

Chapter 8

THE INVENTION OF YUGOSLAV IDENTITY

Serbian and South Slav Historiographies on World War I,
1918–2018

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World War I played a key role in the history of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. One of its consequences was the creation of the common South Slav state, which existed first as a monarchy (1918–41) and then as a republic (1945–91). Proclaimed on 1 December 1918 and conceived as a liberal, democratic, and parliamentary political system, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes changed its character and name in 1929 when King Alexander I Karadjordjević proclaimed a dictatorship and renamed the country the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The cornerstone of the new country was the Kingdom of Serbia, which had emerged victorious from the Great War, to which the territories of the Kingdom of Montenegro and the ancient territories of Austria-Hungary were added. The new state was heterogeneous: it included territories populated by Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, all with common and yet also different cultures, religions, and traditions, as well as diverse experiences of the Great War. This heterogeneity could, in times of domestic political crisis or foreign interference, be a factor of weakness for the new country. The principal problem in the internal politics of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was the lack of national cohesion. Before 1918, the South Slavs did not possess

political unity or any shared experience of living in a common state. The founding, defining event of the new state was therefore the unification that occurred at the end of the Great War. In this way, the Great War became the most important symbol of the realization of (supposed) national unity and the centuries of aspirations of the South Slavs, to borrow from the terminology of that period. Under the new circumstances, it was important to legitimize the young state and its regime, as well as to support ideologically the discourse and the symbolism on which national unity was to be built and disseminated throughout society.

Although it did not entirely disappear, interest in World War I diminished considerably after World War II. For the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its omnipotent leader Josip Broz Tito, history began with their victory over “foreign invaders” and “domestic traitors” during the war and their subsequent assumption of power. World War I also became integrated into the memory and symbolism on which the new “socialist” identity was to be constructed, but it was very much secondary to the more important World War II, which served as a source of legitimization and ideological reinforcement for the new Communist regime, both internally and externally. Yet after the 1960s, the memory of World War I became a way of critiquing the new regime. Following Tito’s death in 1980, this trend gained momentum, and the number of works dedicated to the war of 1914–18 increased considerably, while the common South Slav state plunged into the interior crisis that led to its tragic dissolution in the 1990s.

World War I between Popular and Political Culture, 1918–2018

Popular Culture Immediately after the Great War (1918–21)

The expression of popular feelings relating to World War I in Serbia was most pronounced in the period immediately after the war, between 1918 and 1921, when the new and uncertain state was under construction. Until 1921, the state had no constitution and no stable international borders. During that period, the expression of popular feelings shows the desire to testify to the profound pain generated by the loss of family members and the sincere respect for the sacrifices of the comrades who fell in the war. Any organized ideology of the new state was absent or very rare. Construction of monuments was initiated by local people, local administrations, or Crown Prince Alexander, yet was based on a very spontaneous grassroots wish to remember the death of the country’s soldiers. These monuments consisted of simple crosses and were without official

state symbols. The most significant and common references with which they were inscribed concerned the heroic death of those to whom they were dedicated, as well as their personal courage in defending their family, property, or town.

In the period immediately after the Great War, literary works represented the war in all its absurdity, disillusionment, and psychological and physical consequences for human beings. This is the common pattern for all the authors who served in the opposing Serbian and Austro-Hungarian armies. The poet and novelist who graduated from the Military Academy in Belgrade (1901) and served in the Serbian army as an officer in the Balkan Wars and then the Great War, Milutin Jovanović (1881–1935), gained a literary reputation in Serbia with his works on the everyday life of soldiers during war.¹ The writer and journalist Stanislav Krakov (1895–1968) participated as a Serbian army officer in the wars and was wounded, becoming an invalid. During the war, in 1917, he wrote a novel under the title *Kroz buru* (Through the storm), publishing it after the war, in 1921.² The lawyer and novelist Dragiša Vasić (1885–1945), who served in the Serbian army as a reserve officer during the wars from 1912 to 1918, wrote a novel where the main character dies in a mental hospital after the experience of the war and the suffering during the Serbian army's retreat through Albania in 1915.³ The poetry of Milutin Bojić, written at the Salonika front in 1917 and published under the title *Pesme bola i ponosa* (Poetry of pain and pride),⁴ exalted the personal devotion and sacrifice of Serbian soldiers during the war. His poem "The Blue Crypt" remains one of the most beautiful Serbian poems on the Great War, thanks to its artistic qualities as well as its exemplary nature of the testimony of a poet who participated in the war. It is dedicated to the soldiers who died of exhaustion, starvation, and disease on the Greek island of Vido near Corfu after the Serbian army's retreat through the Montenegrin and Albanian mountains, popularly known as the "Albanian Golgotha." They died in such large numbers that there was no space to bury them all on land; their bodies were instead thrown into the sea, which became their everlasting resting place, their "blue crypt."

The South Slav writers and poets from Austria-Hungary, who experienced the war in the ranks of its defeated army, mostly expressed the sentiments of exhaustion, disgust, and apocalyptic anxiousness.⁵ These feelings are expressed by the Serb writer Miloš Crnjanski (1893–1977) in the poems published in 1919 under the title *Lirika Itake* (The Lyric Poems of Ithaca).⁶ Crnjanski was born into a Serbian family in the Hungarian part of Austria-Hungary. Afraid of his "national activism," the authorities arrested him and sent him to the Eastern Front where he participated in the battles of 1915 and experienced the horrors and miseries of the war.

His poems evoke the fatigue and disappointment of the Homeric hero who finds destruction and humiliation when he returns home. The experience of Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža (1893–1981) was similar to that of Crnjanski. Impregnated by “national feelings,” he tried, without success, to integrate into the Serbian army during the Balkan Wars. He was arrested in Belgrade as an Austrian spy and sent back to Austria-Hungary. During the war, he fought in the Austro-Hungarian army on the Eastern Front and experienced combat. He expressed his opinion of the war in the poems he wrote during the war and published subsequently in 1918.⁷ In the poems he criticized the war, making allusions to its bloodiness, sickness, and insanity.

In the period immediately after the war, the various initiatives to construct monuments dedicated to the war demonstrated the sincere wish to express respect for, as well as the pain arising from, the sacrifices of the soldiers who had perished. The women from the villages around Mount Avala near Belgrade assembled spontaneously, by themselves, to deplore the loss of their loved ones around the grave and simple cross of wood with the inscription “Ein Unbekannter Serbischer Soldat” (an unknown Serbian soldier), which the Germans erected after the occupation of Belgrade in 1915 out of respect for the their enemies’ courage.⁸ In 1917, Prince Alexander ordered the construction of the ossuary at Mount Kajmakčalan at the place where the Serbian army broke through the enemy front line in 1916. The chapel-ossuary was dedicated to the glory of the soldiers buried within it. Its construction was finished in 1925. Another noteworthy example is the small cross dedicated to the Unknown Soldier on the hill of Hisar, near the town of Leskovac, in Southern Serbia. The cross was erected on 28 June 1922, on the day of Saint Vitus (Vidovdan), date of the Battle of Kosovo against the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth century and thereby linked the “heroes who died gloriously” defending the town in October 1915 to the foundation myth of Serbian nation-building.

South Slav memories of the Great War were also cultivated beyond Yugoslav national territory. In 1922, the navy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes placed a memorial cross on the Greek island of Vido in honor of the thousands of Serb soldiers who died there.⁹ On the cross, the inscription was simple: “To the everlasting heroes, the Navy of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.”

Political Culture of “Symbolic Syncretism” (1921–41)

With the adoption of the first constitution, symbolically on 28 June 1921, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes gave the impression of

internal stability. A common memory of World War I among Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was constructed with the support of the state. The king and the government wanted to represent the peasant-soldiers as the pillar of the country, which was designed as a parliamentary, democratic, and liberal monarchy. The state insisted on “symbolic syncretism”: Orthodox-Catholic or Serb-Croat-Slovene to transcend these peoples’ opposing memories of the war.¹⁰ The monument to the Unknown Soldier, inaugurated on 1 June 1922 on Mount Avala at the place where the remains of an unknown Serbian soldier were confirmed to lie by one parliamentary commission, had a carefully chosen symbolism. It was constructed in simple stone, much like the traditional graves of Serbian peasants, with a base in the form of a Byzantine cross, upon which a pyramid-shaped monument was erected. At the top of the pyramid was a cross with six branches, combining the Byzantine and Latin crosses. The monument was an expression not only of the religious-secular and Orthodox-Catholic syncretism but also of a specific culture based on the peasant-soldiers who constituted the major part of the Serbian army and the army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The monument-ossuary in the village of Tekeriš, commemorating the Serbian victory over Austria-Hungary in the Battle of Cer in August 1914, was inaugurated on 28 June 1928,¹¹ a time of deteriorating relations between Serbs and Croats following the assassination of Croatian deputies in parliament by a Serb deputy from Montenegro. This monument, made of stone in the form of a semicone, brought together the remains of Serbian and Czech soldiers, enemies during the war. It was erected by the Association of Reserve Officers, bearing the Serbian coat of arms from the period of the Great War and an inscription “18th August 1914—your deeds are immortal.” At the top of the monument was an eagle with a laurel garland, the symbol of peace. The inaugural ceremony celebrated the Serbian soldiers who fell for the creation of the new state.¹² In 1929, the association of war veterans finished construction of the monument-ossuary at the village of Gučevo,¹³ commemorating the Serbian army’s defense of a key front line from September to November 1914 in battles that saw the first trench warfare in the Balkans. The ossuary, in the form of a pyramid with a large laurel garland and cross, contains the remains of Serb soldiers, but also the remains of Croat soldiers from the ranks of the opposing Austro-Hungarian army.

This memory of peasant-soldiers was contrasted with the memory of Gavrilo Princip, a young Serb with Yugoslav leanings from Bosnia-Herzegovina and citizen of Austria-Hungary, who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 leading to the Austro-Hungarian attack on Serbia one month later and the outbreak of the world war.¹⁴ The state’s reluctance to refer to Princip’s legacy was linked

not only to its internal policy but also to its external policy. In the post-war period, at times, particularly in discussions on German reparations (1924, Dawes Plan; 1929, Young Plan; 1931, Hoover Moratorium), scholars and journalists from the United States, Great Britain, and Germany taking part in the drawn-out war guilt discussion accused Nikola Pašić's 1914 government of knowing about the preparations for the Sarajevo assassination.¹⁵ The royal government and the Serbian intellectual elite rejected any direct link between the Sarajevo assassination and the outbreak of the Great War. In fact, it was feared that such accusations would undermine Serbia's claim of reparations and eventually lead to a reduction of the Serbian share of German reparations that had been fixed in 1920. At the same time, Serbia's war allies demanded repayment of the Serbian debt, refusing to link it to German reparations. What is more, the problem of German reparations and interallied debts had its effect on internal policy: the Croats refused to participate in the repayment of Serbian war debts while the Serbs' response was that they had spilled blood for the common liberation and thus relieved the Croats of paying their reparations.¹⁶ Under these circumstances, the memory of Gavrilo Princip was maintained by private initiatives without any support from the state, though the latter did not object to keeping this memory alive. In fact, after the war, the memory of Princip was actively supported by the Yugoslav nationalists from former Austria-Hungary, mostly from Bosnia and Dalmatia. In 1920, for instance, they organized the solemn transfer of Princip's remains and those of five of his followers and helpers from the prison in Terezin now in allied Czechoslovakia to Sarajevo. In 1928, they set up and unveiled the memorial plaque for Princip at the place in Sarajevo where he committed the assassination.¹⁷

From 1929 on, with the installation of King Alexander's dictatorship and the change of the country's name, official involvement in interpreting the memory of the Great War increased. The monument-ossuary of Mačkov kamen, celebrating one of the bloodiest battles in the vicinity of the Drina River, which halted the Austro-Hungarian offensive in September 1914, was constructed of simple stones in 1929. The inscription on the monument made reference to the new "Yugoslav" identity of the soldiers, which, by then, the state was actively seeking to construct. King Alexander involved himself personally with the promotion of the new, official memory of the Great War. He ordered changes to the old monuments in order to reflect the strong messages of "integral Yugoslavism," the concept that one Yugoslav Nation existed rather than three branches of one nation (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes). King Alexander also ordered the removal of the first monument to the Unknown Soldier and the medieval fortress at Mount Avala in order to pave the way for a new,

imposing monument. Designed by Croat architect and sculptor Ivan Meštrović, the unofficial sculptor of the Karađorđević Court, this monument full of “Yugoslav” symbolism was consecrated on 28 June 1934 by King Alexander and unveiled exactly four years later.¹⁸ The Serbian Unknown Soldier became the “Unknown Hero” of the state whose identity was under construction.

After the assassination of King Alexander I in Marseilles in October 1934, the memory of the Sarajevo assassination was integrated into the official celebration of Vidovdan for “all Kosovo heroes and to all the fighters who fell for freedom” in the whole country. There was an international dimension to the strengthening of an official Serbian memory of the war: The Zejtinlik military cemetery near Salonika in Greece, with the remains of Serb soldiers who perished on the Salonika front, was constructed from 1933 to 1936 and inaugurated on the anniversary of the Armistice, 11 November 1936.¹⁹ On the memorial chapel are verses by Vojislav Ilić the Younger,²⁰ the semiofficial poet on the Serbian war victory that led to the creation of the South Slav state. And in 1936–38, on the island of Vido, near Corfu, next to the memorial cross dating from the immediate after-war period, a memorial complex was constructed. It bore the inscription “Yugoslavia to Serbian soldiers.”

During the dictatorship of King Alexander, the writer Stanislav Kravkov directed the film *Za čast otadžbine* (For the Honor of the Fatherland), presented for the first time in Belgrade in 1930.²¹ The film contained documentary material from the Great War and immediately afterward, presented in the “poetic” manner of Russian modernism as personified by individuals such as Sergei Eisenstein. The two most popular Serbian melodies from the Great War—“Na Drinu” (On the Drina) and “Tamo daleko” (There, Far Away)—were performed on official and unofficial occasions during the whole interwar period. The author of the melody-march “On the Drina” was Stanislav Binički, a composer and conductor who served in the Serbian army during the war as the conductor of the military orchestra. He composed his “On the Drina” after the Serbian victory at Cer in August 1914. The optimistic and victorious march became popular among Serbs after the war. The song “There, Far Away”, on the other hand, was the sad and nostalgic song popular among the Serbian soldiers on Corfu and the Salonika front. Its author is unknown, but he is widely believed to be a Serbian soldier having taken part in the Serbian retreat to Corfu.

During the interwar period, the official celebrations of Armistice Day organized every year in Belgrade on 11 November had both an external and an internal aspect. The celebrations were organized regularly at the allied war cemetery in Belgrade. This was also an occasion to celebrate

the Franco-Serbian alliance during the war, which officials sought to represent as the basis of the Franco-Yugoslav friendship under construction after the war. The royal government emphasized the Franco-Serbian alliance during the Great War in order to show that France still stood behind the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes during the fierce Italian diplomatic pressure of 1927: the treaty of Franco-Yugoslav alliance and friendship was signed symbolically on 11 November 1927.²² Regular contacts were maintained between the associations of Serbian war veterans and French associations, especially with the association *Poilus d'Orient* of the former French soldiers serving on the Balkan Front and with the Inter-allied Federation of Ancient Combatants (FIDAC), which had a strong French influence. The celebration of the tenth anniversary of the breaking of the Salonika front in the Great War was an occasion to underline France's support for the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes at a time of internal crisis after the assassination of Croat deputies in parliament.²³ After the installation of the royal dictatorship in 1929, the celebrations of Franco-Yugoslav friendship based on the memory of the Franco-Serbian alliance during the war increased considerably. Symbolically, on 11 November 1930, the monument of gratitude to France was inaugurated in Belgrade, with much excitement.²⁴ The government wanted to show that France had not abandoned Yugoslavia following the establishment of the dictatorship. During the same period, the monument to Napoleonic Illyria (1809–13) was erected in Ljubljana in an attempt to invent a tradition, or memory, in the former Austro-Hungarian territories that predated the Great War.²⁵

The expression of continuity in Serbian memory of the Great War, which had an extensive impact on the consciousness of a large proportion of Serbs in Yugoslavia and became the symbol of the Great War for ordinary people, was the novel *Srpska Trilogija* (Serbian Trilogy) by the Belgrade University professor of botany Stevan Jakovljević, published in 1937.²⁶ Jakovljević was a Serbian army officer during the war who collected the testimonies of his comrades, which were the inspiration for his novel. It consisted of three parts: *Devetstočetnaesta* (Nine Hundred Fourteen), *Pod krstom* (Under the Cross) and *Kapija slobode* (The Gate of Freedom), published separately from 1934 to 1936.²⁷ The author tried to tell the story that he and his comrades lived during the war and left the testimonies to speak for themselves. His heroes do not like the war, which they see as imposed by their enemies. They suffered, doubted, and sometimes felt for their enemies. The author depicted the idealized image of the Serbian peasant who had the goal of defending the fatherland and a sense for the state, but who after the experience of the war does not sing of the glory of the war or the nation. Many common people and

peasant-soldiers could identify personally with his heroes, and the book was one of the most successful literary projects during the interwar period. It was said that every Serbian house had a copy of this book. The adaptation of his novel for the theater was also a great success in Belgrade and in Serbian provinces.

During the early stages of World War II, for the first time since 1918, high-ranking state representatives were sent to an event in October 1939 linked to the memory of Princip and his friends: at the end of the month a new chapel of remembrance to the Heroes of Vidovdan, where their remains had been moved, was consecrated at Koševo Orthodox cemetery in Sarajevo. The state sent a high-level civil and military delegation to the chapel inauguration ceremony trying to homogenize the country wherever possible in the menacing external and internal situation.

The Use of Memory during the Communist Period and the Yugoslav Breakup (1945–91)

The memory of the Great War did partially reemerge in 1945 with the rise to power of Josip Broz Tito and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. For the Yugoslav Communists, their ascent to power was legitimized on the basis of their heroic struggle in the “war of national liberation and revolution” and the “struggle against the foreign invaders and domestic traitors.” World War II became the almost exclusive point of reference for the new rulers. The new Communist regime renounced the heritage of the defeated “Serbian bourgeoisie” in all respects, except when it came to memory of the Serbian soldiers’ struggle against foreign invaders during World War I. The Communists’ narrative was that the Serbian soldier was an ordinary person, a peasant or a worker, who had a natural, inbuilt sense of freedom and liberty that foreign invaders had wanted to deprive him of over the centuries. This image was also projected without any critical sense onto the other South Slav peoples. It also served the ideological purposes of the new regime, in terms of both foreign and domestic policies. In foreign policy, such narratives gave cover to the pretensions of Yugoslav Communists to the territories of Italy (Trieste, Istria, and Zara) and Austria (Klagenfurt, Villach)

On 13 May 1945, a few days after Germany’s capitulation, Marshal Tito along with Soviet academician Nikolai Sevastianovič Deržavin (1877–1953), philologist and historian, specialist on Bulgaria, and partisan of Soviet pan-Slavism, visited the Monument to the Unknown Soldier on Mount Avala.²⁸ On this occasion, the monument to the Unknown Hero from the Great War served both to impress the foreign visitor and to symbolically integrate the Bulgarians into what could be called

Tito's "pan-South Slavism." Yet it also had a domestic function. Even if the visit was presented as spontaneous, the date was chosen with a great deal of care. The day of the visit was one week after the Orthodox Easter. Traditionally, it was the day when ordinary Serbs assembled at cemeteries to remember their dead. The Communists chose this day to impose themselves symbolically on the Serbian peasants in the area around Mount Avala, who during the war had generally supported the monarchist resistance movement of General Dragoljub Draža Mihailović.²⁹ A similar symbolic "conquest" of the memory of the Great War was the burial in the Serbian war cemetery at Zejtinlik near Salonika of 126 Yugoslav partisans shot by the fascists during World War II.

After 1945, the Sarajevo assassination came back into the public sphere but with a different connotation than in the period of monarchy. During Communism in Yugoslavia, Princip was seen not only as an ordinary but courageous young man, fighting for liberty against foreign imperialism, but also as a predecessor to the Communist revolution. The reemergence of Princip's memory came with the first partisan units that liberated Sarajevo in April 1945. On 7 May 1945, one day before the capitulation of Hitler's Germany, the partisan authorities unveiled a new memorial plaque for Gavrilo Princip in Sarajevo at the place of the assassination to replace the plaque that the German troops had taken down in April 1941. The new plaque had the following text inscribed in golden letters: "As a sign of eternal gratitude to Gavrilo Princip and his comrade fighters against Germanic conquerors, the youth of Bosnia Herzegovina dedicate this plaque—Sarajevo, 7 May 1945." Very much in the same vein, the importance of *Mlada Bosna* (Young Bosnia), the irredentist and national-revolutionary movement in Bosnia before World War I, was stressed.³⁰ That involved representing the movement in Marxist fashion as a predecessor, albeit an unconscious one, of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which brought about the liberation of the country from foreign invaders and a social revolution. Putting Young Bosnia on a par with Princip could be explained by the Yugoslav Communists' wish not to jeopardize the leader cult of the only "true" hero of the people and the revolution—Josip Broz Tito.³¹

With the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, the "fight against imperialism" deeply rooted in the history of all "Yugoslav peoples" also became one of the main arguments in the ideological struggle against "Soviet imperialism." When it came to domestic policy, it served as proof that Yugoslavia's independence was only possible under the Communist Party. After the sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1952, the party proclaimed that it was turning to Marxist sources and changed its name to the Union of Communists of Yugoslavia. Marx was added to the list of the

revolutionary literature that Princip and his friends had supposedly read. Princip became an inspiration for artists and poets and represented a young idealistic freedom fighter, a model for the Yugoslav youth on whom the future of the Communist system rested. In this context, in an ironic twist, the well-established anti-imperialistic thrust of the Princip and Young Bosnia narrative could be turned against the USSR and indeed against Stalin himself. That is why the celebration of the thirty-ninth anniversary of the Sarajevo assassination in 1953 was particularly well prepared by the organizing committee under the authority of the Committee of the Sarajevo Communists' Union.³² On 28 June 1953, the Museum of Gavrilo Princip and Young Bosnia, the work of the Zagreb-born and Vienna-educated architect Juraj Neidhardt, opened in Sarajevo in the house in front of which the assassination had been carried out. Inside was a bust of Princip that inspired artists and literary critiques to all sorts of artistic-political reflections that, in fact, celebrated Tito's regime.³³ Probably on that occasion, the plaque from 1945 was replaced by a new one that excluded direct mention of Germanic imperialism and underlined the role of the people in the struggle for freedom that was well rooted in history. The inscription was the following: "From this place on 28 June 1914, Gavrilo Princip fired a shot that stands for a symbol of People's protest against tyranny and their secular aspirations for liberty." During the celebration, many wreaths were laid in the crypt containing Princip's and his friends' remains by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sarajevo as well.³⁴

The memory of the Serbian World War I-soldiers did also serve other purposes: on the occasion of his visit to Greece in 1954, during the negotiations over the Balkan pact between Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey, Tito visited the island of Vido near Corfu and placed a garland in the "blue crypt" immortalized in the poetry of Milutin Bojić. Through this gesture, in line with his goal of building an alliance with Greece, he sought to pay respect to the continuation of the Serbo-Greek alliance from the Great War. Still, beyond the symbolic gestures and initiatives mentioned above, the memory of the Great War was condemned to be forgotten by the Communist regime. In the field of literature, for example, World War II became without any doubt the primary source of inspiration. The literary works of "class enemies" such as Dragiša Vasić, shot by Tito's partisans in 1945 as a member of the monarchist movement, were prohibited. The Yugoslav Communists understood literature as part of the ideological struggle in the construction of a socialist society within the country. The official view on literature was that art is a result of the artists' view of the world and the artists' ideology. Consequently, all art was perceived as ideology, politics, and an extension of the political strug-

gle. If art was following the regime's line of interpretation, then it was to be nurtured. If not, it should be destroyed.

As the tension in the strained relations with the Soviet Union abated in 1955, the memories of the Serbian soldiers and of the Sarajevo assassination paled into insignificance and were totally overshadowed by two state holidays with dates close to 28 June, both of which had direct reference to World War II: 4 July, the day of Yugoslavia's fighters, and 7 July, the day of the insurrection in Serbia.

With the ideological relaxation of the 1960s, however, the memory of World War I began to reemerge. In 1963, Yugoslavia adopted a new constitution that reinforced the concept of federalization of the country. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Kolubara, the Serbian victory over Austria-Hungary in December 1914, was an occasion for the war veterans of the Great War to organize themselves. The war veterans from the battalion of thirteen hundred young corporals who changed the outcome of the Battle of Kolubara to the advantage of the Serbian army formed an association. Organized within the same ideological framework, they wanted to have the same benefits as Tito's partisans. They sought permission to collect public donations in order to erect a monument to their comrades on the mountain of Rajac, alongside monuments from World War II that were being built after 1945. In the same year, 1964, the film *Marš na drinu* (March on the Drina) directed by Žika Mitrović was released. It was a great success and contributed to Binički's march becoming the anthem of Serbian national consciousness in Communist Yugoslavia. A local Communist and director of a music ensemble, Miloje Popović, provided the lyrics to Binički's music. Rather tellingly, the title changed from "On the Drina" to "March on the Drina", as if to underline its military aspect. Popović's lyrics spoke of the heroism and the courage of the Serbian soldiers during the Battle of Cer. Interestingly, however, it was the Turks, who were explicitly mentioned as the enemies, not the Austro-Hungarians, probably out of consideration for the Croats and Slovenes. In 1966, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the Salonika front after the Serbian army's retreat through the Albanian mountains, a group of interested people from Serbia visited the "historic battlefields and holy places" in Greece: Corfu and the island of Vido, the Salonika front, and the Zejtinlik military cemetery. More and more groups of war veterans began to organize themselves institutionally: in 1967, the Association of the Bearers of the Albania Medal was officially established in Belgrade. Sensitive about its image in the West, the Yugoslav government did also send a detachment of the Yugoslav People's Army to march past on the Champs-Élysées in Paris on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Armistice signed in Rethondes, in the

footsteps of the victorious Serbian army of 1918.³⁵ The reemergence of the memory of the Great War left its traces in literary history as well. In the second part of his novel *Zastave* (The Flags), published in 1967 (the work had been published in parts in the literary journal *Forum* from 1962 onwards), the Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža described the period from 1912 to 1922, where the only hope for the national and social problems of his romanticized characters was the emergence of Leninism in Soviet Russia.³⁶ These characters depicted Serbia as a corrupt, militaristic, primitive country that beat the well-organized Austro-Hungarian army in the spring of 1914. The novel provoked angry reactions from Serbian war veterans, a fact that underscores the extent to which the memory of the war still had the potential to provoke controversy.

In the context of preparing the new constitution adopted in 1974, which federalized the country, the question of past Serbian sacrifices for the construction of Yugoslavia was brought up. The multi-part novel by Dobrica Ćosić—*Vreme smrti* (A Time of Death)—published from 1972 to 1979³⁷ was entirely dedicated to the history of Serbia during World War I. Ćosić was following the footsteps of Jakovljević, describing the Serbian national tragedy during the Great War. The awakening of Serbian national feelings was, in a sense, a critique of the Communism of 1970s Yugoslavia. Ćosić was a disappointed member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, from which he was excluded in 1968 because of his opposition to the official line regarding Albanian nationalism. In his work he argued for a return to the traditional values of the Serbian peasantry that had secured the unity of the South Slavs and had specific views on Yugoslavia. The works of Ćosić had an impact on historiography. Following that period, the number of works arguing that the Serbian government's only goal during the Great War was Yugoslav unity (rather than, for example, a separate peace involving only Serbia) increased dramatically. During the same period, the authorities finally gave their support to the war veterans by permitting the construction, in September 1973, of the abovementioned Monument to the Young Officers (thirteen hundred corporals). The monument was erected on the mountain of Rajac near Valjevo in western Serbia.³⁸ The symbolism of the monument, which celebrated the courage and devotion of the youth, a subject dear to the Yugoslav partisans, was very similar to the symbolism of partisan monuments from World War II.

The pattern of suffering for a “better future” was also characteristic of the book titled *Trnovit put Srbije, 1914–1918* (The Thorny Road of Serbia, 1914–1918), published in 1974 by the Association of War Veterans who crossed through Albania in 1915–16. It consists of testimonies about the heroic works of “a generation pre-ordained for acts of great her-

oism” and had a pedagogical purpose aimed at the younger generation. In his introduction, Kosta Todorović, university professor and president of the association, underlined that along with periods of heroic history, the Serb people had also experienced hard periods of “slavery,” heavy losses, and population upheaval.³⁹ For him, Serbian history had a linear progression leading to the realization of Yugoslavia: the “idea of liberty” always “heartened the heart” and “reinforced the spirit” of “our people” not only to assemble their enslaved compatriots but also to realize the “historical mission” of unification of all the South Slavs. For the author of the introduction, the example of Serbia in the Great War confirmed the “historical law” that realization of “great works” requires great sacrifices in terms of human lives. It was a modest critique of the more and more federalized Yugoslavia, where Serbia did not have a place that corresponded to what it was supposed to have invested in its creation. The book was published thanks to donations and was popular among Serbs. Clearly, the early 1970s were a moment when some disillusioned Communists began to revisit the origins of the creation of Yugoslavia. The gradual return of the memory of the Great War that manifested itself in this particular context was indicative of a desire to show what Yugoslavia might have looked like had revolution broken out in Serbia in 1917 as it did in Russia. That is why in this period references to the peasantry, to Lenin, and to the founding fathers of the revolution were particularly recurrent. The publication in 1975 of John Reed’s book of testimonies from Serbia in 1916, where he was a journalist, confirms this general tendency.⁴⁰ The origins of Yugoslavia were also the subject of the memorial book on the commemorative complex and the war cemetery at Zeitinlik near Salonika, published by the Institution for Preservation of Monuments of the Socialist Republic of Serbia in Belgrade on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the forcing of the Salonika front in 1918.⁴¹ For the author of the book’s preface, the aim of the publication was to “preserve the remembrance of the huge efforts and heroic exploits” of Serbian and allied armies but also Serbian soldiers and the Yugoslav volunteers who “left their lives all around the Balkans.” The “freedom-loving patriotic heroism” of Serbian soldiers becomes that of Yugoslav volunteers too. This representation was in accordance with the official representations of the war that underlined that the achievements of the Serbian army, the Yugoslav volunteers, and the other allied forces on the Salonika front were all equal.

After the death of Josip Broz Tito, the Pandora’s Box of different, opposing memories was opened. The “war of memories” started along with the aggravation of the political and economic situation. To be sure, this memorial struggle was primarily played out in the field of World War II-memory and concerned, among other things, the number and weight of

Serbian losses during the Independent State of Croatia (1941–45). For the Serbs, however, there was a World War I-dimension to it, as the memory of the Great War could be mobilized to serve as proof of the high price paid for the common state. In the ensuing proliferation of all kinds of memories, one book stands out: the book by two local historians from Smederevska Palanka in the region of Šumadija in the heart of Serbia, titled *Tri sile pritisle Srbijcu* (Three Powers Pressed Small Serbia).⁴² It offered a collection of testimonies by those who participated in the Serbian army's retreat through Albania and the Salonika front produced at a distance of almost seventy years. The soldiers were peasants who did not think about high diplomacy and the creation of the new states, but who experienced the war during the retreat, in the trenches, in direct combat with the enemy. Their testimonies were full of emotions: patriotism, courage, and humanity were substituted for brutality, fear, and cowardice. In fact, it was a testimony to the absurdity of the war in the context of the increasing tensions in the country in the mid-1980s.

Memory during the Transition in Serbia after 2000

After the political changes in 2000 in Serbia, the memory of the Great War reappeared, but within the framework of the country's new domestic and international position. This memory will once again be examined with reference to the Monument to the Unknown Soldier on Mount Avala. The first official visitor who came to the Monument to the Unknown Soldier at Avala after the democratic changes in Serbia was Prince Alexander Karadjordjević, the grandson of King Alexander, who had erected the monument. This event marked, symbolically, the new government's wish to make a break with the dictatorship that had existed in Yugoslavia for more than sixty years. With the democratic transition in the country, a kind of "war of memories" ensued regarding the monument. Nevertheless, the references to the past continued to be drawn not from the Great War but mainly from World War II and the First Serbian Uprising in 1804. However, the memory of World War I resurfaced on different occasions. On the ninth anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, on 11 September 2010, for instance, a high-ranking delegation of the National Guard of the United States placed a wreath at the monument to the Unknown Soldier, reminding everyone that "the Serbian soldiers were steadfast allies of the United States during the First and Second World Wars." As in the interwar period, the Serbian Unknown Soldier from World War I was accorded international recognition within the context of Serbia's altered domestic and international environment.

International recognition was also given to Binički's "March on the Drina" that was played in its original instrumental-only version in the United Nations General Assembly in New York during the 2013 New Year's Concert.⁴³ Still, controversy arose when the Congress of North American Bosniaks protested against the march being played in New York, saying that it was a war song under which "war crimes and genocide" had been committed during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, and asked for the president of the sixty-seventh session of the UN General Assembly, the Serb Vuk Jeremić, to be replaced. Jeremić's cabinet argued that the Serbian popular march from the Great War, often played by artists such as Cliff Richard and Chet Atkins, had been transformed into a message of peace, like the "Radetzky March" played at the New Year's Concerts in Vienna.

The consequences of the war in the 1990s were also at the heart of the symbolic and political disputes between Muslims and Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina that surrounded the commemoration of the centenary of the outbreak of World War I in Sarajevo on 28 June 2014.⁴⁴ While the city of Sarajevo hosted a huge international commemorative event, "Sarajevo 1914–2014—Heart of Europe," that saw a multitude of different cultural events being organized with international partners all across the city and that insisted on World War I being a European catastrophe, the city of Eastern Sarajevo, capital of Republika Srpska, held its own celebrations: having refused to attend the EU-funded festivities, Bosnian Serbian and Serbian authorities preferred to celebrate the memory of Gavrilo Princip, and a two-meter-tall bronze statue was erected to that effect.⁴⁵ One year later, on 28 June 2015, on the 101st anniversary of the Sarajevo assassination, Republika Srpska offered to the Republic of Serbia yet another monument to Gavrilo Princip that was erected in Belgrade in the presence of the highest political representatives from Banja Luka and Belgrade.⁴⁶ Once again, the memory of the Great War in the Balkans reflected the controversies over other historical periods with different political messages at stake.

Historiography of World War I

The period after the Great War in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia was characterized by the publication of memoirs and autobiographies by the participants in the war, as well as official documents. Historiographical publications written by authors from the Kingdom of Serbia, victorious in the war, were also most numerous. With the first publications, the first controversies between the participants regarding

the interpretation of certain events arose. In historiography, these concerned first and foremost military, political, and diplomatic history. Historians were especially interested in the reasons for the Serbian victory in the war and how and why the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians was created.

In post–World War II Communist Yugoslavia, the field of historiography was constrained by Marxist ideology, with certain taboos that were best not touched upon. Instead, the focus was placed on the history of workers' parties and socialist movements. Military history of World War II, as well as the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, was given great importance and studied by specialized institutions. With the decentralization (though not democratization) of the Yugoslav system from the 1960s, the writing of history became the subject of controversies between the rulers of the parties in the various Yugoslav Socialist Republics. Contrary to literary works that began to corrode the stereotypical representations of World War II and to oppose the ruling ideological concept, historiography maintained a black-and-white approach to the history of Yugoslavia during World War II. Historians dug deeper into the past in order to use the Great War to support their views on World War II concerning the “aspirations of imperialistic powers” or the “progressive” or “opportunistic” role of some actors in the past.

Political and Diplomatic History

Political and diplomatic historians have focused on two main subjects: Serbia's foreign relations in terms of alliances during World War I and the creation of the common South Slav state.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the pro-Yugoslav Croatian historian Ferdo Šišić published a collection of documents titled *Dokumenta o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1914–1919* (The Documents on the Creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes),⁴⁷ with an accent on documents on the mostly political and diplomatic activity of the South Slav émigrés from Austria-Hungary regarding the creation of the common South Slav state. These documents suggested that, alongside the Serbian government, South Slav émigrés during the war were also a decisive factor in the creation of the common state. Roughly at the same time, the Serbian historian and professor at Belgrade University Stanoje Stanojević worked on the assassination of the Austrian crown prince in 1914 and on the diplomatic background to the start of the war, denying any implication of the Serbian government in the plot leading up to Sarajevo.⁴⁸ Slovenian historians, on the other hand, put the focus on Slovenian political life during the war years,⁴⁹ seeking to explain how the

Yugoslav idea prevailed among Slovenian politicians. The publication in 1925 of the translation of Czech historian Milada Paulová's book on the activities of the Yugoslav Committee,⁵⁰ which consisted of South Slav political and intellectual émigrés from Austria-Hungary, and its relations with the Serbian government also had a significant impact on historiography in the interwar period in Yugoslavia, especially among Croats and Slovenes. Paulová argued that during the war the Yugoslav Committee had to fight for an equal position with the Serbian government, while the behavior and attitudes of Serbian politicians regarding the Yugoslav question were hegemonic and colored by Serbian nationalism. The hypothetical question of who was more "Yugoslav" during the war—the Serbian government or South Slav émigrés from Austria-Hungary—dominated debate during the whole interwar period.

During the Communist era, after an initial period dominated by narrow military history, the question of the relationship between the Serbian government and the Yugoslav Committee reemerged at the end of the 1950s, when the activities of both the Serbian government and the Yugoslav Committee were examined within the context of the wider political and military history of World War I.⁵¹ At the beginning of the 1960s, the relaxation of the political climate helping, the debate over the sense of Yugoslavism and the commitment of different World War I-actors to the Yugoslav cause clearly gained momentum among senior party officials and historians. The third congress of the Union of Historians of Yugoslavia, held in Ljubljana in December 1961, is a case in point.⁵² On that occasion, the first public signs of disagreement between Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian historians became evident. Croatian historian Franjo Tudjman, for instance, criticized the report by Serbian historian Jovan Marjanović, arguing that the Serbian government had shown "pretensions to hegemony" during World War I, contrary to the other actors who were working for Yugoslav unity. The polemics between historians from the various Yugoslav republics continued in 1964, after the publication of *Pregled istorije Saveza komunista Jugoslavije* (Survey of the History of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia).⁵³ Historians from Serbia criticized the authors of the book for not discussing the "progressive role" of Serbia and Montenegro in opposing "Austro-German" imperialism during World War I. Using Leninist interpretations of the war, they also criticized the authors for failing to note that Serbia and Montenegro had fought a "defensive war for justice and liberation," as well as for not mentioning their sacrifices and efforts. The historian Savo Skoko criticized the authors for not discussing the "great problems" of that time, such as the Great Powers' struggle for hegemony in the Balkans, the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Balkan Wars, or World War I in a broader sense.

A significant number of historiographical works were published around the time of the fiftieth anniversary of World War I (1964–68). At the conference “The Yugoslavs and World War I,” held in Belgrade in December 1964, a violent polemical discussion about the character of Yugoslav unification was sparked. Although unification was described as the result of the efforts of the “bourgeoisie” rather than the “broad masses,” it was still evaluated as a “great progressive act.” Some historians argued that because of the risk of a Bolshevik revolution, the creation of Yugoslavia was the result of the Great Powers’ diplomatic activities.⁵⁴ In 1964, the historian and biographer of Tito, Vladimir Dedijer, who had broken with the regime and immigrated to the United States to become a member of the Russell Tribunal, published an article on the Sarajevo assassination and its responsibility for the war’s outbreak in 1914.⁵⁵ Two years later, he published a book on the same subject matter, putting the assassination into the broader context of European history and highlighting the complexity of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s political, economic and social situation prior to 1914.⁵⁶

Parallel to this, the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the Salonika front saw the publication of memoirs written by war veterans and dedicated to their comrades, who were described as ordinary people who “heroically created the Great Yugoslavia.”⁵⁷ Likewise, the fiftieth anniversary of the Yugoslav Committee’s creation was greeted by the Yugoslav Academy of Science and Arts of Zagreb with an edited volume highlighting the committee’s importance for the creation of Yugoslavia.⁵⁸ The introduction to this publication discussed the question of responsibility for the two world wars, referring to the Fischer controversy in Germany. The author gave support to Fritz Fischer’s views and accused the West Germans of remaining stuck in their “militaristic, Prussian attitudes.” The following year, the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, along with other academies from Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Sarajevo, edited *Jugoslovenski narodi pred Prvi svetski rat* (The Yugoslav Peoples before the First World War).⁵⁹ The introduction argued that, contrary to the point of view of European historiography, the animosity and clash between the Habsburg Monarchy and Yugoslav peoples preceded the Sarajevo assassination.⁶⁰ The editor was academician Vasa Čubrilović, one of the participants in the Sarajevo assassination in 1914, who had escaped a death sentence because he was a minor. The book’s most important aim was to show that the creation of the Yugoslav state was rooted in the period before World War I. Much the same approach was taken in historians Bogumil Hrabak and Dragoslav Janković’s 1968 work of popular history on Serbia in 1918, with references to Lenin’s interpretations of the causes of the war.⁶¹

The suggestion by Serbian historians to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Serbian army's breakthrough on the Salonika front with an academic conference in Belgrade was opposed by several Croatian, Macedonian, and Serbian historians, who saw in the proposal a revival of "Serbian bourgeois hegemony." It speaks to the importance of this anti-Serbian impulse that, at the same moment, some Macedonian historians interpreted the Serbian army's breakthrough on the Salonika front as the beginning of the occupation of Macedonia.⁶² Later that same year, Serbian historians again suggested the organization of a conference celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of Yugoslavia in Belgrade on 1 December 1968. The idea was this time opposed by Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža, who was close to senior officials within the party. To avoid the flaring up of tensions, the event was relocated from Belgrade to Zagreb. Its title read "Academic Conference on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Disintegration of Austria-Hungary and the Creation of the Yugoslav State."⁶³ Tellingly, some historians seemed more interested in the breakup of Austria-Hungary than in the creation of Yugoslavia.

With the opening of official Yugoslav archives under the fifty-years rule, the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s saw a proliferation of historiographical works on World War I. The question of the unification of Montenegro with Serbia during the war was explored in the publications by the Historical Institute in Titograd in a series about Montenegro's past.⁶⁴ Serbian historians selected documents that had been published in a voluminous collection during the interwar period and then forgotten, editing them in 1970 in Belgrade under the title *Veliki rat Srbije* (The Great War of Serbia).⁶⁵ The series of internal crises in Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1970s, which led to the adoption of the new constitution in 1974 and came close to turning the country into a confederation thanks to the powers it gave to the republics, also had an impact on the historiography of the Great War. The question of the creation of Yugoslavia remained the most important issue through which historians "proved" the merits of their own nation. Historiography reflected the internal crisis and national conflicts. In 1973, Milorad Ekmečić published *Ratni ciljevi Srbije 1914* (The War Aims of Serbia), in which he argued that the unification of Yugoslavia was the "constant aim of Serbian history."⁶⁶ Dragoslav Janković argued that the "Yugoslav question" was one of the main causes of the war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia in 1914.⁶⁷ He criticized Paulová and her successors for their interpretations of the relationship between the Yugoslav Committee and the Serbian government and put forward the idea of a gradual deterioration of this relationship between 1915 and 1918.

During the second half of the 1970s, several books examined Serbia's political and diplomatic relations with other powers during World War I. The question that interested historians was to what degree these powers did, or did not, support the Serbian government's Yugoslav program. Until the Revolution of October 1917, Russia was the allied power that most strongly supported Serbia in its policy,⁶⁸ while the Vatican was the most opposed to Serbia's plans.⁶⁹ The international aspect of Yugoslav unification was one of the subjects of the Yugoslav historians' conference held in Ilok (in Croatia) in 1979 on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the unification of the Yugoslav peoples.⁷⁰ However, the most discussed and controversial subject was the nature of the creation of the Yugoslav state. Historians from Belgrade insisted that the only goal of Pašić and King Alexander had always been the unification of all Yugoslav peoples, while historians from the other republics' capitals argued the contrary.

After Tito's death in 1980, the Pandora's Box of South Slav history was open. All periods of history became the subject of political disputes between the different Yugoslav republics. Propagandist historical publications increased in number, while works of real historiography were disputed. The conference titled "The Creation of the State of Yugoslavia in 1918," held in December 1988 in Belgrade on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the creation of Yugoslavia with the support of the highest state institutions such as the parliament, was the last attempt to present the results of historical research on the consequences of the Great War in a state that was disappearing before everyone's eyes.⁷¹

Military History

Military history was predominant during the whole interwar period in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia. With a population made up of almost 90 percent peasants, who had been actively involved in the war, the interest in a military history of the Great War was easily understood. The writing of military history by high-level officers (who took care to underline their own wartime merits) could also be appreciated by superiors and bring promotion in military hierarchy. In 1921–22, controversies over the Serbian victory in the December 1914 Battle of Kolubara left Colonel Svetislav Milosavljević⁷² (assistant to the wartime commander of the First Army Vojvoda Živojin Mišić, 1855–1921) and General Živko G. Pavlović⁷³ (assistant to the head of the General Staff of the Serbian Army Vojvoda Radomir Putnik, 1847–1917) opposed to each other. Following the death of Mišić, Colonel Milosavljević argued that the offensive that led to success in the battle was the result of a decision by his direct superior, Vojvoda Mišić. On the other hand, General Pav-

lović argued that the success was the result of decisions by the General Staff and its head, Vojvoda Putnik. In reality, behind the personal rivalry the controversy was really over the efficiency of the Serbian army's command structure and decision-making process during the war.

The publication of documents from the war was supposed to help resolve these kinds of controversies. The whole interwar period was characterized by the publication of voluminous document editions, the most important one being *Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (The Great War of Serbia for the Liberation and Unification of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians).⁷⁴ Published by the Historical Department of the General Staff of the Army, it consisted of documents mostly dealing with military operations, but it also contained documents that dealt with diplomatic questions, particularly in regard to the relationship between Serbia and its allies. Information on the state and morale of the Serbian army during the war, on the volunteers and prisoners of war, as well as on the situation in occupied Serbia could be found in these documents as well. The whole collection underlined the military and diplomatic role of Serbia in the creation of the state of the South Slavs. Albums of photographs from the war were published as well.⁷⁵ The military history provided support to Croatian and Slovenian nationalists, operating under the cover of Yugoslavia, in their struggle with Italian nationalists over their rival claims to the disputed territories of Istria, Quarnaro, and Dalmatia after the war. The speed with which the Serbian army moved to take possession of the disputed territories before the Italian army could do so, following the breakthrough on the Salonika front, served as a pledge of its commitment to the interests of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and the common state. The capacity of Serbian officers to oppose the Italian army was explained by their ability and courage and as part of their war "mentality." The example of the return home from captivity of one Serbian lieutenant colonel who opposed the Italians in front of Ljubljana was often analyzed as a particularly illustrative example of devotion to the Yugoslav cause.⁷⁶

The difference in population losses and material destruction during the war on Serbian territory on the one hand and the former Austro-Hungarian territories on the other was one of the topics of political struggle in the kingdom between the two wars, and it was no coincidence that the murder of Croatian deputies in the parliament in Belgrade in 1928 occurred after a dispute on Serbian war losses.

Serbia paid the highest price during the war on its territory and the period of occupation by Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria. The historiography of the time examined the problem of the occupation of Serbia from several points of view: memoirs,⁷⁷ terror conducted by occu-

pation forces,⁷⁸ and civilian resistance, especially during the Toplica Uprising in 1917.⁷⁹ The historian Vladimir Ćorović argued that the suffering of the Serbian population in Bosnia and Herzegovina was deeper than was the case with other South Slavs of Austria-Hungary.⁸⁰ The Salonika front was also the subject of numerous articles in the historical journal *Ratnik* (The Warrior), issued by the kingdom's army, which examined how the Salonika front had come about, the Serbian army's operations on the front, participation of volunteers, preparation of the offensive, and the breaking of the front in September 1918.⁸¹

During Communist Yugoslavia, military history remained the most important approach in historiography, but its focus shifted to World War II and the victory of Tito's partisans. Among the earliest references to World War I were those in a propagandist historical piece signed by Tito himself. On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the Red Army, Tito claimed that the birth of the Red Army was a consequence of the struggle against "imperialistic powers during the First World War."⁸² The explanation was typical of Soviet propaganda based on Soviet historiography of the interwar period, underlining the global and historical significance of the Bolshevik revolution. Explanations of the Red Army's victories during World War II were also present in historical publications of a more popular kind. Apart from the heroism of ordinary soldiers, the use of modern technology—particularly the tank—was also glorified. The origin of the use of tanks as a modern weapon in World War I was underlined to explain the Soviet victory in World War II.⁸³ In fact, it was suggested that the Yugoslav People's Army should develop them on the Soviet model. The Yugoslav Communists thought that the tanks, used for the first time during World War I, along with the traditional instinct for "liberty" of the "people" would be the strongest offensive arm of the army in the future.

Exaltation of the merits of the army in the victory over the "fascist invaders" and "domestic traitors" was supported by historiography in the context of Yugoslav pretensions to the territory of Italy and Austria after 1945. In 1950, after the Paris Peace Conference of 1947, which failed to resolve the Trieste question and demarcation of the Austrian-Yugoslav border in line with Yugoslav wishes, the Historical Institute of the Yugoslav People's Army in Belgrade published a book dedicated to the 1918–19 military actions in Koroška (Carinthia).⁸⁴ The authors were senior army officers. They were not satisfied with the decisions taken in Paris, which they called the "dictate of the great powers" and argued that the decisions of 1949 concerning Koroška would be clearer if the "historical development" of the "unjust resolution" of that question were to be understood from the end of World War I. This book was published in the

context of the exaltation of Yugoslav nationalism after the split between Tito and Stalin in 1948. Going back to Leninist origins and terminology, the authors compared “imperialistic great powers” to “small nations” and their rights and “just” and “unjust” wars. The Soviet Union was added to the group of great imperialist powers who, ever since World War I, had failed to respect the rights of small nations. Adored until 1948, the leaders of the Soviet Union become detested because of their supposed “anti-Marxist, counter-revolutionary and unfriendly politics” towards Yugoslavia. Another consequence of the 1948 rift with the Soviet Union was that, in addition to works published after 1945, historiographical works from interwar Yugoslavia also began to be referenced, yet this time without mentioning their “imperialist and bourgeois” content.

The federalist concept of Yugoslavia and the ideology of its peoples’ “brotherhood and unity” could not be legitimized simply on the basis of the liberation struggle of World War II, and this caused historians to dig deeper into the past in order to find firmer grounds for legitimizing them both. This led them to World War I. That is why some authors examined the relationship between the Serbian and Montenegrin armies during World War I. In 1953, for instance, Petar Š. Vlahović published the brochure *Sandžaka vojska i bitka na Mojkovcu 1915* (The Army of Sandjak and the Battle of Mojkovac, 1915).⁸⁵ The author wanted to distinguish precisely what was part of Serbian history and what of Montenegrin in 1915. He argued that the fighting of Montenegrin troops after the capitulation of their king and government permitted the successful retreat of the Serbian army to the Albanian coast, and thus belonged to Montenegrin history. According to the author, the Montenegrins had shown a feeling of “brotherhood” and a sense of common interest between the Serbian and Montenegrin peoples, contrary to the calculations of their king and government. It was one of the many common events that bound the two peoples’ pasts, equally important to both of them. The idea of sacrifice was also present in the author’s interpretation: when the two armies were tired of fighting, the only option that remained was to sacrifice one for the other, and that is why the Montenegrins sacrificed themselves to protect the retreat of the Serbian army.

The number of works dedicated to the Montenegrin and Serbian disaster of 1915 increased from 1954. Military historians and senior officers of the Yugoslav People’s Army tried to explain contemporary events and those of World War II with reference to their origins during World War I. General Milan Zelenika (1885–1969), for instance, dedicated an entire book to the war of Serbia and Montenegro in 1915, published by the army’s publishing house.⁸⁶ Zelenika wanted to respond to the wish of

“all our people,” especially Serbs and Montenegrins, to understand the “real causes” of the “national catastrophe” that, in the memory of some people, was akin to a “second Kosovo,” alluding to the Serbian defeat of the fourteenth century. His methodological question was why the retreat of the Serbian army and capitulation of the Montenegrin army occurred in the autumn of 1915. His point was that at the beginning of the war, the Central Powers were well prepared and organized, while “our side” was less well prepared but had better capacity for drawing on the support of its coalition allies. In 1915, the general argued, responsibility for the Serbian and Montenegrin disaster lay with their allies, especially Italy, which failed to help. In fact, the first part of the 1950s was a period of tensions in Italian-Yugoslav relations over the question of Trieste. In the mutual accusations, the Italian and Yugoslav press took the history of World War I as material for constructing their own arguments. The Italian side claimed that Serbia had been victorious in World War I purely thanks to the support of its allies. In 1952, Stevan Jakovljević, writer of the above-mentioned bestseller *Serbian Trilogy* (1937) and World War II POW in Italy, reacted to the “dishonest and cynical distortions of truth in Italian public opinion”⁸⁷ concerning the Serbian army during World War I. General Zelenika also took part in this dispute, attacking the Italian daily *Il Tempo* for accusing the Serbian World War I-army of weakness.⁸⁸ On the contrary, he argued, it was precisely the Italians who had benefitted the most from the support of their allies. After criticizing the role of the Serbian high command, he underlined the role of the “Serbian people,” who, even after their defeat in 1915, did not lose “faith in themselves and in victory.” The communist regime drew on this “excellent tradition” of the patriotism of simple peasant-soldiers in every moment of international crisis, real or invented. General Peko Dapčević, who entered Belgrade in 1944 with the Soviet armies, wrote a book for the army’s own publishing house on the Serbian army’s operations during World War I and those of the Partisans during World War II to prove his theory of the importance of the Serbian and Yugoslav side’s high maneuverability.⁸⁹ He argued that high maneuverability and mobility was one of the most important factors behind “our success” in two world wars, in contrast to the Soviet army whose strength lay in its sheer force; according to his argument, in the mountainous terrain of the Balkans, mobility and maneuverability were of equal, or greater, value. To support his theory, he gave historical explanations based on his analysis of the maneuverability of the Serbian army in 1914–18, which had led to the two victories in 1914 and had prevented the complete destruction of the Serbian army during the retreat of 1915.

Many propagandist works of history with partial academic qualities looked at World War I through the prism of Leninist orthodoxy. The ideological approach was more important than the available sources. Bosnian historian Fuad Slipčević wrote a book on World War I and the creation of the Yugoslav state using only secondary literature from the interwar and postwar period, without any reference to primary sources.⁹⁰ Using Leninist references, such as the responsibility of all imperialist states for the war and the difference between “just” and “unjust” wars, the author set the Serbian king and the political elite on the one hand against the Serbian people on the other. For him, the mobilization of the Serbian army in 1914 was a success because of the experience of the soldiers and the “patriotic feeling of the people who were conscious that what was at stake was their freedom and the independence of their country.”

In this context, the analysis of the World War I occupation of Yugoslav territories was often informed by the experience of the Axis powers’ occupation policies during World War II: foreign invaders implemented ruthless policies of divide and rule toward the South Slavs, setting them one against the other.⁹¹ The enmity between the government and the “people” was the subject of a book on the military relationship between Montenegro and Serbia in 1914–15, until the capitulation of Montenegro.⁹² The author of this work, based on military and diplomatic archives, was Nikola Škerović, from the Historical Institute of the People’s Republic of Montenegro, former deputy in the Montenegrin parliament during the war, who in 1915 had taken part in the discussions regarding capitulation. He accused King Nikola of Montenegro of “betrayal” in contrast to the “people” who wanted to continue the fight just as Serbia did. Thus, the military history of World War I was deeply oriented by official ideology and served the domestic and foreign policy objectives of Communist Yugoslavia. It served the same purpose as that of some historians who developed a narrative integrating the two world wars into the larger framework of a military struggle for the freedom of all “Yugoslav peoples” lasting from the nineteenth century until 1945.⁹³

Against this backdrop it is not surprising that the question of the responsibility for the war’s outbreak, very present in German historiography after 1945,⁹⁴ was not discussed in the Yugoslav context of that period, even more so given the fact that most Yugoslav historians had no doubt as to Germany’s overwhelming responsibility for the escalation of tensions during the July Crisis. Still, some South Slav historians discussed the character of the Serbian participation in the war in the tradition of the ideological struggle between the Bolsheviks (Lenin) and the German Social Democrats (Rosa Luxemburg). In that perspective, Serbia’s

initially righteous defensive war changed its character into an imperialist war once Russia became involved.⁹⁵ The infantry colonel of the Yugoslav People's Army and war historian Savo Skoko opposed that view calling on Lenin's interpretations of the character of the Balkan Wars and World War I and the national liberation character of Serbia's war.⁹⁶ Along with war historian Petar Opačić, Skoko published a highly successful biography of Vojvoda Stepa Stepanović, one of the most important Serbian war commanders, who participated in all wars that Serbia waged from 1876 to 1918.⁹⁷

Economic, Cultural, and Social History

Until the end of the 1980s, World War I was not looked upon through the lenses of economic, cultural, or even social history. As has been argued, World War I crystallized ideological struggles between Yugoslav historians instead of being investigated seriously. However, there are exceptions to that rule, the most notable one being Andrej Mitrović, a professor of contemporary history at Belgrade University. In his 1984 book *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu* (Serbia in the First World War),⁹⁸ Mitrović discussed several allied loans (French, British, Russian, then American) that permitted Serbia to continue fighting during the war. He also gave a sociological analysis of relevant social groups in Serbia during the war, such as the Sarajevo conspirators, Serbian and Yugoslav politicians, Serbian army officers, and Toplica rebels. The author depicted the historical background of the decision-making process and the Serbian actors' different mentalities and cultural backgrounds. He also took issue with the official figures of Serbian losses, which he considered inflated, while his colleagues, such as Vladimir Stojančević, argued that those figures were essentially correct.⁹⁹ Mitrović also touched upon the war guilt question, rejecting, very much in line with Yugoslav historiography on that matter, any Serbian responsibility for starting it. In an interview given on the occasion of his book's publication, Mitrović noted that the idea of Serbian guilt for World War I's outbreak was resurfacing in the context of the weakening of the Eastern bloc. Serbia being traditionally seen as a Russian client state across East-Central Europe, the idea of Serbian responsibility in the outbreak of World War I was therefore instrumental in the weakening of Communist rule. In his introduction to the Serbian edition of Fritz Fischer's book *Alliance of the Elites*, Mitrović accordingly endorsed all of Fischer's arguments.¹⁰⁰ In 1987, he pursued his exploration of the history of Serbia during World War I by publishing a book on the *Uprisings in Serbia from 1916 to 1918*.¹⁰¹ Explaining how the struggle for

freedom gradually became a *topos* deeply inscribed into Serbian culture and mentalities, Mitrović challenged widely held ideas about the extent of popular resistance against the occupying powers. By doing so, he gave a new impulse to the rich historiography on Serbian resistance against the Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian occupier.¹⁰²

During the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, several books on World War I were re-edited in the form of short, popular editions serving various propaganda purposes.¹⁰³ Taken out of context, parts of these books were used to “prove” the repetition of history in the Balkans in 1914 and 1991, the right of one people or another to a particular territory, and the “historical excellence” of one people in comparison with the other.

Revisiting Historiography after the Political Changes in Serbia

After the year 2000, Serbian historiography enriched its research on World War I in three main directions: on medical issues in Serbia during the war, on Serbian refugees after the occupation of the country in 1915, and on Serbia’s diplomatic and military relationship with its allies. The French military and diplomatic support for Serbia played a key role in the Serbian recovery during the war and in the creation of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes at the end of the war.¹⁰⁴ One important book—*Nevoljni ratnici* (Involuntary Warriors)¹⁰⁵—examined the attitudes and actions of the Allied Great Powers on the Salonika front. Taking into account the very rich military historiography that described the battles, the movement of troops, the victories, and the defeats on the Salonika front, the author’s aim was to explain what happened in the background, the decision-making processes, and the struggle for ideas, concepts, and attitudes within General Headquarters and ministerial councils, parliamentary sessions and commissions. Contrary to previous historiography that concentrated on the allied forces’ successful offensive, the author highlighted the differing interests, aims, strategic concepts, and especially material capacities between politicians and soldiers of the Great Powers (France, Great Britain, Italy) on the one hand and the smaller countries (Serbia, Greece) on the other. A particular interest concerns the attitudes of the Great Powers toward the smaller ones, which the author explained in relation to cultural factors and the heritage of colonial attitudes. The interests of the small powers were not taken into account by the great ones, and the Allies were less concerned with the common good than with their own interest. This is also the line taken by the book on British-Serbian relations during World War I with the characteristic title *Neizabrana saveznica* (The Non-Voluntarily Chosen Ally).¹⁰⁶

The cultural aspects of World War I in Serbia have been examined in the book *Top, vojnik i sećanje* (Cannon, Soldier, Memory), published in 2014.¹⁰⁷ With the centenary of the outbreak of the war, several international conferences were organized in Belgrade, and Serbian historians took part in international World War I conferences abroad (Paris, Bucharest, Sarajevo, Banja Luka). In the same period, Christopher Clark's book *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*,¹⁰⁸ which was particularly critical of the Serbian government's actions prior to and during the July Crisis, brought the "war guilt" question back to the fore, provoking reactions from Serbian historians and the general public alike. Several critiques of Clark's book were published in specialized reviews.¹⁰⁹ Clark, along with Serbian historians, took part in the conference held in Belgrade in May 2014 on the lessons learned from the Great War. Some of them returned to editing the archival documents on the Sarajevo assassination, arguing that no proof exists there of Serbia's official involvement in it.¹¹⁰ A short history of Serbia between 1914 and 1918 has been published in English, Russian, and Serbian.¹¹¹ Aiming to make available to specialists and the interested public the basic results of historiography on the Great War in Serbia, an encyclopedia of World War I in Serbia has been published in 2015.¹¹² The question of foreign war testimonies and perceptions of an allied country and people has been discussed in the bilingual French-Serbian critical edition of French texts on the Serbian retreat of 1915–16.¹¹³ In October 2016, a group of French and Serbian historians discussed the question of History and Memory of World War I in Zaječar in Eastern Serbia where the cemetery of the French *Armée d'Orient* is located.¹¹⁴ In November 2016, there was also a series of lectures on Serbia and its Allies in 1916 based on the results of the research of a younger generation of historians and supported by the French *Mission du Centenaire*. Overall, there have been numerous World War I workshops organized by major historical research institutions including those from Republika Srpska.¹¹⁵ It is also worth mentioning and speaks to an increased international overture of the Serbian discussions on World War I that quite a few studies have been translated into Serbian: Christopher Clark's aforementioned book on the war's outbreak, Robert Gerwarth's study on the vanquished during the 1917–23 period, and John Paul Newman's work on war veterans in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians/Yugoslavia are cases in point.¹¹⁶

Today, the Great War does not play the unique role that it once did in shaping memory and historiography in the countries of former Yugoslavia. Other events appear more important and more controversial, such as

the wars surrounding Yugoslavia's breakup, World War II, or events more remote in time yet which play a role in the "invention of tradition" for the identities of the newly created states in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the memory and historiography of the Great War has been relieved of the ideologically impregnated concept of Yugoslavism to become the object of dynamic and discussed memory in societies on the path to democratization, and the object of historiography based on critique of sources and in constant search of new methodological approaches.

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