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

Tomić, A.

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**Author:** Tomić, A.

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## *Propositions*

1. The First World War is Serbia's favourite war as the majority of Serbs consider their country's participation in WWI uniquely heroic and instrumental for the Entente's victory.
2. The 1915 Serbian Retreat across Albania and Montenegro was an extraordinary event which evolved into a Serbian mythomoteur. However, the Retreat has no monument, memorial, nor a dedicated museum in Serbia.
3. Serbs have difficulty dealing with their country's violent past and rely on a narrative which justifies the violence and/or mitigates the circumstances in which it happened. Most Serbs today prefer to linger on the perceived glorious past from WWI than on Serbia's participation in the wars of the 1990s.
4. The WWI centenary events have been used as an occasion to legitimise the current political leadership in Serbia. Various heroic and tragic events from WWI are "go-to" history fillers for the media largely owned or controlled by the supporters of the regime.
5. Various events from Serbian history are retold through collective remembrance so as to be aligned with the master narrative. Nevertheless, individual acts of remembrance of the Retreat and World War I are genuine and sincere.
6. The meaning of remembrance as both a personal and collective concept is best captured in Jay Winter's quote: "Nations do not remember, people do."
7. At any time, the dominant historical narrative of a nation mirrors the current preoccupations of the political elites. The past is habitually used to explain the (bleak) present and predict the (bright) future.
8. The way a nation's past is presented and perceived is not an organic process but an evolved social construct.
9. Acts of collective remembrance commemorate the dominant narrative. The participants — the remembrance actors — are not interested in different views and may consider them sacrilegious or treacherous.
10. Society always benefits from equal opportunities and overall diversity.
11. Owning cats may result in relaxation, reduced blood pressure and heart rate (unless one is allergic to or afraid of cats).
12. Deadlines help focus the mind in the same way that restrictions enhance creativity.