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### WORLD WAR I IN CONTEMPORARY MEMORY CULTURE IN SERBIA

**Abstract:** The memorialization of World War I in contemporary Serbian culture illustrates how this process was affected by ongoing political and social trends. From 1980 until today, the memory of the First World War has been revitalized through the erection of numerous monuments. During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a surge in the erection of monuments to military leaders. It represented a clear sign of the militarization of Serbian society.

Keywords: World War I, monuments, Serbia, Gavrilo Princip

One of the historical themes that recent Serbian national memory culture has revolved around has been Serbia's participation and fate in the Balkan Wars and World War I from 1912 to 1918. The heroes and victims of these wars, united under the names Liberation Wars or Wars for Liberation and Unification 1912–1918, were memorialized immediately after their conclusion. Between the two world wars, numerous monuments and memorials were erected across Serbia (Manojlović Pintar 2002: 89-98; Manojlović Pintar 2014: 134-142). During this period, the memory of the Liberation Wars united private religious forms of remembrance, a collective/national warrior cult, anonymous and famous battle heroes, the suffering of the civilian population, and the royal propaganda of Kings Peter I and Alexander I Karadorđević.

During the socialist government, a positive attitude towards Serbia's role in these wars was not compromised. Strong personal connections and vivid memories of participation in the war and family destinies likely played a significant role among the citizens of Serbia during the 1950s and 1960s. Serbian monarchs were removed from official memory, as well as the memorial heritage and memorial complexes from the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, where significant battles of the Balkan Wars and World War I took place and numerous memorials were located. The focus of memorialization was directed towards the bravery and suffering of the soldiers and civilian population.

The 'celebration' of the Serbian struggle in the First World War became by the 1960s a part of the tavern music culture, which Dobrica Ćosić strongly criticized as a form of degradation and belittlement of national culture: "...March on the Drina, a march with which one generation, the generation of partisan fathers, one national army, liberating, all bloodied, marched into the world's history, into its supreme national achievement. That military march, that honorable and costly victorious song, has become the closing tune of the entire nation's taverns, the 'tush' of tavern chapels in Serbia. The lyrical lament for the homeland and freedom of Serbian and Yugoslav soldiers from Corfu, with a modified, or rather, Serbianized text, has become the song of a debauched, tipsy youth... Let us not devalue the tradition and moral and cultural values of our serious, tormented, and hardworking people." (Ćosić 2000: 381)

The cult of World War I was particularly nurtured in nationalist artistic circles and explored and popularized in literary works. The three-volume novel *Time of Death* ("Vreme smrti") by Dobrica Ćosić (published between 1972 and 1979) and arguably one of the most popular works of the eighties - *The Book on Milutin* by Danko Popović ("Knjiga o Milutinu" published in 1985) significantly shaped Serbian national sentiment during the 1980s. On the other hand, the memorial complex, the military cemetery at Zeitenlik in Thessaloniki, became a kind of patriotic pilgrimage site. It was maintained and visited by Serbian tourists during the summer season and was the subject of monographic publications (Đorđević 1976; Sokolović 1986). The celebration of anniversaries, such as the seventieth anniversary of the breakthrough of the Salonika Front in 1988, also contributed to the popularization of World War I. The emphasis on the importance of World War I as a basis for understanding the significance and destiny of Serbia, as well as as a crucial national historical and identity determinant, led to a new wave of erecting public monuments.

Monuments dedicated to the First World War in Serbia were erected and renovated during the decades of communist rule. They were not only preserved but also led to the consolidation of the memory of those who died in the First and Second World Wars. The names of those who died in the Second World War were added to numerous plaques, and in some places, new unified memorials were created (Karge 2014: 74-75). Additional legitimization of the remembrance of the First World War occurred after the meeting of the Council for the Preservation of the „NOB“ Tradition on May 22, 1969, where the merging of national and revolutionary traditions was emphasized (Manojlović Pintar 2014: 164).

One example is from Gornja Toplica near Ljig, where the local "Alliance of Fighters, Workers, and Citizens" erected a joint memorial dedicated to the memory of those who "died for the defense and liberation of their homeland from the German occupiers and their collaborators in the period from 1941 to 1945 and fallen warriors in liberation wars from 1912 to 1918". The consolidation of memories of the two World Wars aimed to depict the continuity of the Serbian people's struggle against the occupiers.

## COMMEMORATING WORLD WAR ONE IN THE 1980S

In the 1980s, monuments dedicated to World War I took on more representative forms, clearly indicating increased significance and a new wave of strengthening national memory culture (Makuljević 2022). In Mionica, where the birthplace of „Vojvoda“ Živojin Mišić – Struganik, is located, two monuments were erected.



Photo 1. Monument to Vojvoda Živojin Mišić, Mionica, 1988<sup>1</sup>.

The memorial at Ribnički Bridge, where „Vojvoda“ Mišić halted the retreat at the beginning of the First World War, was created by Nebojša Mitrić in 1984. It was erected in the form of a stone monument with a relief featuring the portrait of Vojvoda Mišić, as well as a plaque with his words spoken at that location: “Soldiers, children, stand. Straighten up. Turn your faces to the enemy. – Vojvoda Živojin Mišić, November 1914, Mionica.” Four years later, in 1988, a commemorative equestrian monument to Vojvoda Mišić, created by Oto Logo, was placed in front of the municipal building in Mionica. Logo explained that he infused Mišić’s character into this monument: “Let’s take, for example, Vojvoda Živojin Mišić, a man who never lost a single battle, a man of exceptional strength, will, and perseverance... Some sculptors portray such a personality as a loser, others as a desperate man, and others as a man who doesn’t know what to do with himself. He was none of that, I repeat, never in his entire life. On the contrary, Mišić was determined and thoughtful - a cold man. He never made a single unnecessary gesture. Therefore, the

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the book Makuljević Nenad, *Memorija i manipulacija. Spomenička politika u Srbiji 1989-2021*. Beograd 2022, 27.

sculptor must, in my opinion, see the man in his entirety, as he truly is!" (Jevtić 1995: 34). Logo, the author of several socialist public sculptures, had significant experience with commemorative monuments. He executed the Monument to the Battle of Ljig in 1981 and the Monument to the National Hero Dušan Jerković in Bajina Bašta in 1987, fully in the style of socialist realism. Monumentality characterizes the memorial to Živojin Mišić, one of the first equestrian sculptures dedicated to a national hero after World War II. This monument stands out for its position, iconography, and artistic style. Placed in front of the municipal building, it gave a strong national character to this official institution. Plaques on the monument's pedestal glorify Živojin Mišić and Serbia's struggle in the First World War. Mišić's words during the breakthrough of the Salonika Front are inscribed on the front: "With unwavering faith and hope, heroes, forward into the homeland." The sides provide information about Serbia's sacrifices, as well as praises for Serbian fighters, including the words of communist official Dr. Ivan Ribar about Živojin Mišić: "Vojvoda Živojin Mišić, the genius of our military. One of the creators of our state and liberators of our people, and therefore, his actions will be inscribed in golden letters in our history". The monument in Mionica can be seen not only as a point of convergence and overlap of socialist and national memory culture but also as a herald of the dominance of national monuments in the public space.

Renowned sculptor Drinka Radovanović demonstrated a particular dedication to creating monuments to the heroes of World War I, redirecting her focus to national themes in the second half of the 1980s through the creation of artistic sculptures and memorials to partisans (Vukočić 2002). In 1987, she crafted figures of Stepa Stepanović and Živojin Mišić on horseback. For Tekeriš, a site where battles took place and where a memorial ossuary exists from the Cerska Battle of 1914, she created busts of Živojin Mišić, Radomir Putnik, Petar Bojović, and Stepa Stepanović in 1988 (Vukočić 2002: 222). That same year, she sculpted a bust of Vojvoda Mišić, which was placed at the Belgrade Fair (Vukočić 2002: 221). Literary figure Slobodan Marković provided an account of Radovanović's monuments in 1989, emphasizing her grasp of the essence and reality of the tragedy of the Serbian people in World War I. Marković described the emotional reaction of those present at the unveiling of the monument to Živojin Mišić on November 18, 1988, noting that tears welled up due to overwhelming excitement. He viewed the erection of monuments to the Serbian army leaders as a correction of historical injustice and almost a religious act. In Radovanović's sculptures, he found unique characters and an "emotional approach to the vojvodas, almost as if they were somewhere in the Bible" (Marković 2002: 44-45). Marković's account of the monument's unveiling to Vojvoda Mišić illustrates a kind of mythological interpretation of a national monument. The formal characteristics of the monument, in line with general academic rules, were overshadowed by the importance of the depicted personalities. The monument's unveiling was experienced as the return of national heroes and the beginning of their new life. The monument to Živojin Mišić at the Belgrade Fair not only expanded the topography of national memory but also indicated a new trend. Erecting a national monument within the Belgrade Fair space primarily dedicated to economic activities clearly signaled a new state of Serbian society.



Photo 2. Monument to Vojvoda Živojin Misić, Valjevo 1988<sup>2</sup>

The monument to Vojvoda Mišić was also unveiled in Valjevo on the municipality day, September 15, 1988. Crafted from Jablanica stone at the Dragičević workshop in Arandelovac, it depicts a standing figure dressed in military uniform. The process of erecting monuments to the heroes of World War I continued into the 1990s. The monument of Vojvoda Stepa Stepanović was placed in Kumodraž in 1991, crafted by Drinka Radovanović (Vukoičić 2002: 221). It represents a bronze figure of Vojvoda Stepa, standing in military attire with his hands behind his back. The figure's military function is emphasized, and the posture reflects contemplation – a moment of making strategic decisions. Replicas of this sculpture were later placed in Čačak and Loznica. Kumodraž is the birthplace of Stepa Stepanović, and a memorial complex, which includes his house and monument, was created there. Placing the monument next to the birth house represents one model of memorialization at locations connected to the lives of those depicted. The most famous Yugoslav example of this model is in Kumrovec, where a monument by A. Augustinčić was erected next to Tito's house. The iconography of the sculptures in

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from the book Makuljević Nenad, *Memorija i manipulacija. Spomenička politika u Srbiji 1989-2021*. Beograd 2022, 30.

Kumrovec and Kumodraž does not reflect the depicted individuals' location, childhood, and upbringing but instead emphasizes their military personas.



Photo 3. Monument to Vojvoda Živojin Misić, Valjevo 1988<sup>3</sup>

A memorial bust of Vojvoda Petar Bojović was placed in Vojvoda Bojović Park near Kalenić Market in Belgrade (1991 or 1993), crafted by Drinka Radovanović (Vukočić 2002: 221). The monument depicts Bojović's bust, with the names of battles he participated in inscribed below. A memorial bust of Radomir Putnik was erected in the Bulevar vojvode Putnika in Belgrade. Drinka Radovanović created this sculpture in 1991 (Vukočić 2002: 221). In Čačak, in the early 1990s, the sculpture "Devojčice" by Oskar Berbelj was removed from the front of the post office building. In its place, in 1992, a sculpture of Stepa Stepanović, created by Drinka Radovanović, was installed (Vukočić 2002: 221).

Following the practice initiated in Mionica and Valjevo during the 1980s, in the following decade, several monuments dedicated to Serbian army leaders from the First World War were erected and placed in the urban centers of certain cities. The monument to Radomir Putnik in Kragujevac, crafted by Nikola-Koka Janković, was erected in 1992 in front of the courthouse. Vojvoda Putnik is portrayed as a standing figure draped in a military overcoat, without a cap, and with a contemplative gaze. The appearance of Vojvoda Putnik does not emphasize his heroism but instead reflects an aged and contemplative warrior. This concept of the monument to Vojvoda Putnik reflects the

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<sup>3</sup> Photo by Nenad Makuljević.

author's stance. B. Burić emphasizes, "Such a concept of a monument to the well-known Serbian hero demonstrates the human and creative courage of the author, who, amid the renewed concern for national identity, questions the conventional myth of the Serbian national hero, portraying him as a disappointed and broken man" (Burić 2010:22). In Nova Varoš, the monument to Vojvoda Petar Bojović was ceremoniously unveiled on Vidovdan in 1997. The author, Miodrag Živković, was selected through a public competition in 1992 (PPmedia, Preminuo Miodrag Živković). Vojvoda Bojović is portrayed as a standing figure dressed in military attire.

The Municipal Assembly of the city of Šabac decided at the end of 1992 to erect a memorial fountain and monument displaying three city decorations from World War I. The Monument of War Decorations of the City of Šabac was created by sculptor Milisav – Mija Tomanić, who resided in Celje. Due to international sanctions, the monument could not be transported to Serbia until 2008, when it was finally brought and installed in the city center of Šabac (Grčić, Spomenik). The monument, which represents war decorations received by the city's inhabitants, introduces a novelty to Serbian memorial culture.

The Monument to the Salonika Volunteers was erected in the village of Aleksa Šantić near Sombor in 1998 (Soinfo, Spomenici). This village was formed by volunteers in the First World War. The monument features abstract sculptural decorations with the inscription "Grateful descendants to glorious ancestors." A memorial to the Salonika fighters, founders of the village, was also erected in the village of Rastina near Sombor in 1998 (Soinfo, Spomenici).

Monuments dedicated to World War I only partially follow older practices. It is noticeable that the majority of them depict military commanders of the Serbian army, such as Živojin Mišić, Radomir Putnik, Petar Bojović, and Stepa Stepanović, and were crafted by Drinka Radovanović. The pronounced emphasis on memorializing military commanders indicates a shift in the way the Liberation Wars of 1912–1918 are remembered. While commemoration of victims, fallen warriors, and civilians is suppressed, public attention is directed towards military leaders. This trend, the emphasis on military leaders, is a clear sign of the militarization of Serbian society, fitting seamlessly into the climate of seeking and recognizing a new Serbian (warlike) leader, which was found in the figure of Slobodan Milošević. This is certainly not a coincidence, as the academic and artistic circle supporting Drinka Radovanović's work simultaneously constituted a prominent part of the Serbian nationalist elite.

## MONUMENTS AND THE CENTENARY OF WORLD WAR I

In the years between 2012 and 2018, the centennial of the Balkan Wars and World War I was commemorated (Makuljević 2022). Debates on the causes of the war dominated Serbian public opinion, diverging from trends in European memory culture. European commemoration reflected a higher level of reconciliation among the warring parties, prompting a solemn remembrance of the fallen and a reflection on everyday life and civilian experience during the war. In line with new European relationships and

reconciliation efforts, the Ring of Remembrance monument, “L’Anneau de la Mémoire,” was erected in Ablain-Saint-Nazire on the former Western Front.

The Serbian memory of the Balkan Wars and World War I was burdened by recent political legacies, resulting in modest and inadequate commemorations. Even the graves of Serbian soldiers outside Serbia were not marked in a dignified manner.

In Šabac, a memorial fountain was erected on August 24, 2014, on the day of the Battle of Cer, with an inscription honoring “the heroes of the victory at Cer and all Šabac residents who perished in World War I” (RTS, Šabac). In Prokuplje, based on an initiative from 2015, a memorial park was established with a monument by Čedomir Ristić dedicated to the “Iron Regiment,” a unit of the Serbian army in the wars from 1912 to 1918. The monument, unveiled in 2018, has a cross-shaped base with a construction featuring a cross. It bears inscriptions of battle names in which the “Iron Regiment” participated and the names of liberated cities in 1918 (RTS, Otkriven spomenik).

One significant monument that marked the centennial of the First World War was the unveiling of the Monument to the Great Victory in Užice in 2018 (Kovačević, Spomenik). The 5.8-meter-high monument is a replica of Đorđe Jovanović’s sculpture “Great Serbia” from 1901, which was destroyed during World War I. It depicts an allegorical personification of Serbia with a laurel wreath on her head, holding a crown aloft in her right hand and a flag in her left (Makuljević 2006, 215). At her feet is a crowned double-headed eagle. The monument was initiated by high-ranking state official Nikola Selaković, crafted by sculptor Svetomir Radović, while architect Vladimir Lojanica conceived the architectural design and base.

Although using older models for contemporary memorial sculptures is not uncommon, the example from Užice is rare because there was a deliberate renaming of its title. The sculpture of Great Serbia became the Monument to the Great Victory, and the 1901 model became a monument to those who perished in the wars from 1912 to 1918. Such a transfer of meaning and name change must have had multiple reasons. Even though in his opening ceremony speech, the city’s mayor spoke affirmatively about the idea of Great Serbia around 1901, Nikola Selaković cautioned that only someone malicious would ascribe to the monument a “connotation that does not belong to it” (Kovačević, Spomenik). It is evident that the monument could not be named after its original sculptural model in order to avoid adverse political reactions. Simultaneously, the choice of this sculpture by Đ. Jovanović for the memorial model shows that the monument was intended to glorify the Serbian nation in the past and highlight current authorities, as speeches during the unveiling indicated.

Among the most significant new state memorial complexes dedicated to the events at the end of the First World War are the monument to King Peter, the Museum, and the Park of Annexation in Novi Sad. On the centennial of Vojvodina’s annexation to Serbia, a large public ceremony on November 25, 2018, saw “President Aleksandar Vučić stating that Vojvodina is Serbia and will always be so” (Kovačević, Put budućnosti).

The Annexation Museum is an integral part of the Museum of Vojvodina, established in 2016 upon the initiative of the Provincial Government of Vojvodina

(Muzej prisajedinjenja). The monument to King Peter, created by Zoran Ivanović, is a monumental equestrian statue (approximately 10 meters in height) (Ivanović). The king is portrayed in a military uniform, holding a scroll in his right hand and a cap in his left.

The simultaneous opening of the museum, park, and monument indicates a significant breakthrough in Novi Sad's public memory space. They did not only represent a commemoration of a historical event but also held current political significance. They reinforced the Serbian character of Novi Sad and Vojvodina, counteracting ideas of Vojvodina's autonomy and ethnic specificity.

The centennial commemorations influenced the intensification of memorial policies but occurred in the shadow of international political constraints, especially regarding the celebrations of the Balkan Wars and World War I. The memory of these wars had a considerable impact on strengthening Serbian national sentiment during the 1980s and 1990s, leading to the erection of a larger number of monuments than in the jubilee years of 1912-1918.

### GAVRILO PRINCIP

The debate about Serbia and its responsibility for World War I was closely tied to the interpretation of the personality of Gavrilo Princip. Gavrilo Princip was a member of Young Bosnia and one of the assassins of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, whose assassination in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, was the trigger for the outbreak of the war. While in Yugoslav and Serbian cultural memory, Princip was a hero, in part of European literature, he was interpreted as a terrorist.

Likely due to the atmosphere surrounding the interpretation of Princip's historical figure, which was further emphasized in Christopher Clark's book "The Sleepwalkers," the authorities in Serbia did not erect his monument (Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*). Instead, it came as a gift from Republika Srpska. The monument was cast based on the model from Serbian Sarajevo, the work of sculptor Zoran Kuzmanović, and was placed in the Financial Park in Belgrade (Ilić, Princip). It was unveiled on Vidovdan in 2015, the same day when, in 1914, Princip, along with other members of Young Bosnia, carried out the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. During the unveiling ceremony, Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić emphasized that Princip was a hero and a symbol of liberation ideas, while Milorad Dodik, the president of Republika Srpska, stated that the monument represents the current struggle of Serbs for freedom (Ristic, Serbia).

Interestingly, it is noted that the monument was initiated by Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić (Ristic, Serbia). The anniversary of Gavrilo Princip's death on April 28, 1918, was included in the official calendar of state celebrations of the Republic of Serbia, and the place of its commemoration is the monument in the Financial Park (Državni program). This indicates that this monument, although a gift from Republika Srpska, has been fully embraced and integrated into the most important state memory sites.

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Memorializing World War I in contemporary Serbian culture illustrates how this process depended on current political and social trends. During the 1980s, there was a surge in the erection of monuments to military leaders, with the remembrance of soldiers and civilians gradually taking a back seat. This marked a clear militarization of Serbian society and a new wave of nationalism in Serbia. At the time of the centenary celebration of the beginning of World War I, Serbian public discourse was burdened by the question of blame for the outbreak of the war. The role of Gavrilo Princip, the assassin of Franz Ferdinand, was particularly problematized, leading to Serbian authorities not erecting a monument in his honor but accepting one as a gift from Republika Srpska.

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