dutch, Czech and Russian ambassadors attending, in honour and remembrance of the medical missions, and the Serbian Minister of Culture opening the exhibition.<sup>1244</sup> There was a musical programme and a number of speeches; visitors were then welcomed into the small museum space which told the story of the Valjevo hospitals and the victory over the typhus epidemic.



Replicas of the Scottish Women's Hospitals' collection boxes (left); "Serbian barrel" or "Stammers' barrel", invented by Dr Stammers to delouse infected clothes by steaming (right) (Valjevo Museum, 2 April 2015).

While this was an example of a local exhibition which became more widely popular and toured Serbia, there were also some events on a much smaller scale that were so unique to the town in question, that they remained completely local. This was the case with the exhibition in the Kikinda National Museum, a municipality of about 56,000 people, located 140 km north of Belgrade, closer to both Romanian and Hungarian borders than to Belgrade. Kikinda was Austro-Hungarian territory until 1918 when it became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The two exhibitions in the centenary years focused on its special situation. The

1244 "Otvorena izložba Grad bolnica" ["Hospital City exhibition opens"], *VAMedia*, 2 April 2015 <https://www.vamedia.info/2015/04/otvorena-izlozba-grad-bolnica/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

first exhibition was about Luka Majinski,<sup>1245</sup> the mayor of Kikinda between 1910 and 1924. It was a unique case where the same man served as mayor in two states. Because the town is multinational and multilingual, the exhibition was trilingual, in Serbian, Hungarian and German. The second exhibition entitled *In the New State – Greater Kikinda in the War, Unification and the Final Establishment of Borders 1914 – 1924*, commemorated the town's new status – as belonging to the new country.<sup>1246</sup>

Other towns located in territory that used to be the Austro-Hungarian Empire, also had exhibitions dedicated to their change of country in 1918 (e.g. Novi Sad and Pančevo).<sup>1247</sup> It is worth noting that the Novi Sad exhibition on the “unification” drew considerable controversy in view of its perceived twisting of historical facts; it is believed the exhibition was used “for state and ethnocentric needs of today's Serbia”.<sup>1248</sup>

Another popular subject of exhibitions related to the war was the Toplica uprising of 1917, a month-long revolt against Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian occupying troops, considered the only rebellion in an occupied territory during WWI.<sup>1249</sup>

While this selection of exhibitions exemplifies how museums in Serbia represented the Great War during the centenary-related cultural events, it is also illustrative of what was represented less often. Among the

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1245 *Luka Majinski, 1 gradonačelnik, 1 rat, 2 države* [*Luka Majinski, 1 mayor, 1 war, 2 states*], Kikinda National Museum, 29 July – 29 August 1914.

1246 Izložba u Narodnom muzeju Kikinde posvećena prisajedinjenju Srbiji [Exhibition at the Kikinda National Museum dedicated to joining Serbia], *Dnevnik*, 23 November 2018 <https://www.dnevnik.rs/vojvodina/izlozba-u-narodnom-muzeju-kikinde-posvecena-prisajedinjenju-srbiji-23-11-2018> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1247 The term used to describe joining another state is *prisajedinjenje*, and this could be translated as unification, or joining.

1248 See “Skup: ‘Muzej prisajedinjenja’ je propagandistička izložba” [“Conference: ‘Museum of unification’ is a propagandist exhibition”], *Krstarica*, 10 December 2018 <https://www.krstarica.com/vesti/srbija/skup-muzej-prisajedinjenja-je-propagandisticka-izlozba/> (accessed December 14, 2018).

1249 According to some sources, around 20,000 rebels and civilians lost their lives in the revolt. In 1917, the Toplica Museum in Prokuplje organised an exhibition on the subject which then toured Serbia. In some towns, the title of the exhibition was “The 1917 Toplica Rebellion”, while in at least one town it was renamed, “The suffering of Serbs in the Toplica rebellion”.

surveyed museums, the themes of Serbian POWs from 1915, or occupied Serbia between 1915 – 1918, were less frequent.<sup>1250</sup> While the Serbian master narrative states that *the whole country went into exile* when this was patently not the case. Many more remained in the country, which was dismembered and occupied,<sup>1251</sup> with thousands of Serbs interned, and with civilians bearing the brunt of the invasion, having to survive – not necessarily heroically.<sup>1252</sup> While civilian life in occupied Serbia 1915 –1918 is usually narrated through suffering, the exhibition *The Great War and the Little Man* at the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade attempted to step outside the well-worn narrative, through the selection of archival material focusing on ordinary civilians.<sup>1253</sup> Nevertheless, the stated objective of the exhibition on “the little man” was to present “persons of high moral fibre and patriotism”, and the museum’s curious selection of related events during the exhibition included military lectures.<sup>1254</sup>

The overall impression from what was on offer in our sample of Serbian museums in the centenary exhibitions was that there were many different events and genres to choose from, some more original than others. There was noticeably more engagement of local residents in smaller towns. The response to emails of inquiry was also significant: there was much enthusiasm and interest from smaller towns, with photographs

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1250 Muzej Srema [Srem Museum] in Sremska Mitrovica had one exhibition on POWs possibly owing to the fact that a POW camp had been located there between 1915 – 1918. All (three) WWI related exhibitions were on throughout the centenary years <https://muzejsrema.com> (accessed June 28, 2019); The Military Museum in Belgrade, which did not respond to our request for details on exhibitions during the centenary years, had one exhibition on occupied Serbia 1915 – 1918 including POW camps [http://www.muzej.mod.gov.rs/otvorena-izlozba-okupirana-srbija-od-1915-do-1918-1#.XRz\\_2i2B0\\_U](http://www.muzej.mod.gov.rs/otvorena-izlozba-okupirana-srbija-od-1915-do-1918-1#.XRz_2i2B0_U) (accessed June 28, 2019).

1251 Following the 1915 invasion, Serbia was partitioned into German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian occupation zones.

1252 This aspect is rarely researched, see article by Olga Manojlović Pintar and Vera Gudac Dodić, ““An ugly black night”: Remembering the Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Serbia 1915-1918”, in Oto Luhar, ed. *The Great War and Memory in South-Eastern Europe* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), where a *monochromatic* depiction of the occupation is challenged.

1253 The exhibition catalogue by Vesna Bižić-Omčikus and others, *Veliki rat i mali čovek [The Great War and the Little Man]* (Beograd: Etnografski muzej, 2014) contains journal entries of ordinary Serbs during occupation with a more nuanced representation of the war.

1254 E.g. on 29 April 2015, a poorly-attended 100-minute lecture was given by a Lt Colonel on the subject of the life of a soldier in the Great War.

from the exhibitions, catalogues, publications and posters provided as evidence of activities. Certainly, the most active exhibition centre, the *Defence Media Centre* in Belgrade, had impressive lists of events and activities between 2014 and 2018 – 112 in total.<sup>1255</sup> In comparison to other museums, the *Defence Media Centre* had more events and higher visitor numbers. However, this institution is a department of the Serbian Ministry of Defence, as such has superior funding and closely adheres to the *monochrome script* of the Serbian heroic suffering. Notably, several exhibitions were authored jointly by the *Defence Media Centre* and other museums.<sup>1256</sup>

In the context of the centenary events, the museums in Serbia mostly presented different aspects of the same master narrative, even if new themes did emerge in exhibitions.<sup>1257</sup> Some were expertly curated, such as the war poster exhibitions at the Museum of Applied Art. The *Valjevo – Hospital City* exhibition was a truly educational and cultural event of the year for the local community. In our research, we found that the Ethnographic Museum tentatively tried to explore different historical interpretations, although the unity of the Serbian master narrative remained untouched.

From the sample examined, which we believe to be representative of Serbian museums and exhibitions during the centenary years, 2014 – 2018, we noted great skill and enthusiasm of curators and the wealth of archival resources related to the First World War used to present the well-worn

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1255 Book promotions (43, including nine manuscripts that had never been published before), ceremonies, musical and dance performances, “festivals of patriotic poetry”, concerts, international conferences, seminars, round tables, theatre plays, exhibitions, film promotions, memorial ceremonies and memorial services. All the events are documented on the website of the *Defence Media Centre* and detailed lists of events for each year were provided on request. [http://www.odbrana.mod.gov.rs/sadrzaj.php?id\\_sadrzaja=614](http://www.odbrana.mod.gov.rs/sadrzaj.php?id_sadrzaja=614) (accessed June 28, 2019).

1256 From informal contacts it appears that the *Defence Media Centre* is better funded and cooperation is beneficial for smaller museums.

1257 In May 2016, at the *Defence Media Centre*, there was an exhibition on the subject of *Bread in the Great War* <http://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/9589/otvorena-izlozba-hleb-u-velikom-ratu-9589> (accessed November 20, 2018); in October 2016, the Zaječar Museum organised the exhibition of photographs of the *Deli Ibrahim* Serbian military cemetery in Algeria, by the legendary Yugoslav photographer Stevan Labudović.

narrative. It was overall, with minor exceptions, a ritualistic approach to representations of national history with little room for questions. In view of the tenacity of Serbia's Great War narrative, one cannot but wonder what questions would have to be asked in order to achieve a wider view of the Great War and the Retreat.

### 3. All the Roads Lead to Salonika – Guarding the Dead Since 1918

“The cemetery in Zejtinlik is not just a monument of gratitude to the fallen in the First World War, but it is also a part of history, the echo of victory, an enduring meeting place of grateful descendants, and as the poet said, a monument of “pain and pride.””<sup>1258</sup>

Thessaloniki, or Salonika as it was known in the Great War, was an important hub for the Allies from 1915 even while Greece was neutral. Greece joined the war on 28 June 1917, following months of internal turmoil over the participation in the war. French and British troops arrived in the Salonika harbour in October 1915, but this was not the first time that Greek territory was used by the Entente: the British had already used Lemnos for operations relating to Gallipoli. Their arrival in Salonika was part of their failed attempt to assist the Serbs.<sup>1259</sup> After the Serbian Army Retreat in 1915, and their recovery on Corfu in 1916, Serbian troops were transferred to Salonika to train and reorganise in preparation for new operations. From Salonika, they would set off north as part of *l'Armée d'Orient*. Serbs won the first battle against the Bulgarian Army in September 1916 at the 2521m Kajmakčalan Peak of Mt Nidža, but the breakthrough at the Salonika front, and the final victory would take another two years.

1258 Vojin Djordjević, ed. *Srpsko vojničko groblje na Zejtinliku u Solunu* [Serbian military cemetery at Zejtinlik in Thessaloniki] (Belgrade: no publisher, 2014), 5.

1259 Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika. The Macedonian Campaign 1915-1918* (London: faber and faber/faber finds, 2009/first published in 1965), 11.

The site of the military cemetery in Thessaloniki originally housed the Serbian field hospital which was not unusual. At the time, *Zejtinlik* — a part of town originally named after the Turkish word for an olive grove — was also used as a training camp for Serbian recruits born in 1896, in preparation for the battle for Monastir (Bitolj) in early November 1916.<sup>1260</sup> Salonika accommodated a number of troops from Allied armies, under the umbrella term *l'Armée d'Orient*. The soldiers who died at the hospital were buried close to it and as the graves multiplied, the location started being used primarily as a military cemetery after the field hospital was disbanded.<sup>1261</sup>

After the war, an initiative was launched to gather the remains of the Serbian troops who fell at the Salonika front and rebury them at the Serbian military cemetery. This task was entrusted to a group made up of veterans from the Salonika front. The team was led by Savo Mihajlović, who subsequently became the first cemetery guard. Savo and his comrades visited around 250 cemeteries on and around the Salonika front battlefields, and collected the remains of Serbian soldiers, known and unknown, and placed each soldier's remains in a labelled bag. The remains were then transported to *Zejtinlik* in special vehicles. The remains would later be either buried or placed in an ossuary. The hardest part of the task was thus completed long before the cemetery and the mausoleum were completed.<sup>1262</sup>

Plans to build the Serbian military cemetery started in 1926, when the Yugoslav Ministry of Construction opened a competition for the design of a mausoleum with ossuaries and the surrounding cemetery. The winning design for the project was awarded to Aleksandar Vasić, the architect who also designed the chapel erected in the memory of Field Marshall Putnik at the Belgrade New Cemetery. The original design was further developed by Nikolaj Krasnov (1864 – 1939), Russian architect, who would

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1260 Djordjević, 2014, 12.

1261 Djordjević, 2014, 12.

1262 Djordjević, 2014, 38.

later design the mausoleum on Vido (1938). However, the chief architect who directly supervised the work on the mausoleum and the cemetery was Budimir Hristodulo (1892 – 1965).<sup>1263</sup> He also personally organised the planting of cypress trees from the Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos.<sup>1264</sup> The stone for the *Zejtinlik* mausoleum was pre-cut and brought from Serbia. Around 2,000 marble crosses were also made in Serbia and transported to Greece, as was the stone for the ossuaries meant to house the remains of several thousand Serbian soldiers.



View of the chapel at *Zejtinlik* and the main alley (April 2017).

1263 Budimir Hristodulo was also one of the 1300 corporals, young cadets drafted early to reinforce the First Army in the Battle of Kolubara in November 1914. “*Budimir Hristodulo, neimar vojničkog groblja u Solunu*” [“Budimir Hristodulo, builder of the Salonika military cemetery”] <https://www.aleksinac.net/lat/aleksinac/aleksincani/budimir-hristodulo-neimar-vojnickog-groblja-u-solunu.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1264 Hilandar is a 12th century Serbian monastery on Mount Athos in Greece <https://www.hilandar.org> (accessed May 16, 2019).

Greece donated 7,000 square metres of land in *Zejtinlik* for the cemetery free of charge in perpetuity, while all the materials for the mausoleum and the crosses were imported from Yugoslavia into Greece tax-free. The *Zejtinlik* mausoleum with the ossuaries in the crypt covers 600 square metres.



*St George Slays the Dragon* mosaic, mausoleum chapel, *Zejtinlik*. (April 2017).

The motif designs are religious and patriotic. Mosaic frescoes of St Michael the Archangel and St George slaying the dragon were created in likenesses of the frescoes in the Manasija<sup>1265</sup> and the Dečani<sup>1266</sup> monasteries. Both saints are popular images used to portray the Serbian side of the war, in particular St George.<sup>1267</sup> The dragon is, of course, the enemy, akin to the snake on the monument to the Defenders of Belgrade discussed in the previous chapter. By using the images known from Serbian monasteries,

1265 Manasija monastery <http://manasija.rs/?lang=en> (accessed May 17, 2019).

1266 Dečani monastery <https://www.decani.org/en/> (accessed May 17, 2019).

1267 Dušan Kovačević's play, and later film *St George Slays the Dragon*, is an example where death in the First World War is portrayed as heroic but also absurd.

the authors of the mausoleum made a strong association to the Serbian homeland; all the more necessary because these Serbian dead were to be laid to rest in foreign soil, albeit in friendly Greece.

The verses engraved on the mausoleum external walls are by Vojislav Ilić the Younger (1877 –1944). All the Serbian Army units who fought on the Salonika front are inscribed on the walls inside the chapel, while the central 200-kg-candelabra is made of cannon shells from the battlefield. The Serbian military cemetery was officially inaugurated and the memorial chapel consecrated on 11 November 1936, in the presence of a great many Greek and Yugoslav officials, veterans, and families of fallen soldiers. A detailed report of the ceremony was published in the daily *Politika* the following day.<sup>1268</sup> High representatives of Greek and Serbian clergy held a memorial service in Serbian and Greek. The men's choir *Obilić* from Belgrade sang the hymn "In Eternal Memory". In his speech, the head of the Yugoslav delegation, General Marić, the Serbian Defence Minister, revisited the bleak days of the autumn 1915, when Serbia was attacked from three sides and forced to retreat through Albania. The recovery in Greece and North Africa was followed by the breakthrough of the Salonika front where "great deeds required great sacrifices"<sup>1269</sup> after which Serbia was finally liberated. General Marić's final remarks, thanking the Greek king and government for looking after the Serbian dead, were spoken in French.

Mr Papadimas, the Greek Undersecretary for War, responded by paying a tribute to the courage of Serbian soldiers who died on Greek soil. In his speech, Mr Papadimas used "Serbian" and "Yugoslav" almost interchangeably, referring to Serbian troops and to the "friendly Yugoslav nation" that persevered despite all the misfortunes of war. He ended his speech by quoting the inscription on the monument to Leonidas's 300

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1268 Dr M. "Na Zejtinliku je juče svečano osvećena spomen kapela herojima srpske vojske sa Solunskog fronta" ["Memorial chapel consecrated to the Salonika Front Serbian heroes in Zejtinlik yesterday"], *Politika*, 12 November 1936, 5-6.

1269 Dr M, 1936, 5-6.

Spartans fallen at Thermopylae: “Go tell the Spartans, passer-by, that here obedient to their laws we lie”,<sup>1270</sup> thus drawing a parallel between the Serbian sacrifice and that of the most famous warriors of Ancient Greece. It was clear that this was the highest praise from the Greek hosts. The ceremony at the cemetery ended with the laying of wreaths by various Yugoslav officials, as well as by the representatives of Allied armies and numerous representatives of Serbian veterans, auxiliary services, Greek-Yugoslav associations, Greek veterans and dozens of other groups. The *Politika* article reporting on the event lists 28 different organisations that were represented, adding that numerous families of fallen soldiers also attended. Following the laying of wreaths on the Serbian cemetery, the attending delegations also laid wreaths on the other Allied cemeteries: French, British, Italian and Russian. Remarkably, on the day, wreaths were also laid on the cemeteries of former enemies, Germans and Bulgarians.



Entrance, Serbian Military Cemetery (April 2017).

1270 This is inscribed at Thermopylae, *The 300 Spartans* Blog <http://www.300spartanwarriors.com/battleofthermopylae/tributesmemorials.html> (accessed May 17, 2019).

The Serbian military cemetery suffered from neglect and minor damage in the Second World War but the cemetery guard, Savo Mihajlović's son Djuro who took over after his father died in 1928, hid relics and valuable objects from the crypt and saved them from being looted. The cemetery underwent major renovation by the Yugoslav government in 1969 when, among other improvements, the name *Serbian Military Cemetery* was added above the iron entrance gates.<sup>1271</sup>

The cemetery acquired today's look in 1969, although *Zejtinlik* is no longer on the outskirts of Thessaloniki because the city has spread and the balconies of residential buildings look onto the well-ordered plots. Apart from the Serbian cemetery, there are other Allied cemeteries in the same location, French, British, Italian, and Russian. All these cemeteries are the responsibility of the state they belong to, as is the Serbian one. The French and Serbian cemeteries are the only ones with guards, but only the Serbian guard lives on the premises. Djordje Mihailović, the grandson of the first cemetery guard, took over guard duty following the death of his father Djuro in 1961.

Djordje Mihailović (b. 1928) has been watching over the dead Serbian soldiers his whole adult life. He will be the last person to be buried at the cemetery, in the same tomb where his father and grandfather were buried. In 2019, he was still welcoming visitors, arriving in small groups in an almost continuous stream, particularly in the summer.<sup>1272</sup> Thessaloniki is the Serbian tourists' favourite stop in Northern Greece with many package tours offered combining shopping, Mt Olympus, and the visit to the cemetery.<sup>1273</sup>

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1271 Djordjević, 2014, 35.

1272 In 2015, Mihajlović acquired an assistant. He turned 92 on 1 May 2020, when he received a phonecall from President Vučić. His Serbian passport arrived a few days later. The tabloid *Kurir* has many articles on him e.g. "SUZE SU MI SAME POŠLE KADA ME VUČIĆ POZVAO: Čuvar Zejtinlika čika Djordje dobio pasoš Srbije" ["MY EYES FILLED WITH TEARS WHEN VUČIĆ CALLED ME: Zejtinlik guard gets Serbian passport", *Kurir*, 15 May 2020 <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3464713/suze-su-mi-same-posle-kada-me-vucic-pozvao-cuvar-zejtinlika-cika-djordje-dobio-pasos-srbije> (accessed May 20, 2020).

1273 E.g. advertisement for a tour <https://www.bigstar.rs/solun-putovanje> (accessed May 17, 2019).

Although old and frail, Djordje Mihailović is a forceful presence, dressed partially in a Serbian army uniform, with a soldier's cap that looks exactly like the ones worn by his grandfather and his comrades in arms during 1914–1918. He is not only the guard, but also the guide, a tireless history narrator and something of a *YouTube* star.<sup>1274</sup>



Djordje Mihailović at the entrance to the crypt (April 2017).

From the comments posted below the *YouTube* videos, it appears that some of the video viewers, or those who visited the cemetery and met him, actually believe that he *is* a veteran of the First World War, which would make him at least 120 years old.<sup>1275</sup> He greets all the visitors warmly and is proud of the fact that the Serbian military cemetery has the most visitors of all the military cemeteries in Thessaloniki. It is clear that for him and for the visitors to *Zejtinlik*, this is *the* most important military cemetery of the Great War — there is no awareness of any other large Allied cemeteries.<sup>1276</sup>

1274 There are many recordings of Djordje Mihailović's talks on YouTube e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbf12Y27gAs&t=424s> (accessed May 17, 2019). Reportedly, he has never been to Serbia.

1275 The author visited the military cemetery in Thessaloniki for the first time in 1975 and thought the same, as a mathematically challenged 11-year-old.

1276 During our visit on 9 April 2017, we listened to comments from visitors and to Djordje Mihailović, hearing frequently that "there are no such cemeteries anywhere in the world". Mention of Flanders cemeteries gets no reaction.

“Uncle” Djordje as most people call him, has a routine where he greets visitors, speaking Serbian with a soft Greek accent, asks them where they come from, what their family names are, and points them to a grave or ossuary box. His approach to visitors is spontaneous and friendly, with light banter thrown in: “Where are you from?”, “Niš”, “That’s okay, it’s not your fault”.<sup>1277</sup> He recites the verses inscribed on the mausoleum:

“Behold oh, stranger, as you pass them by  
 In this most sacred and communal grave  
 Know that the bravest of the brave  
 Down here today in these tombs they lie.  
 They belong to the bold Serbian nation  
 Who fought like giants in this cosmic war  
 The nation through which much suffering tore  
 Whose warriors deserve admiration  
 They died from the bullets, from hunger and thirst  
 High up on Golgotha they were crucified  
 But never for one moment their faith and hope died  
 The trust in final triumph always came first.”<sup>1278</sup>

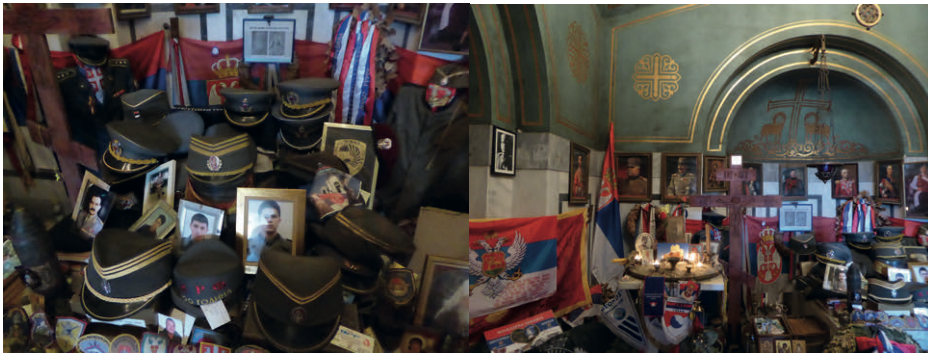
Although we are in Thessaloniki, where Serbian soldiers who died at the Salonika front are buried, it is the suffering in Albania which is the main point of reference. Uncle Djordje reminds everyone about what happened in 1915; how the great Retreat saved the Serbian Army, how they recovered in Corfu and how they came to Salonika from whence they made the breakthrough with the Allies to liberate the country. Uncle Djordje is impossible to interrupt and delivers his lines with gusto, his audience listening, appreciative and curious. “Serbia gave it all to the war, so many died, there are 8,000 buried here. Without the Serbs, there would have been no breakthrough at the Salonika front.” As he speaks, a couple of visitors are wiping their tears, visibly moved. He continues,

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1277 Visit on 9 April 2017.

1278 Inscribed on the front of the mausoleum, verses by Vojislav Ilić Jr. (translated by A.T.).

vehemently: “They [the Allies] should worship us instead of bombing us.”<sup>1279</sup> The last sentence is, of course, a reference to the 1999 NATO air strikes against Serbia and Montenegro, a topic that comes up uncomfortably, now and again. At the end of the speech, held before the entrance to the crypt below the chapel, after answering questions, Uncle Djordje fetches shot glasses and brings out a bottle of Serbian plum brandy handing out glasses to everyone present to drink to the glory of the fallen soldiers: “*Slava im*” (“To their glory”). Following this ritual, the visitors are taken downstairs to the crypt where the ossuary boxes house the remains of around 3,000 soldiers. Just behind the door to the crypt, there is a row of full brandy bottles — many visitors bring home-made plum brandy as a gift. During the last 10 to 15 years the crypt has filled with additional memorabilia left by visitors. There are medals, flags, photographs, lithographs, pictures, certificates, diplomas, more flags, posters with Serbian diaspora themes, pictures of Serbian soldiers who died in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, or simply Serbian soldiers in uniform, of different ages and from different time periods, with written dedications to *Zejtinlik* or to Uncle Djordje.



The crypt with caps, pictures and memorabilia (April 2017).

There are many curious anachronisms, such as the reproduction of the iconic picture by Uroš Predić (1857 – 1953) known as “The Kosovo Maiden”, showing a young woman giving a drink to a wounded Serbian

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<sup>1279</sup> Visit on 9 April 2017.

soldier on the Kosovo field after the battle, and a black and white picture of a legendary Montenegrin rebel killed fighting the Turks.<sup>1280</sup> Among the many pictures, posters and other objects on the wall, there is also a memento of two photographs of a US F-117 bomber downed in Serbia in 1999, with a handwritten note: “Greetings from Budjanovci”.<sup>1281</sup> It is a collection of objects that has less to do with the Great War and more with the Serbian narrative of perpetually resisting a more powerful enemy.



The crypt decorations: The memento from Budjanovci (left), and enlarged detail of the “Kosovo Maiden” picture, with votive images of St Nicolas<sup>1282</sup> and the Virgin with Child (right). (April 2017).

1280 The picture is titled, “The heroic death of Vojvoda Tripko Džaković 1875”.

1281 Budjanovci is a village in Serbia, near Belgrade, where a US stealth bomber was shot down by Yugoslav anti-aircraft rockets during NATO air strikes in March 1999. A documentary was made on the subsequent meeting and friendship of the USAF pilot and the colonel of the Yugoslav Army who shot him down. *Second Meeting*, Journeyman Pictures, 2013.

1282 St Nicolas is the most popular Serbian saint because the majority of Serbs celebrate St Nicolas as their family’s Patron Saint.

The vast assortment of kitsch souvenirs is unsettling and it is apparent that Uncle Djordje has simply allowed anyone to leave a memento in the crypt. The altar of the crypt is also full of mementos, and the table set up next to it is a shrine filled with Serbian military caps, photographs of all the Serbian Field Marshals as well as King Aleksandar, and assorted saints. Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, convicted war criminals, also feature among the photographs. There are multitudes of hangings on the walls of the crypt, making it look more like a hoarder's storage room than a crypt. Uncle Djordje points at photographs of notable visitors, actors, writers, high priests, Yugoslav and Serbian presidents who have visited: "They have all come here, from Tito onward." There is a votive candle rack for visitors to buy candles and light them in remembrance of the dead. Uncle Djordje also plays music in the crypt — the two staple songs symbolising the Retreat: "The French ship is leaving" and, "There, Far Away".



The shrine with mementos, and the votive candle rack (April 2017).

Most of the ossuary boxes have soldiers' names, some have rank and company, some have the place of birth. Several of the engraved details have been changed or had additional information written next to them, ostensibly by visiting descendants, in different ways, with pen, or pencil, or stickers. Occasionally, there is the date of a visit. Surprisingly, there is no obvious ban on writing on the ossuary boxes. If visitors wish to leave an object in the crypt, to mark their visit, they are free to do so. The state

of the crypt has been called out in the Serbian press. Criticism about piled up kitsch mementos and the presence of the photographs of convicted war criminals is not levelled at Uncle Djordje but at the Serbian Consulate in Thessaloniki, officially in charge of the mausoleum.<sup>1283</sup>



The photograph on the left shows the ossuary box of Private Radoš Gašić, Šumadija Division, and underneath it, added in ballpoint, “Thank you, forefather, for everything, The Gašić family, from Prijedor,”<sup>1284</sup> with dates of visits. The lack of specific family relation may indicate that they are not sure how they are related to him. The photograph on the right shows the ossuary box of Private Vljako Spasić from *Markovac*, and underneath it is written in ballpoint, *Mačkovac*, presumably a correction, and the date of the visit of his great-grandchildren. Some of the ossuary boxes have initials N.N. indicating an unknown soldier. On one such ossuary, someone has placed the name and picture of Dragutin Dimitrijević *Apis*, the Serbian Army officer whose organisation *Black Hand* had ostensibly procured the *Browning* pistol that killed the Archduke Franz Ferdinand.<sup>1285</sup>

The prevalent memorialisation experience of the *Zejtinlik* cemetery is that of sadness at the loss of young lives, but it also leaves an aftertaste

1283 “NEVIDJENA SRAMOTA: Kriptu Srpskog vojničkog groblja u Solunu pretvorili u vašarsku tezgu” [“Unbelievable shame: the crypt of the Serbian military cemetery in Thessaloniki has become a flea market stall”], *Blic*, 17 July 2017 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/nevidjena-sramota-kriptu-srpskog-vojniskog-groblja-u-solunu-pretvorili-u-vasarsku/pbz1zw6> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1284 Prijedor is in the *Republika Srpska*, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1285 *Apis* was tried for treason in 1917 and executed in the vicinity of Salonika. His verdict was overturned in 1953 by the communist regime, and then again in 2012 by the Serbian judiciary. For more on *Apis*, see David MacKenzie, *Apis: The Congenial Conspirator. The Life of Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijević* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1989).

of a misplaced *triumphalism*. According to Uncle Djordje, French and British cemeteries “get as many visitors a year as we get in a day”.<sup>1286</sup> The implication being that the French and the British cannot possibly care about their dead or their history as much as the Serbs do, therefore making Serbs somehow *more legitimate* as a nation. This came through quite clearly from remarks heard during the visit. None of the visitors to *Zejtinlik* seem to be remotely interested in the Allied cemeteries. They may be the dead from the Salonika front but they are not *our dead*.

The Retreat is closely bound with the Salonika front in a way that the one cannot be mentioned without the other. For practical reasons, the two places — Thessaloniki and Corfu — are often reversed so visitors who come from Serbia, can visit both places on the same trip. They visit Thessaloniki first, and then Corfu — first the place from where the Serbian troops set off to liberate the country, and then the place where these troops recovered after the Retreat, before going to Salonika. This does not seem to bother anyone. They know why they come and they know what to expect: meeting the legendary Uncle Djordje, listening to his lectures, taking selfies and perhaps seeking out a grave or an ossuary box. To drink a glass of home-made plum brandy “for the souls” of the dead, and to light a candle is a way to pay tribute. It is a ritual with no time for detours, not even to the next-door cemeteries. These dead are not equal. This attitude was also noticeable in a complete lack of curiosity among the visitors to *Zejtinlik* about Entente military cemeteries elsewhere, which have far greater numbers of dead. It is not possible to get a *pilgrim* who is visiting a specific *lieu de mémoire* interested in another site of memory, where other nations have buried *their* fallen. As Susan Sontag observed in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, in relation to this phenomenon: “It is intolerable to have one’s own sufferings twinned with anybody else’s”.<sup>1287</sup> Comparing suffering does not have an objective purpose. Yet, nationalist discourse revels in comparisons, always making a case for *exceptionalism*. In the Serbian case, this comes through strongly, as diagnosed by David

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1286 Visit on 9 April 2017.

1287 Sontag, 2004, 101.

Lowenthal when speaking about self-importance of unearned nationalist pride, “*our* past is unlike anyone else’s. Its uniqueness vaunts our own superiority.”<sup>1288</sup> Observing the rituals of visitors to *Zejtinlik*, the pathos of Uncle Djordje’s declamations, the mementos left in the crypt, there is a sense that the people who come here seem to get *strength* from this exchange. They nod as they listen, they look around and see others solemnly absorbing the words they seem to *need* to hear — their beliefs are being validated and they are grateful for the experience. Many of them will look to complete the pilgrimage to Greece with a trip to Corfu. In the next part of the chapter, we look at another mythical Serbian site of suffering, “where yellow lemon trees bloom”.

#### 4. “There, Far Away”: From Tourists to Pilgrims in Corfu

“There are no soldiers alive today who were in Corfu in 1916.

However, the excitement experienced by the pilgrims to Vido grows stronger every year.

The wailing wall of the small boats above the Blue Tomb is the redemption for the Serbian illusions of the 20th century.”<sup>1289</sup>

In his 2004 book *Pilgrimage to Corfu*, Ljubomir Saramandić, curator of *Serbian House* in Corfu, explains that for Serbs, travelling to Corfu is never an ordinary tourist visit. Most Serbian visitors to Corfu know about the history of the island and the recovery of the Serbian Army on the island. The visit to the sites of memory can be more powerful than *knowing* about the events. Orthodox Easter<sup>1290</sup> is a popular time to come to Corfu because many travel agencies organise coach tours at this time, marking the early start of the tourist season. Typically, there are coach tours from Belgrade to Thessaloniki, which then take the travellers to Corfu by ferry from

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1288 Lowenthal, in Gillis, 1996, 47.

1289 Saramandić, 2004, 81.

1290 Both Serbia and Greece celebrate Easter according to the Julian calendar.

Igoumenitsa. Salonika and Corfu — symbolise the two key places for the Serbs in WWI — Corfu as the island of salvation and Salonika as the place from where the liberation of the country started and where many of those who have fallen in the battles at the Salonika front are buried.

While Thessaloniki is relatively easy to get to by road,<sup>1291</sup> Corfu requires additional effort of travelling across the Ionian Sea, heightening the feeling that one is seeking out a special experience. Apart from attractive local customs that characterise celebrations of Easter in Corfu,<sup>1292</sup> Serbian visitors who come at this time, and their hosts, seem to connect the almost miraculous recovery of the Serbian Army in Corfu and the “greatest Christian holiday” — Easter. When the Serbian Army celebrated Easter in 1916 with Regent Aleksandar, the celebrations had special significance.<sup>1293</sup>

For those who come specifically to pay their respects to the Serbian soldiers from a century ago, the first port of call is usually the museum that chronicles the events from the 1915 attack on Serbia and the Retreat, to the evacuation to Corfu, and the recovery, as its central themes. In 1993, the building at no.19 *Moustoxidou Street* in the old town was given to Serbia by the Corfiots, to be used as a museum featuring Serbian arrival and life in Corfu, and as a lasting memorial to the bond of friendship between the two countries.<sup>1294</sup> The building, which quickly became known as *Serbian House*, houses the museum and the Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Serbia. *Serbian House* places the Serbian story of Corfu in historical context. The museum educates the visitors not only on Serbian life in Corfu between 1916 – 1918, but it also gives a sense of continuity between then and now, inviting a journey through the sites of memory in Corfu that bridge the century-long gap. It is noticeable that the presentation

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1291 Distance between Belgrade and Thessaloniki is 650 km.

1292 “Glory and splendour not seen anywhere else in the world” Corfu Easter, Biggest Religious Event in Corfu <https://atcorfu.com/pasxa-stin-kerkyra/> (accessed May 17, 2019).

1293 Saramandić, 2004, 64.

1294 Interview with Ljubomir Saramandić, 11 April 2017.

in *Serbian House* on the hospitality of the Corfiots does not contain any negative aspects regarding the Serbian presence in Corfu.<sup>1295</sup>

The first monument commemorating Serbs in Corfu was built by soldiers of the Drina Division to their dead comrades in 1916. The land where the monument was erected had been donated by the farmer Yanis Yanulis from Agios Matheos. Today, Mr Yanulis has a monument too,<sup>1296</sup> erected in 1989, by the *Association for Nurturing Traditions of Serbia's Liberation Wars up to 1918*,<sup>1297</sup> in gratitude for his gesture. Mr Yanulis's descendants continue to maintain links with the Serbs who visit Corfu.<sup>1298</sup> On the road to Agios Matheos, there is a sign, flanked by Greek and Serbian flags, indicating a small enclosed park which houses the monument with a white marble cross at its centre.

On the right side of the monument, below a Serbian coat of arms, the following words are engraved:

*The Drina Corps soldiers  
to their comrades from wars with  
Austro-Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria  
1914 – 15 – 16.*

On the left side of the monument, the following verses are engraved, authored by Lieutenant Vladimir Stanimirović:

1295 A novel published in 2018 paints a rather sordid picture of both Salonika and Corfu, see Slobodan Vladušić, *Veliki juriš [The Great Charge]* (Belgrade: Laguna, 2018), 145.

1296 Yanulis had a street in Belgrade named after him on 31 October 2018, "Beograd dobio ulicu u čast grčkog dobrotvora Janisa Janulisa" ["Belgrade now has a street to honour the Greek benefactor Yanis Yanulis"] *Politika*, 31 October 2018 <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/414678/Beograd-dobio-ulicu-u-cast-grckog-dobrotvora-Janisa-Janulisa> (accessed November 1, 2018).

1297 "Društvo za negovanje tradicija oslobodilačkih ratova Srbije do 1918. godine" has a Facebook page with posts mostly consisting of photographs from ceremonies of commemoration <https://sr-rs.facebook.com/drustvo.1918/> (accessed May 18, 2019).

1298 Mišo Vujović, "The Epic of Heroism and Suffering", *SERBIA National review* (Year IX, no. 50, 2015), 24-25.

*On the graves, far away  
 Serb flowers will not sway;  
 Back home tell our children  
 We will never return to them.  
 To our land send our greetings,  
 Kiss the Serb soil for us!  
 And let these graves remind you all  
 The fight for freedom that we won.*<sup>1299</sup>



Road sign for the Monument to the Drina Division soldiers, and the Monument (April 2017).

On historically pertinent dates, memorial ceremonies are held at the monument.

The landing site of the Serbian Army at Gouvia, 10 km north of Corfu town, has been marked with a memorial since 1975. The memorial site is explained in Serbian, Greek, and French: “*Dans ce port de l’île de Corfou l’armée serbe alliée venant d’Albanie a débarqué du 6 janvier au 5 avril 1916*”. Below, another smaller and partly erased inscription reads, again in the same three languages: “*Au people Hellène — Les guerriers serbes reconnaissants*”.

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<sup>1299</sup> Translated by A.T.



Gouvia landing memorial plaque (April 2017).

Ten km south from the town of Corfu, in Gastouri, is another site of memory for the Serbs, the *Palace of Achilleion*. This palace is popular with tourists for other reasons. It was commissioned by the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, better known as Sissi, who, according to information from the museum, retreated to Corfu to recover from the suicide of her only son, Rudolf. After her death, the palace was purchased by the German Emperor Wilhelm II. “William II, however, never had a chance to enjoy the palace’s beauty because of a war that broke out, from his own doing”,<sup>1300</sup> as the museum website puts it. After the island of Corfu became a place for the recovery of Serbian troops in 1916, the palace served as a 500-bed military hospital where Serbian troops and officers, among others, received medical treatment. The hospital, administered by the Medical Service of the French Army, was operational between February 1916 and

1300 Museum Achillion [http://www.achillion-corfu.gr/default\\_en.html](http://www.achillion-corfu.gr/default_en.html) (accessed May 20, 2019).

June 1919. Today, a plaque at the entrance to the palace memorialises this period and gives a brief overview of the historical circumstances.



The Palace of Achilleion and the memorial plaque: “*Pendant la guerre continentale 1914 – 1918 les troupes alliées ont utilisées l’île de Corfou afin d’y accueillir et abriter l’armée serbe après sa retraite à travers l’Albanie*”. (April 2017).

From the point of view of continuity of the Serbian state and government in exile, the most important building for the Serbs was the Municipal Theatre where the Serbian Assembly held its sessions from 1916 to 1918. The theatre was destroyed in a bomb raid in 1943, and today a plaque in the new building commemorates the theatre’s role in Serbian history.<sup>1301</sup> While the Corfu sites described above are all significant, the most important of all the monuments in Corfu, and, one could argue, *the only true memorial* to the Retreat, is the mausoleum on Vido, “the island of death”, where the sick and dying Serbian soldiers were brought first. It is not known exactly how many were buried at sea near Vido, but it is likely that well over 5,000 Serbian soldiers were given a sea burial.

Burial at sea represents a particularly painful kind of *disappearance*, as noted by Robert Harrison in *The Dominion of the Dead*: “There are no gravestones on the sea. History and memory ground themselves on inscription, but this element is un-inscribable. **It closes over rather than keeps the place of its dead**, while its unbounded grave remains humanly

1301 Saramandić, 2004, 77-78.

unmarked.”<sup>1302</sup> [emphasis mine] This sentiment finds its embodiment in the iconic piece of Serbian poetry, “The Blue Tomb” by the poet Milutin Bojić (1892 – 1917). A talented poet and a veteran of both Balkan wars, Bojić was working as an army censor in Niš in 1915.<sup>1303</sup> Having crossed Albania and arrived in Corfu, he witnessed the lifeless bodies of his comrades being loaded onto the boats before being buried at sea. This sight stayed with him. His poem “The Blue Tomb”, or “The Blue Graveyard”, is his monument to those buried at sea.<sup>1304</sup> The poem has a remarkable cultural imprint on the way the Retreat and Corfu are viewed by Serbs. It is regularly read, quoted, and the actual phrase *Plava grobnica* **only** refers to a part of the Ionian Sea close to Vido, and to the events of 1916. The poem is also part of the Serbian school curriculum, it is recited in full at most First World War commemorations, and included in television programmes and documentaries. Despite its frequent appearance, the poem seems to provoke undiminished emotion every time it is performed. The poem is an elegy, constructed of 14 quatrains in alternate rhyme, with the first, fifth, ninth, and fourteenth stanzas written in a combination of iambic heptameter and a seven-syllable line, while the others are all in twelve-syllable lines, i.e. *alexandrines*. Bojić recognises what it means for his dead comrades to have no grave, no place of rest that their descendants could visit, and he uses his poetry to not only build them a tomb but also to hold a memorial service for them:

“Hail to you, imperial galleys! Restrain your mighty rudders!  
 Stroke your oars silently!  
 I am proudly officiating a sublime Requiem in the chill  
 of the night  
 Upon these sacred waters.  
 Here at the bottom, where seashells tire in sleep  
 And upon the dead, algae peat falls,

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1302 Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 12.

1303 Milutin Bojić – biografija [biography] <https://www.biografija.org/knjizevnost/milutin-bojic/> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1304 Saramandić, 2004, 27.

Stretch the graves of the brave, couches brother  
beside brother,

Prometheuses of Hope, Apostles of Pain.

(...)

Buried are here once ancient garlands

And the passing joy of more than one generation,

That's why the cemetery lies in the shadow of waves

Between the bosom of the sea and the vault celestial.

(...)

I wish for the eternal silence to rule

And for the glorious dead to hear the noise of Battles,

And rejoice in our cries of victory, as we cast ourselves beneath

The wings of Glory upon the field vermillion with blood.

For, there far away, battles sway

With the same blood that emanates from this resting-place:

Here above the eye of the resting lords.

There before the son's history is made.

(...)

Hail to you imperial galley! In the name

of a conscientious fast

Glide slightly upon these sacred waters.

A Requiem I'm officiating, one that heavens

have yet to see upon these sacred waters!"<sup>1305</sup>

Corfu's Serbian community newspaper, *Srpske novine Kraljevine Srbije* (*Serbian newspaper of the Kingdom of Serbia*) published the poem in 1916. Bojić was already sick with tuberculosis when he went to Salonika later that year, but he lived to hear his poem recited in a Salonika tavern.<sup>1306</sup> He died in Salonika on 8 September 1917.

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1305 Blog *Corfu Blues and Global Views*, "Blue Graveyard", translated by Michael M. Petrovich, <https://corfublues.blogspot.nl/2010/01/plava-grobnica-blue-graveyard-milutin.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1306 Saramandić, 2004, 29.

The mausoleum with the ossuaries on the island of Vido holds the remains of 1,232 Serbian soldiers, collected from different Serbian military cemeteries from across the island. In addition, the remains of 1,532 unidentified soldiers were placed in two exterior side walls of the mausoleum depicting the front and the back of the Albanian commemorative medal. Above the entrance door is the dedication: “To the Serbian Heroes — Yugoslavia”.<sup>1307</sup>

The mausoleum was not the first monument to be built on Vido. After the war ended, there was an earnest intention to erect a worthy monument to memorialise the terrible loss of life. The first monument on the island of Vido was the white stone cross unveiled by King Aleksandar on 17 May 1922. The ceremony was attended by political, military and religious representatives from both countries. The cross-monument was erected by the Royal Navy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The words engraved on the monument are: “To the Immortal Heroes — Royal Navy 17 May 1922”.



Vido, The Navy Cross (14 April 2017).

<sup>1307</sup> During the visit on 14 April 2017, one of the visitors complained loudly to a friend that the word ‘Yugoslavia’ should be erased from the stone where it is engraved, and ‘Serbia’ engraved instead.

The project for the mausoleum took longer to be realised, mostly on account of financial reasons. The mausoleum was finally completed during the mandate of Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović who stayed in Corfu as a young official of the Ministry of Finance in 1916, when he met and married a Corfiot woman.<sup>1308</sup> The mausoleum was designed by Nikolaj Krasnov and the engineer in charge of the works was Joseph Cohen from Corfu. Construction took place from 1936 to 1939. The inside of the mausoleum was decorated by Lazar Ličinovski's mosaic *Albanian Golgotha* in 1940.<sup>1309</sup> The mausoleum's original design also had two statues of Serbian soldiers that were never completed. In 2015, the Serbian tabloid *Kurir* started an initiative to collect funds to enable completion of the statues.<sup>1310</sup>

Even without the statues, the Vido mausoleum is what Serbian visitors to Corfu come to see. The visitors on Good Friday, 14 April 2017, were all Serbian, predominantly aged between 30 and 50, with several younger people aged around 20. Almost all were carrying flowers as they boarded the chartered boat flying Greek and Serbian flags, for the ten-minute crossing to Vido. The guide gave instructions, particularly regarding smoking, because the island of Vido is covered in pine trees. There was a brief introduction about the programme. It was clear that the group had already been to the Salonika cemetery and that the visit to Vido, on Good Friday, would be the highlight of their trip. The island of Vido is small, with one restaurant open in the summer season, and the mausoleum, at the end of a path, leads through the pines. The path was paved as a gift to the Corfu municipality by the town of Kruševac, twinned with

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1308 Augusta Gazis was the youngest daughter of Yanis Gazis, owner of the hotel *Bella Venezia* where the Regent Aleksandar and the Serbian government were residing while in Corfu. All three of Mr Gazis's daughters married Serbs.

1309 Saramandić, 2004, 76.

1310 J. S. Spasić, "Zaboravljeni heroji Albanske Golgote – nedovršena spomen kosturnica na Vidu" ["Forgotten heroes of the Albanian Golgotha – Unfinished Memorial Ossuary in Vido"], *Kurir*, 12 October 2015 <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/1971947/zaboravljeni-heroji-albanske-golgote-opustela-spomen-kosturnica-na-vidu> (accessed May 20, 2019). It appears that at least one site continues to be active for donations. *Budi human* [Be a humanitarian] fundraising site, Aleksandar Šapić <https://www.budihuman.rs/sr/korisnik/180/izradimo-statue-herojima-albanske-golgote> (accessed May 20, 2019).

Corfu since 1985, as the plaque on the way testifies. On the plateau before the mausoleum visitors stood or sat in the shade with flowers they had brought to throw into the sea as a tribute. The atmosphere was subdued and serious. Some visitors were taking pictures in front of the mausoleum.



Visitors posing in front of the mausoleum (14 April 2017).

People were talking in small groups. When a second group arrived, there were around 160 people in total as well as two guides and the curator of the Serbian House, Ljubomir Saramandić. One of the guides, Uroš Matijević, gave a speech with background on the initial Corfiot misgivings when the Serbian soldiers started arriving in 1916. The content of his speech was mostly inspired by Ljubomir Saramandić's book, which many of the visitors had previously bought. Matijević told the visitors about what Corfu was like before the Serbs arrived — the island had about 100,000 inhabitants when approximately 140,000 Serbian soldiers landed there over a period of a few weeks. He spoke about how the scepticism of the locals was short-lived when they were won over by the honesty

and courage of Serbian soldiers as well as by their fervent desire to return home as soon as possible.<sup>1311</sup> In Matijević's speech, Serbian soldiers in Corfu had a child-like innocence about them. They saw lemon and orange trees for the first time, but never took any fruit. They desperately needed help, and received it gratefully from the Greeks and the French.



The second group arriving (14 April 2017).

The relations between Serbs and the Greeks were portrayed as idyllic — and several visitors remarked in passing: “Greece is a rare country where Serbs are welcomed with open arms.”<sup>1312</sup> Following the reading of passages from the book *The Pilgrimage to Corfu*, Matijević talked about Dr Archibald Reiss, who was the author of the report on Austro-Hungarian crimes committed in Serbia in 1914.<sup>1313</sup>

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1311 Uroš Matijević, speech at the Memorial, 14 April 2017.

1312 Vido, 14 April 2017, conversations with visitors.

1313 Reiss, 1916.

As mentioned in chapter III, Reiss fought on the Serbian side, crossed Albania, and wrote extensively as Serbia's advocate. He was a member of the Serbian delegation at the Versailles Conference, settled in Serbia after the war, and was instrumental in establishing the forensic police department in Belgrade.<sup>1314</sup> Prior to his death, Dr Reiss wrote his final *advice* to the Serbs, to be read after his death. Matijević called it Reiss's "testament", its title is *Ecoutez les Serbes!*<sup>1315</sup> It was rediscovered by the wider public in the mid-1980s and has been in print since. In his final address to the people of the country he had done so much for, Dr Reiss told his intended readers – the Serbs – what he thought about them, hoping that, by pointing out their faults, he would help them change, even after his death. The guide then read from Reiss's book about the positive traits that Reiss thought Serbs had – they were brave, patriotic, hospitable, democratic, kind-hearted, proud and clever. He gave examples and explanations. Then he spoke about their faults: the Serbs were also lazy, greedy, ungrateful, particularly with regard to the treatment of war invalids, and spiteful. Reiss linked this last trait to xenophobia, which he considered *un-Serbian*, an identity trait that *should not have developed*. The guide read the final passage from Reiss's testament: "A nation like yours that has resisted centuries-old enslavement, that has retreated across Albania and that was exiled but not defeated, and managed to return to its homesteads victorious must not allow to be ruled by a handful of selfish and corrupt politicians, despicable racketeers, contemptible parasites and criminal profiteers and sharks."<sup>1316</sup> When he finished his reading, many of the visitors were nodding in approval and asserting that these words "could have been written yesterday". Matijević gave his own conclusion about what he had just read: "He knew us well. This is a lesson for us. You see, we stand here with pride, before this mausoleum. They have indebted

1314 J. Mathyer, "Professor RA Reiss: A Pioneer of Forensic Science", *Journal of the Forensic Science Society*, Volume 24, Issue 2 (March 1984), 136. Mathyer does not mention that Reiss grew increasingly disillusioned with Serbian politicians, and cut his ties with most of them. He died in Belgrade in 1929, reportedly following an altercation with a neighbour.

1315 Arčibald Rajs, *Čujte Srbi! [Listen, Serbs!]*, translated by Dejan Stojićević, preface by Čedomir Antić (Ethos: Belgrade, 2005).

1316 Rajs, 2005, 61. (Uroš Matijević's speech, 14 April 2017, Vido, recording, transcript, translation by A.T.).

us, so that one hundred years later we come here with a full heart, and with a feeling of pride. My dear friends, let us do something so that in a hundred years somebody can say something nice about us.”<sup>1317</sup>



The visitors listening to the speeches (14 April 2017).

After Matijević’s speech, Ljubomir Saramandić, the *Serbian House* curator and the author of *The Pilgrimage to Corfu* made a shorter speech and gave another dimension to the day: “Since you have come to Corfu at the time when we are celebrating the greatest Christian holiday, I would like to go back 101 years ago, to 1916, and to the scene described by the Canadian priest Dr Boyd.

He describes the scene as a unique one, never seen before. Over 130,000 soldiers and officers were lined up in the old port from where we had set off. And then the Supreme Commander of the Serbian Army, Regent

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1317 Uroš Matijević’s speech, 14 April 2017, Vido, recording, transcript, translation by A.T.

Aleksandar Karadjordjević arrived on horseback. He addressed his soldiers: “Christ has risen, my heroes!” and from all 130,000 of them came the reply: “Christ has risen, indeed.” Dr Boyd, delighted with what he had seen, describes it as unique, a ruler addressing his soldiers the way the apostles had made it known that Christ had risen. It is my profound conviction that at that moment, the word “resurrection” acquired a double meaning. On the one hand, the greatest Christian holiday, the day of Christ’s Resurrection and on the other, the resurrection of the Serbian state and army, exactly from this place where we are standing now.”<sup>1318</sup> Saramandić then introduced Mr Stanojević, one of the visitors who was carrying a wreath. Mr Stanojević seemed moved by the occasion and said that his daughter had made the wreath which he carried with him on the coach all the way from Serbia, yet the flowers were still fresh. He used to hear about the battle of Cer on his grandfather’s knee. He said he was placing the wreath with a feeling of sadness and pride. He became choked with emotion by the end of his speech. Saramandić then invited everyone to join in the singing of the song born on the island, “There, Far away”, as he started playing it from a device. The singing was muted and emotional. The final line of the song “Long live Serbia!” was taken up by the crowd at the end, but not loudly.

The visitors were then invited to enter the mausoleum. The ossuary boxes were marked with names, unit numbers and were immaculate compared with the Salonika crypt. The altar had a remembrance book where visitors left their thoughts. Most wrote “Glory to them” (“*Slava im*”). On the altar was a jar of Serbian soil. It came from the earth around the Monument to the Unknown Hero as does the one in the Salonika mausoleum. The visitors walked around the mausoleum and then it was time to visit the small plateau by the sea, where most official commemorations are held, and from where wreaths and flowers are thrown into the sea. Many visitors were visibly moved, some family members and friends holding on to each other.

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1318 Ljubomir Saramandić’s speech, 14 April 2017, Vido, video recording, transcript, translation A.T.



Mr Stanojević laying the wreath made by his daughter (14 April 2017).



Visitors signing the Visitors' book in front of the jar of Serbian soil (14 April 2017).



Visitors in the mausoleum among ossuary boxes (14 April 2017).



A corner with votive images, a framed oath of the association of the descendants of veterans to keep the memory of their ancestors, and a photograph of the Memorial of the Unknown Hero (Belgrade) on the right.



A view of the “Blue Sea Tomb”. (14 April 2017)

On the return trip, the mood was lighter, the captain of the boat also played “There, Far Away” and the visitors threw their remaining flowers into the sea. This was the moment when the purpose of the trip was palpably complete. They were not mere tourists — they were pilgrims. Having concluded their pilgrimage, the world now looked different.<sup>1319</sup>

There is a practical and conceptual difference between an official commemoration and a commemoration organised by private individuals on such an occasion as described above. In the former, the officials pronounce speeches written by someone else, adjust the sash on the professionally made wreath, after it has been carried and positioned to lean against the memorial by dapper uniformed soldiers. Private commemorations may be managed less impeccably, and even clumsy at times, the wreaths are not perfect, and the assembled company

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1319 Ljubomir Saramandić interview, April 2017; correspondence, October 2017.

more varied. In both cases, there may be real emotion, but *the agenda* is different. For the politicians, it is their job — they represent the state, or the government, they have to be seen to be going to the site of memory and paying their tribute, while individuals are there of their own free will — they do not have to do it. The 160 or so people who came to Vido on 14 April 2017, *chose to be there* during their holiday — they were not doing it for someone else, they were doing it because they felt they had to do this once in their lives. This need is the essence of pilgrimage which started as a religious ritual.<sup>1320</sup> The journey to a sacred place is made in order to be reminded of the moral principles of one's faith. In a world where much is changing, and moving away from a purely religious ritual, secular pilgrimages are undertaken to refocus our lives and help us see things more clearly.<sup>1321</sup> Searching for meaning in a historically important location for one's community can thus be interpreted as a "moral place-making" activity<sup>1322</sup> or as another manifestation of an *imagined community*. The sacred secular site of Vido seemed to provide a missing piece in the visitors' lives. This was a place to come for validation, but in a different way from the *Zejtinlik*. The remarkable aspect of this visit was the *bond* that could be sensed in the crowd. They were *all* being addressed by the guides and the speeches were veritable *sermons*. It was, in essence, a kind of memorial service, strangely enough echoing the words of the Serbian Foreign Minister Dačić in 2013, who said that Serbs hold a memorial service every time they come to Vido.<sup>1323</sup>

In the final two parts of this chapter, we explore "fictive kinships" of remembrance, established 100 years after the end of the war. Just as the

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1320 Pilgrimage — Religion — Britannica.com <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pilgrimage-religion> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1321 Saramandić, 2004, 12.

1322 Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans, *Gender, nation and religion in European pilgrimage: old routes, new journeys* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 210.

1323 "Nama je svaki odlazak na Krf opelo" ["We hold a memorial service every time we come to Corfu"]. *B92*, September 26, 2013. [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2013&mm=09&dd=26&nav\\_category=11&nav\\_id=758324](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2013&mm=09&dd=26&nav_category=11&nav_id=758324) (accessed September 30, 2013).

visitors to *Zejtinlik* and Vido do, the people who get together to carry out different acts of remembrance are performing the “work of remembrance”.<sup>1324</sup>

## 5. “We’ll do it Ourselves”: Individual Memorial Events and Practices

“We did exactly that with the expedition, the guerrilla way. With our own example and through action. Without any backing of the state, or whining that we needed support. If you — as a state — don’t remember, if you don’t want to be a part of it, if you’re not interested — no problem! We’ll do it ourselves, we will lead by example.”<sup>1325</sup>

There are remarkable acts of remembrance performed by private individuals who got together with the purpose of remembering the two key aspects of Serbia’s Great War — the Retreat and the Salonika Front. Next we look at a selection of these “fictive kinship groups” “who do the work of remembrance”, as described by Winter.<sup>1326</sup>

### The Expedition

In December 2015, one hundred years after the Retreat through Albania began, a four-member team of mountaineers from Belgrade crossed Montenegro and Albania on foot as a tribute to their ancestors. The expedition, named *Albanian Golgotha 100 Years Later*, set up a website in Serbian and English to give historical context of the Retreat, to introduce the members and to explain their motivation:

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1324 Winter, in Winter and Sivan, 1999, 59-60; Winter, 2006, 136.

1325 Marko Nikolić, team leader, from correspondence, June 2017.

1326 Winter, 2006, 136-137.



The photograph of expedition members in WWI Serbian army uniforms on the *Albanian Golgotha 100 years later site*.<sup>1327</sup>

“By pilgrimage via paths of such heroes, expedition wanted to remind contemporaries how precious was the honor of the Serbian state and the army. Had they lost the honor, they would have lost everything else: the state, the homeland, the respect of the descendants ... Preserving it, these glorious heroes quickly regained freedom, homeland, and state and they deserved the perennial admiration of their descendants. But these descendants were also left valuable lessons: how to love the homeland,

1327 <http://albanskagolgota.rs> (accessed May 20, 2019)

how to fight for [its] freedom and that without [sacrifices] there [can be] neither freedom nor homeland.”<sup>1328</sup>

The website has changed since and no longer has all the of the text quoted above, nor all of the original information, specifically in relation to donations for the project. The website, as it is at present, states the mission of the project – “peaceful and patriotic expedition” to follow in the footsteps of the Serbian Army from 100 years ago, starting from the town of Peć, in Kosovo, to the islands of Corfu and Vido.<sup>1329</sup> The expedition members were equipped with only necessary items, and travelled on foot without logistical support. The team set off from Peć in Kosovo and had originally planned for the expedition to last up to 20 days. However, the weather was favourable and they arrived in Dürres (Durazzo) in Albania, after walking 245 km in eight days. The team comprising Marko Nikolić, Nemanja Nešković, Nenad Mitrović, and Marko Marković, were all experienced outdoor experts, thoroughly prepared for their expedition.

Contrary to their picture on the website, they did not undertake the expedition in Serbian army uniforms from the First World War,<sup>1330</sup> but in alpine mountaineering and trekking clothing. In remembrance of Serbian soldiers who took communion in the Dečani Monastery in November 1915, the team did the same before setting off towards the Prokletije Mountains 100 years later. Out of the three routes most used in the Retreat, the one that cost the most lives went through Prizren, across the Vizier’s Bridge, which was completely frozen at the time. However, as there is a motorway along that route today, this would have not presented a challenge for the team. Therefore, the team chose the following route for the crossing –

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1328 The quoted text can no longer be found on the website at this date *Albanska Golgota 100 godina kasnije* [Albanian Golgotha 100 years later] [www.albanskagolgota.rs](http://www.albanskagolgota.rs) (accessed March 10, 2016).

1329 <http://albanskagolgota.rs> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1330 In an interview they seem put out by a question asking if they had actually completed it wearing a Serbian WWI uniform.

Rugovo Canyon, Mount Čakor to the Dürres Harbour.<sup>1331</sup> After arriving in Dürres, they boarded a ferry for Corfu where they visited the Vido memorial. After Corfu, they visited *Zejtinlik* in Thessaloniki, and then travelled to Macedonia, to climb Mt. Kajmakčalan and complete the journey.

The expedition drew considerable public attention, particularly after the event. They were invited to multiple talks, conferences, and interviews, all over Serbia, Bosnia (Republika Srpska), and Macedonia to talk about the expedition and what it meant to them as an experience.<sup>1332</sup> In correspondence with two of the team members who had agreed to answer additional questions, they expanded on the experience and their views of history and memory.

Marko Nikolić (b. 1978), team leader, “promoter of Serbia”, fan of active outdoor life, wanted to get people to move in nature, learn about themselves and their country. Nikolić felt strongly that Serbian cultural and moral heritage was not appreciated, that the Serbian nation had not learnt from its past, raising questions as to why the country was not marking such events “more seriously and properly”, why the past was “brushed under the carpet”. He believed that the expedition’s objective was also to ask the question, “Where are we 100 years later?” Nikolić was unequivocal in his views on the importance of the First World War for Serbia, and the state of Serbia today: “The Great War should be the main lesson for today’s youth, as an example when we were acting like one,

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1331 Another member of the expedition, Stanko Tomić (no relation), a descendant of a Serbian volunteer from the US, joined the expedition in Shkōdre (Scutari), having gone a different route to retrace his great-grandfather’s steps. See Senka Miloš, “Putevima divova – Albanska Golgota 100 godina kasnije” [“In the footsteps of giants – Albanian Golgotha 100 years later”], 8 January 2016, *Sputnik – Serbia* <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/analize/201601081102340412-Albanija-putevima-predaka-planinarenje/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1332 Tribina “Albanska Golgota 100 godina kasnije” [“Conference “Albanian Golgotha” 100 years later”], Kanal M RTV, YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivXD6sQQhmI> (accessed May 20, 2019); Ekspedicija “Albanska Golgota 100 godina kasnije” [“Expedition “Albanian Golgotha” 100 years later”], *Novosti*, 18 December 2015 (accessed May 20, 2019); Ekspedicija Albanska Golgota 1915 – 2015 [Expedition Albanian Golgotha 1915 – 2015], *Mondo TV, YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbrfN9VeBr8> (accessed May 20, 2019).

undivided, brave, educated, determined, [but] today we are geographically smaller than ever, with a load of reality shows, quasi-idols, and unskilled people as leaders.”<sup>1333</sup> Nikolić felt that the experience of the expedition had changed him because it was “an explicit pilgrimage and questioning of oneself, one’s nation, and life in general”.<sup>1334</sup> As the most poignant part of the expedition he described the Prokletije Mountains and had difficulty imagining an army getting through using frozen mountain-goat tracks. By being away from civilisation, by being out of one’s comfort zone, he says: “this is when you realise what these people, our great-grandfathers, have done for us. Today we stand on their shoulders, but in a moral, spiritual, even physical sense, we do not reach to their knees”.

Regarding the connection to the events of 1915 – 1916, he said that it was “emotional, spiritual, strong and educational”. Nikolić considered that as a nation, Serbs did not respect the memory of those events, that they lacked real interest and engagement, for which he blamed “fake patriotism, folklore kitsch and low-life. Drunken louts with beards, military caps, flags, aggressively attacking everything they don’t like”. Nikolić’s view was that young people did not feel inspired to study history by those who promoted it: “These people are not like our forefathers, they don’t have the spirit, or the upbringing. Our ancestors were just, they never attacked those weaker than them, they were hardworking heads of household, honest, and were not measuring everything in profit.” His hope for a change in the way the Retreat is remembered stemmed from a feeling that their expedition had changed something, because of the way they did it, “the guerrilla way”: “Dozens of towns invited us and hosted us to give lectures on this subject, and to tell them about our journey. Dozens of people followed in our footsteps and walked the path in summer conditions. That was the objective, that each Serb should walk that path and comprehend what our ancestors had done.”<sup>1335</sup> Nikolić thought that this was enough for the awareness to start changing.

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1333 Marko Nikolić, correspondence, June 2017.

1334 Marko Nikolić, correspondence, June 2017.

1335 Marko Nikolić, correspondence, June 2017.

Nenad Mitrović (b. 1980), Serbian army officer, sports and outdoor enthusiast, member of the Serbian Mountain Rescue Service, also provided his comments in relation to the expedition, and in relation to the historical past and remembrance. His view was that the expedition received some short-lived attention, but that no initiative had resulted in making the remembrance of the event “more collective”.<sup>1336</sup> He felt that the *one* documentary done by the Serbian Television<sup>1337</sup> was not enough, and that something would have to be done on the level of the relevant ministries such as Education, Defence, and Culture. Mitrović thought that young people could become more interested in their national history through an expedition. Mitrović reiterated his admiration for his ancestors: “I understood that the operation Albanian Golgotha was a battle for the honour of the Serbian State and it was won with terrible suffering. I understand that the price of honour of my people is very high and that we cannot play with it today.”<sup>1338</sup> He said that during the expedition, he felt close to his forefathers who had died for him. His impressions in relation to the way the retreat was remembered in Serbia today was that it was only truly honoured by individuals and some smaller citizens’ associations, and modestly so. He felt that there was no adequate remembrance on a state level of *any* of the major events of the First World War. He explained that it was difficult in the present circumstances for most people to make historical heritage a priority, and that political will was lacking in getting people attracted to educational and cultural institutions that should take the lead in showcasing national heritage. Mitrović has this to say about the way the Serbs dealt with the past in general: “The relationship to the events in our past is often fashioned in relation to the daily events. When we celebrated the communist victory in the Second World War, all the other victories were diminished. In the nineties, when we suddenly *remembered* we were not communist, we started to despise *everything* that was connected to the partisan movement. We are constantly going from

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1336 Nenad Mitrović, correspondence, August 2017.

1337 *Srbi na Krfu*, RTS, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gMd758zbnY> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1338 Nenad Mitrović, correspondence, August 2017.

one extreme to another and it seems that we are not capable of rationally looking at the facts and comprehending our past. In our quarrels, we lose sight of the essence and fail to establish and clearly formulate our national interests that should be undisputable, regardless of political opinions. That is why we did not succeed in grasping the message of the Albanian Golgotha, nor in building a monument to the heroes, such as they deserve, which would always be our warning of the price of Serbian honour."<sup>1339</sup>

Mitrović was in favour of building a grand monument to the heroes of the Retreat, perhaps in Kosovo, and placing memorial plaques along the route with a view to attracting future pilgrims. He thought that educational trips should be organised, or sports events, such as a bicycle race in the honour of the Retreat. Mitrović also added that the Serbs should promote the Retreat through films because that would educate young people on the subject: "The story of Albanian Golgotha and Serbian history in general is an endless and eternal inspiration".<sup>1340</sup>

## The Rowers

Earlier that year, in May 2015, a memorial rowing expedition in the honour of the Retreat was organised by a five-member crew. The expedition was planned to last a month to complete travelling across three seas, Ionian, Aegean, and the Adriatic along the route from Cavala, Tassos, Evia, the Peloponnesian Canal, Corfu, Brindisi, and ending in Bar, Montenegro. In Corfu, the crew delivered a plaque of gratitude to Serbian House entitled, "In the honour of the ancestors for future generations".<sup>1341</sup> Miloš Azdejković, the youngest member of the expedition was excited to take part in it: "We prepared seven months for this. The idea is to pay our respects to the ancestors, and my great-grandfather crossed Albania. They set off bravely into uncertainty and only taking with them the idea of a state. We would need about 300,000 strokes of paddles to do it, that is two

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1339 Nenad Mitrović, correspondence, August 2017.

1340 Nenad Mitrović, correspondence in August 2017.

1341 "Veslači u čast prelaska preko Albanije" ["Rowers in the honour the Retreat across Albania"], *B92*, 29 May 2015 [http://www.b92.net/sport/na\\_vodi/veslanje.php?yyyy=2015&mm=05&dd=29&nav\\_id=998073](http://www.b92.net/sport/na_vodi/veslanje.php?yyyy=2015&mm=05&dd=29&nav_id=998073) (accessed May 20, 2019).

strokes for each soldier who crossed Albania". A five-part documentary on their expedition was broadcast in 2015, and has since been available online.<sup>1342</sup> It gives historical background, provides original footage from the Retreat as an introduction and then follows the team's adventures, including damage to the boat, sickness of the crew, and weather problems. They stopped in Vido to visit the memorial, and observed a minute's silence before the "Blue Sea Tomb". In Corfu they visited Serbian House to present the plaque in honour of the Retreat.<sup>1343</sup>

## The Mountaineers

After centenary commemorations in Serbia got underway in 2014, *Danas*, a Belgrade independent daily, published an article about mountaineers from the *Mountaineering and Skiing Association Kopaonik*<sup>1344</sup> who clean overgrown and dilapidated Serbian military cemeteries outside Serbia, mostly in Macedonia.<sup>1345</sup> The article gave a bleak picture of the state of Serbian military cemeteries abroad, with Serbian national heritage remaining uncared for, while the only projects considered were those that can be used in high-visibility events.<sup>1346</sup> As the article put it: "Unofficial sources in the Serbian government say that it is the practice for [military] cemeteries to be cleaned at the last minute, just before a state delegation is supposed to visit."<sup>1347</sup> Even though there are enthusiastic volunteers eager to help clean and renovate cemeteries, there seems to be needless

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1342 "Savim prirodno: U čast predaka: prvi deo" ["Completely naturally: In the honour of our ancestors: part one"] RTS, January 2016. <http://www.rts.rs/page/tv/sr/story/22/rtssvet/2147491/savim-prirodno-u-cast-predaka-prvi-deo.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1343 "Savim prirodno: U čast predaka: peti deo" ["Completely naturally: In the honour of our ancestors: part five"], RTS, YouTube, January 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSF7sAKMc5s> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1344 Planinarsko-skijaško društvo Kopaonik <https://www.psd-kopaonik.org.rs> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1345 Since the *Prespa Agreement*, in force since February 2019, the country is known as North Macedonia. However the Serbian media always refers to it as *Macedonia* only.

1346 Jelena Tasić "O srpskim vojnim grobljima brinu samo planinari" ["Only mountaineers look after Serbian military cemeteries"], *Danas*, 15 September 2014 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/o-srpskim-vojn timer-grobljima-brinu-samo-planinari/> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1347 Tasić, 2014.

politicking which prevents these volunteers, such as the mountaineers' association,<sup>1348</sup> from getting basic financial support for cleaning.

At the same time, as the newspaper article explained, Serbian soldiers who died in the Balkan Wars and the two World Wars rest in 500 cemeteries in 36 countries, with no equivalent of a War Graves Commission in Serbia. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Matters officials, were unable to say exactly how many of these cemeteries were from the First World War, but they did say they had no immediate plans to renovate them, even on the eve of the centenary commemorations.<sup>1349</sup> On the other hand, the mountaineers' association, clearly well-informed and knowledgeable, *scored a scoop* in 2010 when they found the grave of the fabled *Vojvoda Vuk*,<sup>1350</sup> who died in a battle on the Salonika front in November 1916 in Macedonia. It seemed that only one local shepherd knew where to find the grave.<sup>1351</sup> Official reticence to support these individual ventures may be partly explained by the group's willingness to challenge official narratives: "On the Kajmakčalan battlefield which covers about 1,600 square km, there is a Serbian military cemetery with a central monument in almost every village. They originate mostly from battles in 1916. There is the cemetery of the Third Serbian Army, which was not reorganised, **as the official history says**, but they are all resting there, on the battlefield — 1,209 officers, 31,432 non-commissioned officers and soldiers", said the mountaineers' association announcement on their site in 2014.<sup>1352</sup> [emphasis mine]

The story of the mountaineers began in 2008, when a group, led by their guide Stanoje Stojković,<sup>1353</sup> was climbing Mt Baba, towards the Pelister Peak in Macedonia, and on their way, they met Dragiša Strahinić, a Serb

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1348 Planinarsko-skijaško društvo Kopaonik <https://www.psd-kopaonik.org.rs> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1349 Tasić, 2014.

1350 Vojin Popović aka Vojvoda Vuk aka Zmaj od Pčinje, (1881 – 1916), veteran of the Balkan Wars, member of the *Black Hand*, legendary commander of the guerrilla volunteer detachment.

1351 Tasić, 2014.

1352 Tasić, 2014

1353 Stanoje Stojković, correspondence in June 2017, June 2019; interview, November 2018.

from Bitolj, who told them about derelict Serbian military cemeteries at the foot of the Kajmakčalan Peak, on Mt Nidža, 100 km east. Some of the cemeteries were from the Balkan wars and others from the First World War. They were overgrown with weeds, Dragiša said, “the wooden crosses had rotted a long time ago, the metal crosses rusted away and the plaques with the names of the buried soldiers were gone”.<sup>1354</sup> Moved by the sight, Dragiša helped establish a Serbian-Macedonian association of volunteers who started cleaning these cemeteries. Stanoje Stojković felt that this was something the mountaineering association from Belgrade could do too. Stanoje organised the first cleaning operation in September 2009. His group was made up of 20 mountaineers and nine members of the *Association of the descendants of 1912 – 1918 volunteers*. In order to carry out cleaning and repairs, they had to apply for a special permit from the Macedonian authorities. Stanoje Stojković’s inspiration and determination led to having one cleaning operation per year, taking in several cemeteries each time with the total number of 11 cleaning missions in ten years, with 300 participants, from 20 different towns across Serbia. After the first operation they received modest support from their Belgrade municipality. Stanoje found that the *Institute for the Protection of Monuments* was unable or unwilling to help.

The volunteers were not deterred and continued their self-financing. Stojković believes that people joining him to clean derelict cemeteries are motivated by “a hope of finding an ancestor, burn some incense on his grave, light a candle for his soul.” As Stanoje further explains: “I have great-grandfathers who have crossed Albania and fought on the Salonika front.”<sup>1355</sup> He set up a *Facebook* page for the “Kajmakčalan Association”,<sup>1356</sup> where he posts *before and after* pictures of military cemeteries, as well as all the legible information about the soldiers buried there, their name, rank, unit, and the date when they died. Stojković discovered that there were rear units in charge of making tombstones for their comrades

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1354 Stanoje Stojković, correspondence, June 2017, June 2019; interview, November 2018.

1355 Stanoje Stojković, correspondence June 2017, June 2019; interview, November 2018.

1356 <https://sr-rs.facebook.com/udruzenje.kajmakcalan.2015/> (accessed June 7, 2019).

“Live comrade for the fallen one”) which is how some fallen soldiers can still be identified today. Under the heading “Serbia Remember” on the *Facebook* page of his association, Stanoje regularly posts photographs of military headstones they come across with the information on the barely legible tombstones, including the exact location of the graves so that any surviving relatives can find them.



“ДРАГОЉУБ МИЈАИЛОВИЋ; 3. Ч; 2. Б, 7. ПУК; ИЗ ВЕЛИКЕ КРСНЕ; ЈАСЕН. СМЕДЕРЕВ. ПОЖИВЕ 24 Г; ПОГИБЕ 22- I - 1917. Г. СПОМЕНИК СЕ НАЛАЗИ НА СРПСКОМ ВОЈНОМ ГРОБЉУ НА ЛОКАЦИЈИ ТРНОВО - СТУДЕНА ВОДА.”

“Dragoljub Mijailović, 3rd Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Regiment from Velika Krsna; Jasen, Smederevo. Lived to age 24. Killed in action 22-I-1917.

The tombstone is located at the Serbian military cemetery on the Trnovo-Studena Voda site.”<sup>1357</sup>

1357 <https://www.facebook.com/udruzenje.kajmakcalan.2015/photos/a.1798095917092137/1809102412658154/?type=3&theater> (accessed June 28, 2019).

There are currently 233 such photographs<sup>1358</sup> and more are being added. Stanoje Stojković continues to organise trips and hopes that more people will be inspired to join them, but has given up on getting assistance from official institutions.



БЛАГОЈЕ Ј. КОСТИЋ, ПОРУЧНИК МИТРАЉЕСКОГ ОДЕЉЕЊА ПЕШ. ПУКА  
КЊАЗА МИХАЈЛА; ПРОКУПЉЕ, ПОГИНУО 5-ХИ-1916. Г. НА КОТИ 1212.  
СПОМЕНИК СЕ НАЛАЗИ НА СРПСКОМ ВОЈНОМ ГРОБЉУ У СЕЛУ СКОЧИВИР.  
“Blagoje J. Kostić, Lieutenant of the machine-gun squad of the Infantry Regiment Prince  
Mihailo; Prokuplje, killed in action 5-XI-1916 at trig point 1212.  
The tombstone is located at the Serbian military cemetery in the village of Skočivir.”<sup>1359</sup>

1358 Kajmakčalan udruženje [association] Facebook page [https://www.facebook.com/pg/udruzenje.kajmakcalan.2015/photos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/udruzenje.kajmakcalan.2015/photos/?ref=page_internal) (accessed June 28, 2019).

1359 <https://www.facebook.com/udruzenje.kajmakcalan.2015/photos/a.1798095917092137/1806290669605995/?type=3&theater> (accessed June 28, 2019).

One of the group members, Ljiljana Stamenić (b. 1960), explained what had motivated her.<sup>1360</sup> She first joined the cleaning operation of derelict military cemeteries in 2011, wishing to do some physical work to get relief from office work. She did not know what to expect from this trip and it turned out to be a revelation. Her experience of cleaning tombstones and revealing the names beneath dirt and moss was intensely emotional. When she saw how young most of the soldiers were when they died, she was frequently moved to tears. She was reminded of the story of her family. Her own great-grandfather Milan Stamenić, was last seen by his brothers on the way to Albania in 1915. The family assumed he was captured and sent to Hungary or Romania as a prisoner of war. He was never heard from again. Ljiljana Stamenić looked for his grave in *Zejtinlik* but did not find him. She read extensively about the war and the region where her great-grandfather was from, but never found out what happened to him. She felt that every time she was lighting a candle on a tombstone for a young man killed in the war, she was also lighting a candle for her great-grandfather Milan, and *remembering* him. Ljiljana regretted that the rest of the family did not feel that they should honour and remember him: “What Milan had left behind, [his brothers] knew how to share between them, but what happened to him, what about our remembrance of him? He should not have had to die **twice**, once in the war and again **in the hearts of his family?**”<sup>1361</sup> [emphasis mine]

The fictive kinships that Winter wrote about were formed as a way of coping with loss and grief, for personal or political reasons.<sup>1362</sup> With the aftermath of the Great War removed by a whole century, the members of fictive kinships doing the work of remembrance in the situations described above seem to be motivated by similar and yet different urges. The deepest motivation for their work of remembrance is rooted in the *ancestor worship* of an *imagined community* combined with the *retrospective mirage*. They feel that they *know* what the heroes of the Retreat

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1360 Ljiljana Stamenić, correspondence, June, August, September 2017, March 2018.

1361 Ljiljana Stamenić, correspondence, June, August, September 2017, March 2018.

1362 Winter, 2006, 140.

were like: brave, indomitable, resolute. They *remember* them as heroes beyond reproach. Honouring them properly seems to mean erecting grand monuments — the groups all have great faith in the power of memorialisation. Through their actions, the fictive kinships want to feel closer to the *idealised and inspirational* past. Today's Serbs and Serbia do not fare well in comparison to the heroes of the past. Among the actors of remembrance, including the visitors to the Serbian *lieux de mémoire* related to the Great War, there is a palpable discontent with the state of Serbia today. The betrayal of ancestors, of the glorious dead, hangs as an unspoken accusation, or in the case of the guide's speech on Vido, as an invitation *to do something to be remembered by*. What that *something* should be is not specified. This brings us to another recurrent theme animating the discourse of remembrance: mourning for *the authentic Serbian self*. *We Serbs used to be honest, determined, and united in the Great War but have since become corrupt, weak, and divided. We have forgotten who we really are. We can recognise here the universal theme of moral degeneration. The fictive kinships of today are not necessarily mourning the dead soldiers — they are mourning the loss of imagined authentic self*. Not always in relation to the Great War, but about what has been *lost*, one way or another. Arguably, they might be mostly disappointed by what has happened in the last 25 years. Disillusioned, they use the acts of remembrance to find authenticity, in the same vein that people embark on pilgrimages.<sup>1363</sup> They set off on their sacred journeys into the past, searching for lost meaning, fighting for the identity damaged by the complexity of historical experience and their own perceived lack of agency in it.

Next, in the last part of the chapter, we discover foreigners who have been inspired by Serbia's Retreat and the Great War to achieve remarkable goals. While there are a number of elements of the themes we have seen among their Serbian counterparts, their purposes and their paths are different.

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1363 Noga Collins-Kreiner, "The lifecycle of concepts: the case of 'Pilgrimage Tourism', *Tourism Geographies*, (18:3), 324.

## 6. Remembrance Across Borders

“Since I was a boy, there would always be one day a year where we would remember the fallen in all wars and this was on Remembrance Sunday, the first Sunday after the 11th of November, this was the day that most people in my Church of Ireland Parish would wear red poppies, we sang “Onward Christian Soldiers” and other hymns that were to me very meaningful and uplifting. The inside of the entire church was full of remembrance plaques for men and women who had given their lives so that we could all be free. But in Serbia, it is even more relevant as nearly every person I know would have some relative who was lost in one of the wars. But maybe it is too much for some people.”<sup>1364</sup>

Foreigners who supported Serbia in the Great War are still popular today. Dr Archibald Reiss is still quoted and remembered as the great friend of Serbia, despite his difficult last years in Belgrade.<sup>1365</sup> Foreign medical missions in the Great War are celebrated, the doctors and nurses who worked in Serbian hospitals in 1914 – 1915 are widely written about. Many were awarded medals for bravery and dedication. Today, the foreigners, particularly from the West, who speak in favour of Serbs and Serbia regularly get considerable press coverage in the Serbian news and sometimes more than that. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the British actor Ralph Fiennes was granted Serbian citizenship in 2017.<sup>1366</sup> He has since been vocal about his love and admiration for Serbs.<sup>1367</sup> The media report widely on such events and the government feeds on positive

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1364 Mark Keating, correspondence, November 2017.

1365 Reiss had fallen out with Pašić over corruption allegations against his government and had retreated from political circles. On 8 August 1929, Reiss suffered a stroke following a heated argument with a neighbour in Belgrade.

1366 ““Fajnsić za B92: Lepo je biti Srbin, ali fotografija...” [““Fajnsić” for B92: It’s good to be Serbian, but the photograph...”] B92, 24 September 2017 [https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=09&dd=24&nav\\_category=12&nav\\_id=1307013](https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=09&dd=24&nav_category=12&nav_id=1307013) (accessed July 5, 2019).

1367 “Radije bih bio Srbin nego Britanac” [“I would rather be Serbian than British”], B92, 5 July 2019 [https://www.b92.net/zivot/vesti.php?yyyy=2019&mm=07&dd=05&nav\\_id=1562879](https://www.b92.net/zivot/vesti.php?yyyy=2019&mm=07&dd=05&nav_id=1562879) (accessed July 5, 2019).

publicity — *If these foreigners are on our side then we are right*, etc. But there are less well-known foreigners who have developed an interest in Serbian history connected to their own national history in ways that have led them to become unlikely champions of remembrance.

### **The Irishman who walked to Corfu**

Jovan Memedović, Serbian TV presenter and the host of the series, *Completely Naturally* who authored reporting on the rowers who rowed across three seas to pay tribute to the Serbian soldiers who crossed Albania, also made a documentary on another pilgrim of the Retreat.<sup>1368</sup> Mark Keating (b. 1968), an Irishman from Dublin, was inspired by the Retreat to walk the distance between Belgrade and Corfu to commemorate the journey made by his wife Vesna's grandfather in 1915. Keating met his wife while working as an *International Red Cross* volunteer during the wars in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>1369</sup> While travelling with his wife's relatives and exploring Serbia in the late 1990s, he learnt about his wife's grandfather Dobrosav Petrović who fought in both Balkan Wars and in the First World War. He was a member of the famous Drina Division. When the Division troops, just the same as countless others, were ordered to retreat in the winter of 1915, Dobrosav too crossed Montenegro and Albania on foot. Greatly weakened and sick with dysentery, he narrowly escaped death on Vido after a friend spotted him, and pulled him off a boat that would have meant certain death. Following his initial recovery in Corfu, Dobrosav Petrović was then sent to Marseille for further treatment. Dobrosav subsequently joined his comrades in 1916 in Salonika, took part in the Kajmakčalan battle and eventually in the liberation of the country. After the war, Dobrosav Petrović married in 1921, and fathered 13 children. He died in 1978. It was only after Mark Keating was researching his own family history in 2014, that he found out that his own great-grandfather, Sergeant Thomas Frederick Vaughan, member of the 18th

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1368 "Sasvim prirodno: U čast predaka: peti deo" ["Completely naturally: In the honour of our ancestors: part five"], RTS, YouTube, January 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSF7sAKMc5s> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1369 From correspondence, November 2017, April 2018.

London Regiment, part of the 10th Irish Division, had served in *l'Armée d'Orient* after being shipped from Gallipoli to Salonika in 1916. Keating learnt that not only were both their ancestors in Salonika at the same time, but that his great-grandfather had also fought Bulgarians in Serbia and Macedonia. He also survived the war and returned home. As Mark Keating put it: "When I realised that it would be 100 years since these great events I thought of the best way to remember them, walking a portion of the route was naturally going to be part of this remembrance."<sup>1370</sup>



Mark Keating with his dog Pajo in front of the Celtic cross of the 10th Irish Division, North Macedonia, 2015. (Photograph courtesy of Mark Keating.)

More importantly, apart from Mark Keating's desire to pay tribute to both his and his wife's ancestors, he used his expedition as a fundraiser for the children's ward at the Belgrade's *Institute for Oncology* and for *St John's Ward* in *Our Lady's Children's Hospital* in Crumlin in Ireland.<sup>1371</sup> Mark Keating's 2,000 km walk from Belgrade to Corfu and back via Kajmakčalan called *Walk For Their Lives 1915 – 2015*, raised funds for new equipment for both

1370 From correspondence, November 2017, April 2018.

1371 "Man and dog on 2,000 km trek to raise cash for charity", *The Irish Times*, 20 August 2015 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/man-and-dog-on-2-000km-trek-to-raise-cash-for-charity-1.2323321> (accessed May 20, 2019).

hospitals. This was Keating's third humanitarian action to raise funds for Serbia and Ireland. In 2014, Keating rode his bicycle from Dublin to Belgrade to raise money for three hospitals and to commemorate 20 years since meeting his wife.<sup>1372</sup>

Keating's expedition received extensive coverage in Ireland and Serbia and he became something of a celebrity. The connection he made between soldiers in the Retreat and cancer patients was survival: both groups would have had to keep going to survive — the soldiers had to keep going the same as people with cancer. His own experience from the walk mirrored this: "When we really have to, and there is no other way, we can adapt to anything. That is how these people survived 100 years ago."<sup>1373</sup> On his walk he met many people who told him about their own grandfathers and great-grandfathers who had crossed Albania and he saw different graves, crosses, and roadside memorials to the fallen in different wars. Keating described his two most poignant moments, first at Kajmakčalan, when it took them two days to reach the top: "We were completely exhausted, I would think it was the same for Dobrosav and his men. It was freezing cold, minus 12 degrees with the most incredibly strong wind. However, the next morning was completely quiet with the most incredible sunrise. We were there on our own and we felt it, but it was probably the most beautiful place I had ever been to. We could see the Albanian mountains in the far-off distance that we had climbed the month before, and in the other direction Mount Athos in Greece. It was a holy place where so many men fought and died, it felt like the peace we felt that morning had been truly earned 100 years ago." The second place on his journey which moved him in particular was near a village of Valandovo in Macedonia where Irish troops had been stationed: "For six months between summer and winter they fought off the Bulgarians and the extreme weather, in the summer the intense heat and mosquito-

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1372 In 2014, through the Whitewater Foundation, Keating collected aid for the victims of catastrophic floods in Serbia. In 2018, he completed another walk to commemorate the breakthrough on the Salonika Front and raised more funds for sick children.

1373 From correspondence, September 2017, November 2017, April 2018.

ridden area spread malaria, and in the winter the cold left many with frostbite.” In this place there was a granite Celtic cross marking the place where 1,000 Irish soldiers died “in the defence of Serbia”. Keating had an intensely emotional experience connecting to the soldiers of 100 years ago, imagining his great-grandfather carving the wooden toys that he still has today. Keating felt that there was a natural affinity between the Serbs and the Irish, that both nations had scars from the past, what was the battle of Kosovo to the Serbs, that was the Great Famine to the Irish. He said that the Irish were able to leave the Troubles behind them but that Serbs still had some way to go with Kosovo.<sup>1374</sup>

Although there were other expeditions and races in relation to the Retreat,<sup>1375</sup> which were then followed in 2018 by several more projects in honour of the 100th anniversary of the breakthrough on the Salonika Front,<sup>1376</sup> Mark Keating seems to have been the only one who came up with the idea of raising funds for charity. However, other foreign kinships of remembrance also have something specific to show for their engagement.

### **Serbian Prisoners of War remembered in the Netherlands**

Although the Netherlands was a neutral country during the First World War, there was a significant presence of foreign troops on Dutch soil, both refugees and prisoners of war, particularly after the Netherlands reached an agreement with England and Germany to organise the internment of their prisoners of war in the summer of 1917. Many thousands of prisoners were interned in different camps across the country. After the

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<sup>1374</sup> From correspondence, September 2017, November 2017, April 2018.

<sup>1375</sup> A team of three cyclists from the Serbian entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, cycled from Višegrad to Corfu, following the same ritual, visiting Serbian House and the Vido memorial with the ‘Blue Sea Tomb’. “Višegrad: Trojica biciklista u čast srpskih vojnika prešli 4000 kilometara” [“Višegrad: In the honour of the Serbian soldiers three cyclists journeyed 4000 kilometres”] *Glas Srpske*, 4 August 2015 <https://www.glassrpske.com/drustvo/vijesti/Visegrad-Trojica-biciklista-u-cast-srpskih-vojnika-presli-4000-kilometara/lat/190028.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

<sup>1376</sup> Bicycle race was organised from Niš to Zejtinlik and Corfu in September 2018, see “Biciklistički maraton od Niša do Zejtinlika u Krfa u čast predaka” [“Bicycle marathon from Niš to Zejtinlike and Corfu in the honour of our ancestors”] *Južne vesti*, 18 September 2018 <https://www.juznevesti.com/Sport/Bicisklisticki-maraton-od-Nisa-do-Zejtinlika-i-Krfa-u-cast-predaka.sr.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

Armistice was signed in November 1918, all were to be repatriated, among them 4,316 Serbs.<sup>1377</sup> In 2012, a team of three amateur historians, Tatjana Vendrig, Fabian Vendrig, and John Stienen became interested in the story of Serbian POWs in the Netherlands after Fabian's online searches discovered a Serbian monument at a cemetery in Garderen with the names of 64 Serbian soldiers who had died in the Netherlands. This intrigued them enough to start researching further. They discovered that 91 Serbian soldiers had died in the Netherlands before they could return home at the end of the war. The Spanish flu took the lives of 86 between January and February 1919, with five having died before the epidemic started. The research team set about finding out what had happened to them, where they had come from and whether they had descendants. Eight years later, the team had an impressive trilingual blog, in Serbian, Dutch, and English, a slew of articles published in Serbian and Dutch press,<sup>1378</sup> a publication on the Serbian Prisoners of War in the Netherlands published by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2016,<sup>1379</sup> several others in the pipeline, and remarkable research results. They succeeded in finding the relatives of 12 soldiers who had died in the Netherlands, and in some cases, they were able to reconstruct the journey of individual soldiers which they have illustrated in Google maps.<sup>1380</sup> Occasionally, the families received letters from the camps or photographs of their ancestors, and individual stories could be pieced together. Djordje Vukosavljević from Kragujevac, one of the Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands, was captured in late 1915.<sup>1381</sup> Initially, he was in a German prisoner-of-war camp before being sent to the Netherlands after the war, prior to being repatriated to Serbia. Djordje wrote from the German camp to his wife

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1377 Tatjana Vendrig, Fabian Vendrig, John M. Stienen, Serbian Prisoners of War website, Introduction <https://www.secanje.nl/en/introduction/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1378 <https://www.secanje.nl/en/mediapublications/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1379 Tatjana Vendrig, Fabian Vendrig, John M. Stienen, Serbian soldiers of World War I who died in the Netherlands (Belgrade: Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2016).

1380 Serbian WWI prisoners in the Netherlands <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1KUT-XqfkFioudqp8WwRebyiTr9w&ll=48.579662943050636%2C14.046020084960901&z=5> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1381 Serbian Prisoners of War, Djordje Vukosavljević — Kragujevac <https://www.secanje.nl/en/results/dorde-vukosavljevic/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

Lepa: “Dear Lepa, the parcel you sent me, I received on the 10th day. Namely, out of 36 Serbs, I am the first one who has received a parcel. (...) The bread you sent every Serb took it, crossed themselves, and kissed it, and then we started to cry happy tears. On this happy and touching day, I shared and ate the bread brotherly with my people.”<sup>1382</sup> In Djordje’s last letter, sent in June 1918, he complains of having been separated from his fellow Serbs and finding himself among foreigners with whom he could not communicate. He was also experiencing worsening eyesight.<sup>1383</sup> Djordje’s wife Lepa received a telegram in August 1919 informing her of his death from flu. The telegram was sent by Dragi Rajičić, who had met Djordje in a camp in 1917. Djordje died in January 1919 in Millingen, a village near Apeldoorn in the Netherlands. He was buried in Garderen, but his journey did not end there. In 1938, after the plans to exhume and reburial Serbian soldiers from the Netherlands at the Serbian Field of Honour in Thiais<sup>1384</sup> were abandoned because of the lack of space, the remains of the Serbian soldiers were transferred from Garderen to the Serbian mausoleum in Jindřichovice, today in the Czech Republic. Djordje’s story was pieced together by the research team, including the autopsy and exhumation reports.

In another case, Miloš Jeremić from Resnik was taken prisoner during the Retreat. He went through one or more camps in Germany before arriving in Nijmegen, where he died in January 1919. Remarkably, “until recently, when Miloš (Tanasijević) from Resnik visited our website and discovered that his great-great-grandfather Miloš died in the Netherlands, nobody from his family knew exactly what happened to Miloš Jeremić.”<sup>1385</sup>

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1382 Vendrig, Vendrig and Stienen, 2016, 18.

1383 Most probably from having worked in a salt mine as a POW, Vendrig, Vendrig and Stienen, 2016, 20.

1384 Souvenir français – “Les Serbes de Thiais”, 7 April 2019 <http://www.souvenirfrancais-issy.com/2019/04/les-serbes-de-thiais.html> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1385 Serbian prisoners of war, Miloš Jeremić <https://www.secanje.nl/en/victims/jeremic-milos/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

Fabian Vendrig (b. 1978), was interested in Balkan history when he found the monument in Garderen. Inspired by the work of Remco Reiding about Soviet soldiers buried in the Field of Honour in Amersfoort,<sup>1386</sup> Fabian started researching with the other two researchers, Tanja Raković (who subsequently became his wife) and John Stienen. Considerable satisfaction came from finding Serbian soldiers' families as well as from reconstructing their life stories. Fabian lives in Belgrade, is interested in history, runs a blog,<sup>1387</sup> and writes about monuments from the First World War, although he does not feel a particular connection to the war. Fabian is critical of the official Serbian government centenary commemorations which he feels are only organised for VIPs, not for the people. He also thinks that there is a lot of political instrumentalisation of the events, where the politicians want to show off.<sup>1388</sup> Unimpressed by Serbian efforts to preserve history, he observed a lack of care, although there were exceptions. Fabian feels that as a research team they had done what they could and that the Serbs could and should do more: "Serbs are talking a lot, but not doing a lot."<sup>1389</sup>

John Stienen, (b. 1972) Fabian's fellow researcher, another Dutchman, had some experience in researching prisoners of war in the Netherlands in World War I. His motivation for joining the research was his interest in history as well as his curiosity to find a connection between the Netherlands and countries of Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>1390</sup> His archive researching skills were required to corroborate what the team discovered, and the resulting knowledge carried a sense of achievement: "Describing what happened to Serbian soldiers in the Netherlands, required us to have a basic understanding of how they got here and what the situation in the Netherlands was like at the time."<sup>1391</sup> As for the official Serbian centenary commemorations, John feels that the Serbs "did what they

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1386 Stichting Russisch Ereveld Amersfoort [http://sovjet-ereveld.nl/?page\\_id=2898&lang=en](http://sovjet-ereveld.nl/?page_id=2898&lang=en) (accessed June 28, 2019).

1387 Fabian's site <https://www.fabian-vendrig.eu> (accessed May 20, 2020).

1388 From correspondence, June 2019.

1389 From correspondence, June 2019.

1390 From correspondence, June 2019.

1391 From correspondence, June 2019.

could”, in view of the Serbian lack of tradition in marking the First World War, “No poppies, no Menin Gate, no Last Post, etc.” and that it was only the collapse of Yugoslavia that had made WWI “come back”.<sup>1392</sup>

The original monument which first ignited Fabian Vendrig’s curiosity, at the cemetery in Garderen, probably dated from the 1920s. In 1938, at the request of the then Yugoslav government the remains of the 29 Serbian soldiers buried there were exhumed and repatriated. The monument was left behind. In 2006, the Garderen *Hervormde Gemeente* volunteer Piet van Bentum<sup>1393</sup> became interested in it and started an initiative for its renovation. *Het Servisch Monument* committee within the Garderen *Hervormde Gemeente* was thus started and the monument gradually renovated with the names of all 91 Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands since 2007. Ever since then the committee has been holding an annual memorial service on the first Saturday of October at the Garderen cemetery, involving the local Serbian community, some Dutch citizens, Serbian Embassy officials, and the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Netherlands. Thanks to a detailed blog posted by two enthusiasts who were present,<sup>1394</sup> we have details of the special commemoration when the monument was officially “handed over” to Serbian Embassy representatives in 2011. On that occasion, on Saturday 1 October, the commemoration began with the *Last Post* and was followed by two minutes’ silence, before the Serbian Ambassador and the Serbian Consul laid a wreath at the monument. After various speeches, the *Regimental Brass Ensemble of the Grenadiers and Rifles*<sup>1395</sup> from Assen played the Serbian and the Dutch national anthems. This was followed by a Serbian priest, Vojislav Bilbija singing *Tamo daleko*, as he accompanied himself on his

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1392 From correspondence, June 2019.

1393 “Garderen Piet van Bentum Lid van Oranje-Nassau”, Nieuwsblad De Band, 26 April 2019 <https://nieuwsbladdeband.nl/lokaal/gardereen-piet-van-bentum-lid-orde-van-oranje-nassau-583757> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1394 “Herdenking Servisch Monument te Garderen-Grafstenen krijgen een gezicht” <https://begraafplaatsveldwijk.wordpress.com/2011/10/01/herdenking-servisch-monument-te-garderen/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1395 Regiments fanfare ‘Garde Grenadiers en Jagers’ <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/muziek/regimenstfanfare-garde-grenadiers-en-jagers> (accessed May 20, 2019).

guitar. Then came the memorial service.<sup>1396</sup> The Serbian community around Nijmegen and Apeldoorn, and their Dutch friends continue to remember Serbian soldiers from the First World War who died in the Netherlands. Every year, on the first Saturday in October, they gather to hold a memorial service at the monument in Garderen, an occasion always attended by a Serbian Embassy representative<sup>1397</sup>. This was also the case on 6 October 2018 when we attended the open-air memorial service. Some 70 people gathered for the service and the speeches, followed by a poetry reading given by a local Serbian poet who read his own version of the “Blue Tomb”. When the programme was officially over, all those present were invited to a local municipal building where the parishioners served Serbian specialties and drank plum-brandy in memory of Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands.



The monument to Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands — Garderen (left). Ending of the memorial service on 6 October 2018 (right).

1396 “Herdenking Servisch Monument te Garderen- Grafstenen krijgen een gezicht” <https://begraafplaatsveldwijk.wordpress.com/2011/10/01/herdenking-servisch-monument-te-garderen/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1397 Memorial service for Serbian soldiers in Garderen, Embassy of the Republic of Serbia <http://thehague.mfa.gov.rs/newstext.php?subaction=showfull&id=1538997447&ucat=19&template=Headlines&> (accessed May 20, 2019).

## Remembering the Scottish Women's Hospitals

In 2006, Alan Cumming, (b. 1965) from Cumbernauld in Scotland, travelled to Belgrade. His main interest was to watch a football game, but he was also curious because he thought Serbia had been presented in a negative light throughout the 1990s and he felt there was more to it. He happened to be walking past a hospital in Belgrade<sup>1398</sup> and saw a plaque with a name that intrigued him. It was a plaque commemorating the contribution of Dr Elsie Inglis to the Serbian First World War effort. It turned out to be, as the phrase goes, *the beginning of a beautiful friendship*. Dr Elsie Inglis, as mentioned in chapter III, was one of the first women physicians in Britain and an active suffragette.<sup>1399</sup> At the outbreak of the First World War, after the British Red Cross rejected her offer to establish a medical service staffed by women doctors and nurses, Inglis founded the Scottish Women's Hospitals (SWH) to tend wounded Entente soldiers in Europe. The SWH sent around 1,500 women to war-torn Europe between 1914 and 1918. Alan Cumming rediscovered this and much more about Elsie Inglis and the SWH. He was surprised that so many of the women who helped Serbs during the First World War were remembered: "I was then as now completely astonished by the Serbian people's love, knowledge and devotion to large numbers of these women; (...) it was a largely untold story in my homeland. It seemed like the perfect time to rebuild the friendship with Serbia and Scotland."<sup>1400</sup> Alan rediscovered a part of Scottish history that many Scots never knew about and he did much of it by organising events in both Serbia and Scotland. He set up a blog devoted to the SWH, with the stated intention, "to keep the memory alive and honour the women who served with the Scottish Women's Hospitals."<sup>1401</sup> His objective was to find out the name and the story of everyone who

1398 Dr Dragiša Mišović Hospital, had originally been the location of Dr Elsie Inglis' Memorial Hospital in 1922. [http://www.dragisamisovic.bg.ac.rs/stranice/a\\_onama\\_istorijat.html#cyr](http://www.dragisamisovic.bg.ac.rs/stranice/a_onama_istorijat.html#cyr) (accessed June 28, 2019)

1399 Lucy Inglis, "Elsie Inglis, the suffragette physician", *The Lancet*, 8 November 2014 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)62022-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)62022-5/fulltext) (accessed June 28, 2019).

1400 From correspondence, June 2019.

1401 Scottish Women's Hospitals <https://www.scottishwomenshospitals.co.uk> (accessed June 28, 2019).

had been a part of SWH. Alan unearthed photographs, documents and newspaper articles on the SWH in Scottish libraries. In 2013, he visited Elsie's grave in Edinburgh, found the headstone in poor condition and organised an appeal for funds. As a result of his publicity, the work was done for free by an Edinburgh firm. As the centenary years approached, the more Alan spoke about Elsie, on radio and TV programmes, in schools and community centres, the more he became the go-to person to talk about Elsie Inglis and the SWH.



Alan Cumming (right) and Velibor Vidić, Valjevo Museum historian and curator, at the grave of Evelina Haverfield,<sup>1402</sup> Bajina Bašta, Serbia (photograph courtesy of Alan Cumming, September 2016).

1402 Evelina Haverfield (1867 – 1920), suffragette, SWH administrator, died in Serbia after founding a home for Serbian war orphans.

In 2014, Alan appeared in a Scottish-produced documentary “The Woman Who Went to War — A Great Adventure”,<sup>1403</sup> and invitations for him to speak and participate in conferences poured in. Alan runs a small landscaping business in Cumbernauld and is not an academic, by his own admission.<sup>1404</sup> However, in rediscovering Elsie Inglis for Scotland, he also discovered his talents for research, organisation, communication and networking. Although he researched the First World War and the engagement of Scottish Women’s Hospitals during the war, Alan admitted that he did not feel particularly connected to the actual war. Elsie’s story of commitment to a cause she believed in, connected Alan Cumming to his own values and who he felt he was as a person.<sup>1405</sup>

Although he considers himself only an amateur historian, and does not feel he belongs in formal conferences, over the period of time that he had researched Serbia’s Great War, and specifically the Retreat, during which many SWH doctors and nurses crossed Albania with Serbian troops, he made pertinent observations: “The events in Serbia are embedded in every Serb as everyone today has a family connection to WW1 and therefore has a grim reminder. Personally, I don’t really think Serbia as a nation fully recovered from the retreat. I think something more than flesh and honour was lost on those mountain passes. One only need to go to Vido Island today. The atmosphere among young Serbs on visiting the island, quietly breaks your heart.”<sup>1406</sup>

In September 2017, with the help of many from his large network of friends and supporters in Serbia, Alan organised a visit to Serbia by fourteen of Elsie’s fourteen relatives, where they spent a week touring the country. One of the towns on the tour was Mladenovac, a small town about 50 km

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1403 “The Woman Who Went to War – A Great Adventure” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj43IALlvI0> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1404 From correspondence, 2015 – 2019.

1405 From correspondence, 2015 – 2019.

1406 From correspondence, June 2019.

south of Belgrade, where Elsie and other SWH doctors and nurses worked and where a drinking fountain was erected in their honour in 1915.<sup>1407</sup>



The inscription on the memorial drinking fountain in Mladenovac says: “In memory of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals and their founder Dr Elsie Inglis. 1915” (April 2015).

Since Alan Cumming began his campaigning in 2006, he has given over 80 talks, lectures and events in Scotland, and elsewhere in the UK and Europe. He has provided information for exhibitions as far afield as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In 2017, Alan was asked by the Scottish government to be their advisor and have the final say in the commemoration of the centenary of Elsie’s death in November 2017.<sup>1408</sup> At

1407 Alan Cumming, “Elsie’s relatives’ “pilgrimage” to Serbia”, *Britic*, 7 November 2017 <http://www.ebritic.com/?p=635083> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1408 Fiona Pringle, “Princess Royal honours Elsie Inglis in Edinburgh”, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 November 2017 <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/health/princess-royal-honours-elsie-inglis-in-edinburgh-1-4626796> (accessed June 28, 2019).

the same time, largely thanks to Alan Cumming, a Scotsman who went to see a football game in Belgrade in 2006, a courtyard at the Old Medical School in Edinburgh has been renamed *Dr Elsie Inglis Quadrangle*.

When looking into the past of our own country, it may be difficult to achieve detachment for all the reasons discussed above. National attachments are hard to shed. Engaging with another country's past may be liberating. It may help us discover connections we did not know existed, or reveal parallels of experience that deepen interpretation of our own beliefs. Stepping out of one's own routine and locality and asking questions, then looking for answers, or starting purposeful projects — raising funds for those who need them, or shedding light on historical curiosities through exploration of sites of memory, seem to have brought unexpected rewards for our actors of remembrance. What is striking in these three stories is that the past was used to achieve something *tangible* in the present — to further knowledge, to create understanding and to make a difference. Through their work, they have learnt new skills, they have created new friendships and they have changed lives. By performing their *mnemonic labour*, they have established *communities*. It is this outward move from one's own universe to the outside world that makes this group of actors of remembrance exceptional. At the same time, their activities were gladly acknowledged by the Serbian establishment as validation of the Serbian master narrative, now also recognised by well-informed foreigners. This did not taint their engagement, it merely placed them in a unique position of being welcomed by the official and *professional* centenary commemorators and by the grassroots *fictive kinships of remembrance* who sensed their commitment as sincere and spontaneous.<sup>1409</sup>

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1409 The overview of the “kinships of remembrance” events expressly does not include such manifestations as *Marathon for Peace*, which incorporates in its remembrance-run sites, the 1999 NATO bombing. The event seems to be sponsored by the state-controlled Serbian television. Its website is no longer available and its facebook page does not seem to have been updated since 2016. <https://sr-rs.facebook.com/pages/category/Sports-Team/ATLETSKI-KLUB-MARATON-MIRA-VIDOVDAN-99-102039086556840/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

## Conclusion Chapter V

It hardly seems fair to compare the official commemorations with these “nonofficial forms of collective remembrance”,<sup>1410</sup> as Jay Winter calls them. In all the individual initiatives of remembrance, we find action, movement, and agency. The motivation of ordinary, private citizens to do something memorable and extraordinary in order to remember events from the past, and to honour people who died 100 years ago, seems to relate to an inner need. Or rather, their motivation relates to *different inner needs*, but they have similar elements. It is significant that all these initiatives consist of seeking out the actual *sites of memory*, those that exist, or even those that are almost gone: walking the same paths as the ancestors, seeking a route through the Albanian mountains that is the hardest, or finding graves that are barely there, these actions are all about connecting the dead and the living. War monuments are not able to capture the connection between the past and the present in the same way. It is as if by going to the sites of memory, moving through space, the agents of remembrance are going back in time, “because they have to speak out” to use Winter’s term.<sup>1411</sup> We suggest that the inner need pushing these exceptional individuals to become agents of remembrance is linked to a *search for direction from the past*, more specifically from the glorious dead of the Great War. The official commemorations are simply political occasions based around the relevant dates, but they are all to do with the present. The individual acts of remembrance may be a response to spiritual ancestral needs to seek the sites where the dead are, or where they could be, where they have disappeared. Politicians at official commemorations — by their very act — are maintaining that the dead would approve of them as they twist the historical narrative. The individuals who participate in acts of remembrance engage actively with the existing narrative by going to the sites of the dead, known and unknown, each with their own deeply personal cause. What these groups have in common is that, in a way, they are looking for approval from the ancestors.

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1410 Winter, 2006, 139.

1411 Winter, 2006, 139.

In his 2003 volume *The Dominion of the Dead*, Robert Harrison outlines the difficulty in confronting the superiority of those who have come before us: “Whether we are conscious of it or not we do the will of the ancestors: our commandments come to us from their realm; their precedents are our law; we submit to their dictates, even when we rebel against them. Our diligence, hardihood, rectitude, and heroism, but also our folly, spite, rancour and pathologies, are so many signatures of the dead on the contracts that seal our identities. We inherit their obsessions; assume their burdens; carry on their causes; promote their mentalities, ideologies, and very often their superstitions; and often we die trying to vindicate their humiliations. Why this servitude? We have no choice. Only the dead can grant us legitimacy.”<sup>1412</sup> Just as the present is having a hard time fighting for supremacy with the past, the living are taking their inspiration and vision from the dead.

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1412 Harrison, 2003, x.