

Memories of the First World War And the 1917 October revolution in former Yugoslavia

The centenary of the First World War reminded the societies in the Balkans and especially their political and intellectual elites to the one of the most important global historical events. In some cases, literally, the centenary had taken out this history from oblivion. A brief review of the culture of remembrance in some of the Balkan countries about the First World War and the events related to it can lead us to a conclusion that such a great world event with far reaching consequences in the region has been neglected, as other histories dominate the national narratives.

In Socialist Yugoslavia, the history of the 1914-1918 war had its part in the creation of the socialist historical narrative and the culture of remembrance. The October revolution and its global impact were underlined as events that represented an important part of the socialist revolutions in Europe that ultimately led to the establishment of the socialist regimes in the aftermath of the Second World War. The older generations of the Balkans' socialist countries remember well the place and the importance of the October revolution and its effects in the Balkans as part of the global struggle of the workers and soldiers against the imperialism and bourgeoisie. Boulevards, bridges and squares were named after the October revolution. But, in the Yugoslav case, the year 1917 was not important only because of its revolutionary character. The 1917 was the year of the *Corfu Declaration* (Krfaska deklaracija/Крфска декларација) that gave birth to the Yugoslav state in 1918. It is exactly this moment, the foundation of the Yugoslav state that dominated the narrative of the First World War during the socialist period. Although, the communist elites tried to instrumentalise the First World War for the purposes of legitimizing the establishment of the new regime and its elite, it was the Second World War that dominated the politics of memory. The war that brought the Communist party in power represented the central and most important historical event. Moreover, the new regime tried to erase the previously shaped memory of the war, as it is illustrated by the changes in the wording of the memorial plaque of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Moreover, the few monuments of the fallen soldiers in the First World War were forgotten as central attention was given to the monuments of partisans and the most famous battles in the Second World War.

We witness similar patterns in the other Balkan countries. In the Bulgarian context, certain events from the First World War were also used to legitimize the socialist regime and the development of some political and historical myths. Entering Sofia from the west, one can easily notice the monument dedicated to the Soldier's revolt following the collapse of the Macedonian/Salonika front in September 1918. For the communist elite, it was more important to underline this revolt against the monarchy and establishment of the republic than the history of the entire war. The paradigm of classes and struggle against the imperialism dominates the historical narrative. In Greece, it was the war with the Ottoman Empire and the Asia Minor catastrophe that overshadowed the history of the First World War. However, in most of the countries, the War represents only a part of a series of wars fought from 1912 until 1922.

In all countries, with or without a socialist past, the nationalist narrative was not absent. Yet, it coexisted with the socialist narrative and the paradigm of classes, and represented an integral part of the historical memory and the politics of memory. During the late 1980s and with the approach to the centenary of the First World War, we witness even more interest in the history of the 1914-1918 war, as well as an increase in the nationalist rhetoric. In the Yugoslav case, the end of the socialism and rise of the nationalism and the subsequent wars in the 1990s brought some radical

changes to the interpretation of the First World War and the development of a new culture of memory. The three essays or examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Macedonia demonstrate how the war was instrumentalized for political purposes and how the intellectual and political elites selected specific events from the history of the war considered to be important for the national narrative and the nation.

Amir Duranović, presents well the place and the importance of 1917 and the First World War in the Bosnian society as well as the changes in the debates over these events in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina. The case with the centenary of the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo showed the deep division in the Bosnian society and the abuse of the past for political purposes, which further deepens the inter-ethnic division in the country.

Boris Stamenić's essay and the Croatian example of the politics of monuments from the First World War and its aftermath, as well as the policy of naming streets and squares, shows very well the place and the importance of this history in Croatian society. Like in the other cases, for the Croatian society it was more important to look on the symbolical importance of the 1918 and the end of the war in regards to the political and administrative changes, i.e. the foundation of Yugoslavia, than to look to other aspects of the war and its effects on the Croatian society.

In his contribution **Petar Todorov** tries to examine the development of the historical narratives and their uses for political purposes in both socialist and post-socialist Macedonia. With slight changes, the First World War and the year 1917 remain as a vivid example of a politically engaged history that serves to legitimize specific political ideologies and interests. However, in the Macedonian case, it is evident that the history that is neglected by the local historians has a strong impact on the creation of ongoing historical and political myths in the Macedonian society.

Although the history of the First World War and 1917 represents minor and marginal historical event in the domain of the public space and culture of remembrance, it has strong a potential to cause political tensions and conflicts in the countries and between the neighbors.

Petar Todorov

1917 and 1918 in Croatian Culture of Remembrance

Dr Boris Stamenić (Croatia)

In the Croatian culture of remembrance, the year 1917 may be marked as a former watershed year. The change of importance of the year 1917 arose from the dissolution of the Yugoslav socialist order in 1990. At the same time, the year 1918 maintained its symbolic value for the Croatian culture of remembrance throughout the 20th and into the 21st century. Pronounced ideological discontinuity has not manifested itself in oblivion related to 1918, but rather in the change of the value-based interpretation of the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

In the culture of remembrance of the socialist Yugoslavia, 1917 was a watershed year of world history, the beginning of a new era. Reasons for the symbolic value of 1917 arose less from the political action that led to the Yugoslav unification (signing of the Corfu Declaration), and more from the romanticized interpretation of the Bolshevik takeover of the dissolving Russian Empire. Similar to other socialist countries, particularly the German Democratic Republic, Yugoslav historiography and culture of remembrance tried to present the echo of the October revolution across the territory of what was to become Yugoslavia. Unrest of the aftermath of the Great War, particularly the sailors' protests in Boka Kotorska in the early 1918, were presented as the spark of the socialist rebellion across the Eastern Adriatic coast.

In compliance with the perspective of historical materialism, the socialist revolution was presented more or less consistently as the central event in human history. Anti-feudal rebels were interpreted as prequels to the socialist revolution, and World War II, or rather the National Liberation struggle, was interpreted through its dual quality, as a simultaneous liberation of the country from the occupying force and the realization of the socialist revolution. The National Liberation struggle was thus the final and most important episode in the liberation of the Yugoslav peoples from imperialism and the onset of development of a socialist society in Yugoslavia.

Despite the central place of World War II in the national historiography and culture of remembrance, interpretations of global history assigned the greatest importance to the October Revolution. On the timeline presented in my primary school reader, published in the late 1980s, the October Revolution was visually presented as the event of global importance equal to that of Columbus's discovery of America. Until 1990, Zagreb, then the capital of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, had the Street of Socialist Revolution and the Lenin Square. And then, things started to change fast. A wave of post-communist renaming of streets and squares in Zagreb started in August 1990 at the Lenin Square, renamed the King Petar Krešimir Square, honouring the 11th century ruler. Shortly after that, all other streets reminiscent of the October Revolution and socialism were renamed, and the meta-narrative of history textbooks was changed significantly. The end of the First World War remained prominent in the curriculum, though now primarily within the context of the dissolution of Austria-Hungary and the Yugoslav unification. In simple terms, the symbolism of the "historical fracture" was shifted from 1917 to 1918, from the October Revolution to the end of the Great War and the events immediately after that.

The symbolic value of 1918 in contemporary interpretations of history in Croatia arises primarily from the administrative and political changes in Central and South-Eastern Europe immediately after World War I. At that, for the Croatian public, 1918 is primarily the year of establishment of the joint Yugoslav state, and the end of the Great War and the dissolution of Austria-Hungary remain events of far lesser symbolic value.

During World War I, there were no significant military conflicts in the territory of the present-day Republic of Croatia, but the war bore dramatic consequences on the Croatian society nonetheless. Human loss in the Great War in the territories now part of the Republic of Croatia is estimated to more than five percent of total population. In addition to soldiers, killed primarily in Galicia and the Julian Alps, under the insignia of Austria-Hungary, towards the end of the war and in its immediate aftermath, the population of present-day Croatia was decimated by the Spanish flu pandemic. Miroslav Krleža and many other writers noted the horrors of the Great War in their writing. However, the public spaces in Croatia barely acknowledge any traces of the disaster and the human suffering of the Great War.

An odd monument or a plaque commemorating the fallen soldiers may still be found at cemeteries or in churches, but pompous monuments reminding of the Great War are simply absent from Croatian streets or squares. Unlike Germany, where monuments commemorating victims of the First World War are far more prominent in the public space than those of the Second World War, the situation in Croatia is the opposite. Judging by monuments and public debates, Croatian culture of remembrance keeps World War I under a thick shadow of World War II.

Two monuments at the Mirogoj cemetery in Zagreb are an indicative metaphor of the discursive interpretations of the Great War in the Croatian culture of remembrance that have survived in the public space until this day. The 1939 Monument to the Fallen Croatian WWI Soldiers underscores the universal sacrifice and suffering. On the other hand, the 1932 Monument to the December Victims is not only the resting place of a particular group of people killed in a particular event, but also a place of remembrance that emits a powerful political-symbol message. It is as monument to Croatian defenders who died on 5 December 1918, killed by police bullets as they protested against Yugoslav unification at the central square in Zagreb: an embodiment of the anti-Yugoslav discourse of Croatian nationalists and a direct opposite to the history of the Yugoslav monarchy and its policies.

In the public space, the ruling ideology of the unified three-name people in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes presented the Great War as liberation and the long-awaited unification of South Slavic lands under the Serbian crown. Rulers of the newly-formed kingdom, Petar I the Liberator (1918-1921) and Aleksandar I the Unifier (1921-1934) were presented as successful agents of the centuries-long desire to bring together all the Yugoslav lands under the rule of a people's ruler. Ideology of the Kingdom was best visualized in the pompous monuments to one or the other king, erected by the late 1930s in dozens of cities across the country. However, such monuments are now visible only in old postcards and photo-archives.

Monuments of unilateral ideological quality built in the mid-20th century were destroyed immediately after the collapse of the system that generated them, with no accompanying public debate on their historical or artistic value. The declaration of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) in 1941 established a Fascist order led by the same people who co-organised the 1934 assassination of King Aleksandar, together with Macedonian revolutionary nationalists. In compliance with the radical anti-monarchy policies of the Ustasha movement, monuments to King the Liberator and King the Unifier were destroyed in the first few months following the establishment of the NDH. At the same time, the Ustasha promoted the presentation of the 1918 December Victims as martyrs killed during the centuries-long struggle of the Croatian people for the Independent State of Croatia. The symbol-political significance of the 1918 December Victims was demonstrated by the Ustasha authorities by, among other things, erecting a monument to the fallen protesters at the central square in Zagreb in 1942. However, just three years later, the monument was removed.

In the historiography of the second Yugoslavia, the interpretation of 1918 and the foundation of the first Yugoslavia was not as limited in meaning as the interpretation of 1941 and the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. Unlike the NDG, which was interpreted solely through the prism of mass crimes and collaboration with the occupying forces, the Yugoslav Kingdom was presented as a failed attempt to resolve the national and social issues after the unification, which was in itself presented as positive. History was interpreted as the continuous centuries-old joint struggle of the peoples of Yugoslavia, driven by the desire to be united. The fact that the peoples of Yugoslavia fought on different sides during World War I was explained by interests, even the cunning of the foreign imperialist forces which thus hindered the Yugoslav unification.

The 1980s liberalisation in Yugoslavia led to a moderate pluralism in the culture of remembrance in public spaces. While the Serbian public remembered more and more the heroic role of Serbia in World War I, the public in Slovenia and Croatia discussed more openly the idea of returning to Mitteleuropa and imagined the better past of Austria-Hungary.

The idea of Mitteleuropa as the desirable alternative to Yugoslavia and the Balkans marked the campaign for the first multi-party election in Croatia in 1990. Opposition parties, primarily the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ), styled themselves as the promoters of the return of Croatia into the arms of civilised countries, whereas they imposed on the Communist League of Croatia, now the newly-established successor Party for Democratic Change, the position of advocates of Balkan backwardness.

During the political crisis and the outbreak of war in the early 1990s, there were numerous public statements indicating that the entry of Croatia into Yugoslavia in 1918 was a colossal mistake that led to further misfortune. Although most historians emphasized that an independent Croatia was not a realistic option in the circumstances of the time, the narrative of 1918 as a colossal mistake that could and should have been avoided was a popular image and one of the key premises of the contemporary Croatian nationalism. Alternative interpretations of 1918 have no significant role in the contemporary Croatian society. History textbooks indicate the political and geopolitical complexity of the situation that led to the unification of Southern Slavs in 1918, but such topics rarely cause any public debate.

Unlike 1918 and the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as topics of at least some relevance in the Croatian culture of remembrance, the October Revolution and the year 1917 are presented as minor topics that no one even speaks about outside the academic community. The centenary of the Revolution was marked in Croatia with a handful of lectures and a documentary entitled "Red Spring" by Marko Stričević, shown on Channel 4 of the Croatian Public TV in early November.

However important due to their indirect consequences for the Croatian society, 1917 and 1918 play no prominent role in the Croatian public space, The culture of remembrance has been focused for decades on World War II and the early 1990s war for independence, and the situation seems unlikely to change in the near future.

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Debating 1917 in Bosnia & Herzegovina Today

Amir Duranović (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

This short essay tends to draw the main lines or contours of what might be a much bigger essayist topic. In order to show how 1917 as revolutionary year is poorly remembered in Bosnia & Herzegovina today I shall firstly give an overview of important points in Bosnian history under the Habsburgs (1878-1918) with a focus on debates and political actions „about the future“ during 1917 and 1918 as the later one happens to be more important in mapping the memories in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but broader than that as well, that is to say, in territories that once made up Yugoslavia. Secondly, but not less important, I shall point out the main lines of political life in Bosnia & Herzegovina under Habsburgs just to show the scope of approaches to the future(s) and the complexities that followed them. Finally, I shall briefly put together the political standings of Serb, Croat and Bosniak political actors or their actions to give more arguments for my final claims about today Bosnia and debates that are so particular that in some cases general context is almost neglected.

The religiously diverse territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina, long considered the frontier between Catholic Europe and the “East,” had by the second-half of the nineteenth century become the fault lines of numerous clashing territorial, cultural, and economic ambitions. Shaping the contours of what would become the ethno-national struggles of emerging political constituencies linking South Slavic Christian Orthodox identity politics, Russian imperial expansionism, and the contradictory forces of entrenched Ottoman administrative traditions, was the newfound ambitions of the Habsburg Empire in the Balkans. As its immediate neighbour to the south, Bosnia and by extension, the territories known as Herzegovina, became a logical extension of a dynamic alliance between once hostile political traditions - German (Austrian) and Hungarian - that both sought ways to consolidate their domination over central Europe and its economic potential. Upon consolidation through a formal alliance, the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary gained new impetus to expand southwards at the expense of Ottoman and Russian assumptions of cultural hegemony in the Balkans. Ironically, it would be the ethno-national fissures which increasingly made Ottoman rule in the region tenuous at best and permitted the Austro-Hungarian Empire to formally entertain a new role as of 1878.

From the other point of view, the idea for the creation of a united country of Southern Slavs became more intensively present in public discourse from the middle of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century a few specific steps were made towards its realization. In nearly all conceptions of the creation of a Yugoslav country, Serbia was to have the leading role in the realization of the Yugoslav idea. Later Yugoslav historiography posited that Austro-Hungary was the main opponent of the South Slavs union, and Austro-Hungary was seen as an exponent of German imperialistic policy in South-East Europe. On the other hand, Serbia was assumed to be an integrative factor of South Slav’s unification and the victory of the Serbian army in the Balkan Wars elicited a response among Southern Slavs living in Austro-Hungary the Balkan Wars, Austro-Hungary was faced with an enlarged and strengthened Serbia.

Given the conditions of the First World War, the Serbian government led by Nikola Pašić, decided to move toward the final realization of the Yugoslav idea as Serbia’s main aim. In 1914 that decision was stated in an official document known as the Declaration of Niš (Niška deklaracija). During the First World War, it was continued with the activities undertaken for realizing the Yugoslav idea. The Yugoslav club, counterpart of Serbian government, also gave its support to

the unification of the South Slavs as a group of South-Slavic politicians from Austro-Hungary with the May Declaration of 1917 (Majska deklaracija). The mutual appearance of the Serbian government and Yugoslav club was specified with the Corfu Declaration of 1917 (Krfaska deklaracija), where both parts had to make certain concessions about the role model of the joint country of the South Slavs. However, Serbia had the dominant role in the realization of that objective. The South Slavic regions on the borders of Austro-Hungary were united in 1918 into the Country of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, which was on the 1st December 1918, united with the Kingdom of Serbia into the United Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Previously, the Assemblies of Montenegro and Vojvodina voted for unification with Serbia. With that step the first ever Yugoslav country was formed.

In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the question of Yugoslav unification still opens many questions worthy of research. This is particularly the case in the understanding of the position of Bosniaks regarding the newly formed country. To better understand their position at the end of the war in 1918, it is important to understand their attitude towards Austro-Hungary at the beginning of the war in 1914. From their experiences during the Balkan wars from 1912 to 1913, Bosniaks passionately accepted the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and they understood the First World War as “their war”, which they were dragged into as loyal subjects of the Habsburg Monarchy. Events during the Balkan wars helped Bosniaks to understand that the alternative to Austro-Hungarian governance was not the Ottoman Empire but rather Serbia and this strongly determined their loyalty to the Habsburg Monarchy. The fear of union between Bosnia and Serbia made Bosniaks loyal to Austro-Hungary during the whole war, even though the degree of that loyalty was becoming weaker with time.

The degree of weakening loyalty towards the Monarchy was caused partially by the poor protection of Bosniak citizens in Eastern Bosnia at the end of 1918 but also because of fear from violence conducted against the citizens of the region. At the same time, the fear of the Serbian army’s arrival was present with the Bosniaks, as it was thought by some certain groups as a “foreign and occupying army.” Still, Bosnian policy and religious ethics pretended to crush that fear by expanding the Yugoslav idea amongst Bosniaks, which is what happened at the end of 1918. Until 1918, Bosniaks mainly cherished the idea of remaining within the borders of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The active role of Mehmed Spaho on the political scene, the most eminent member of the newly formed Yugoslavian Muslim Organization, only in the second half of 1918 and beginning of 1919 when abovementioned party was officially established, meant a stronger bonding of Bosniaks with his political concept: the Yugoslav option.

Serbia’s territorial expansion was realized during the Balkan wars, and was weaved into the ideological narrative of the newly formed Yugoslav country. Through territorial expansion during the Balkans wars, Serbia gained space and strategic importance. Successes from the beginning of the First World War as well as the contribution in the breakthrough on the Salonika front, now called Macedonian front as well, especially in Macedonian historiography, additionally strengthened their position before the formation of the first Yugoslav country. At the head of the newly formed country was the Serbian Royal family and all leading positions of the political, military, economic and social aspects of life were held by members of the Serbian civil elite.

Prior to proclamation of new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 one should note the importance of political debates in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1917. As major military operations were not taking place in Bosnia & Herzegovina, diplomacy gained more ground, especially when it comes to understanding the scope of debates about the future of Dual Monarchy. By that time political as well as ethno-national identities were very much shaped in Bosnia & Herzegovina in a

way that all aspects of short and long term political attitudes had to count of at least three way approaches towards each political step, that is to say Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs had their own political agenda in almost all matters. Having said this, one can easily conclude how Bosnian Serb political leaders mainly followed the lines shaped by the Serbian Government who strongly advocated for political unity of all Southern Slavs under the rule of Karađorđević Royal family and took active role in debates undertaken with other members of Yugoslav club. Another important point in this network of actions and political moves was to understand the attitude of Croat political side (mainly outside of Bosnia), second important pillar in establishing what would become first ever common South Slavic state in 1918 and their main political programs were advocated through Yugoslav club as well. Prior to that, note the importance of long lasting ideas of attaining trialism within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, where Croatian delegations attempted to gain it throughout the entire World War I. Even though these ideas of attaining trialism were favored by new Austro-Hungarian ruler, Emperor Karl I who ascended the throne in 1916 thus succeeding long-term Emperor, late Franz Josef, all ideas of trialism were always declined by the Hungarian side as they insisted to preserve the integrity of the Hungarian crown, a story which dates back to the middle ages. All these debates, however, show the scope of complexities within the wider Balkan region which came to surface by the end of 1918.

In Bosnian case as well there is Bosniaks' side to be reconsidered as Bosniaks, or their political and religious leaders of that time had taken some part in political debates where they either advocated for any type of peaceful solution, as in case of Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mehmed Džemaludin Čaušević, or opted for an autonomus political position as claimed in Memorandum prepared by Šerif Arnautović and submitted to Austro-Hungarian Emperor Karl I. Namely, while meeting with Hungarian Primer Minister Count István Tisza de Borosjenő et Szeged in 1917 when he visited Sarajevo in seeking support for a political solution for the future, Grand Mufti of Bosnia Mehmed Džemaludin Čaušević claimed that he „would support any solution that brings peace for exhausted people of Bosnia and Herzegovina“ as they suffered many consequences of the war. On the other hand, former Bosnian Parliament Deputy Šerif Arnautović proposed a Memorandum about autonomus position of Bosnia in future political reshapings of the Monarchy, which is still debated in Bosnian historiography as can be seen in a paper prepared by Adnan Jahić and Edi Bokun in 2015. In this paper the „authors bring the integral text of the transcript of the Memorandum delivered to the Austrian Emperor Karl by a prominent Bosnian politician Šerif Arnautovic during the audience in Vienna on 17 August 1917. The transcript, in the Bosnian language, was published by Arnautovic himself as a separate during the war. Most historians did not use it in their works on political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the First World War, which, together with insufficient research of the Muslim component of the Bosnian political scene during the Austro-Hungarian rule, led to certain factual errors and unsubstantiated assessment of Arnautovic's political views in the process of resolving the Yugoslav issue during the last two years of the war“. On the other hand, as shown in a paper of another Bosnian historian Husnija Kamberović, local Bosniak political leaders had many dilemmas in shaping what would become their view towards the future. Namely, Kamberović claims that „Our [Bosnian] historical literature exaggerates the relevance and scope of Bosniak support to the creation of Yugoslav state. It is considered that Bosniak interests were more authentically represented by a Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce (i.e., Mehmed Spaho), than by the man who was the most influential political leader of the time (i.e., Šerif Arnautović). The Bosniak political leaders had long been politically undetermined vis à vis the post-war status of

Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some believed that the autonomy of Bosnia within the Habsburg Monarchy was the best solution, while others counted on the possibility of autonomy within Hungary, whereas a group – at first, quite a small, insignificant and uninfluential one - advocated Yugoslav unification. Finally, due to historical circumstances, the group that favoured Yugoslav unification became dominant. The leading figures of this circle were Dr Mehmed Spaho and Dr Halid-bey Hrasnica. This group took a strong pro-Yugoslav orientation only in September 1918 and not at the beginning of 1918, as some tend to believe. It is quite certain that Mehmed Spaho, as the leading figure of this group, did not advocate pro-Yugoslav orientation in May 1918, but only in the second half of September, while he began actively working on unification as late as in October.“ In abovementioned cases scholarship of this historiographical issue is pretty much sure how Bosniak political position was an ambivalent one during 1917 and 1918 but it was mainly due to the fact that main political actors of that time had shortages in broader political experience and less maneuvering space for more significant political actions.

Having said all these, one might wonder about the relevance of present day debates in Bosnia and Herzegovina about the past, in general, creation of Yugoslavia in particular or any other historical question or issue. Great stories about the war or centenary of October revolution play no important role in our everyday political or social debates, if at all. Harsh, but short time debates about 1914 and the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo, show that our focuses have completely changed the perspective in post-Yugoslav era. Once common Yugoslav narrative hardly exists in daily debates. Contrary to that, historians do debate the past in their professional and scholarly based work, joint projects are being conducted, conferences organized, books still published, but post Yugoslav states and societies have switched their priorities or at least that is what they tend to do or pretend to do. In case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, one should note the fact that post Dayton Bosnian political life, that is to say, as of 1995 onwards, has been dramatically fragmented in a way that once common narratives, stories and public gatherings or festivities have become a new fault lines and contested terrain. In such a context where a respected number of our public appearances are focused on particularities, global context is usually neglected. Put these general frases a bit differently and you will get a totally new example. In todays France, for example, Musée de l'Armée (L'hôtel des Invalides) hosted an exhibition about October revolution in Russia. Meanwhile in Sarajevo, Historical Museum, once established by communists after Second World War in a month full of activities, that is to say in November 2017, hosted an exhibition about the perspectives in tourist architecture in Yugoslavia during 1960ies.

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Dormant yet radiant history: memories of the First World War in the Republic of Macedonia

Dr Petar Todorov (Macedonia)

This essay addresses the image(s) of the First World War in the Macedonian society. The history of the war has been dominantly defined as the most tragic event in the Macedonian national history. This interpretation has a strong impact on the Macedonian national historical and political narrative and in the development of the present historical and political myths in the Republic of Macedonia. Taking this into consideration, the essay focuses on three important points. The first is the historiographic production in both socialist/Yugoslav and post-socialist/post-Yugoslav context and the creation of the ethno-nationalistic discourse. The second point is the partnership between politics and history, or how the political thought influenced the historiographic production during the recent years, and the role played by the historians who presented themselves as political and national sermons, ignoring the critical approach in studying history. The last point is the public discourse, the politics of memory and the commemorations i.e. the way the present day Macedonian society reacts to the history of the First World War.

No other event in the Macedonian historical ethno-national narrative can be defined as dormant yet radiant; dormant because it has a great potential for academic research due to the fact that what is perceived to be one of “the most tragic event in Macedonian history” is not a subject to a continuous academic research, and radiant, because it has a huge impact on the development of the present historical and political myths in Republic of Macedonia and has had a strong impact on the everyday life of the local population for decades after the war. One of the most known novel of the Macedonian literature *Pirej* (1980) represents a solid example of the importance and the place of the history of First World War (WWI) in Macedonia. The novel, as well as the historical narrative, underlines the sufferings and the victimhood of the Macedonian people in the wars from 1912 till 1918. Moreover, the history of WWI represents only one piece of a long series of events that shape the myth of victimhood in the Macedonian historiography, one of the most important and strongest myths. However, the historical narratives also shape other myths such as the myth of eternal enemies or a siege mentality.

Besides the novel, a discovery of a grenade or artillery shell from WWI in someone’s backyard or a field is the most common way citizens of Macedonia are reminded of the WWI history and its devastating consequences. Although many regions in Republic of Macedonia, especially those near the front line, still keep memories of the WWI and its consequences, today, in Macedonia, there is no national monument or memorial commemorating its history. However, there are many other memorials and monuments such as military cemeteries. Until 1990s, many of these cemeteries were neglected. After the independence, many of them were reconstructed as the Bulgarian military cemeteries in the southeastern part of Macedonia. The renovation of these cemeteries showed an increase of nationalist reactions from the part of many historians and media blaming the government for allowing the reconstruction of cemeteries of an “occupying force”. Such reactions represents a solid example of the abuse of history and the influence of the historical narrative in the Macedonian society. Namely, we do not witness such reactions in the case of other cemeteries (French, German, British), whose armies helped the other “occupiers” to re-establish their rule in the present Republic of Macedonia.

It is exactly the cemeteries where every 11th November commemorations take place. Ambassadors from the European Union (EU) countries and government officials pay visits to the WWI military cemeteries and give speeches about the importance of peace and reconciliation in the region. However, in many other cases, messages from the Macedonian representatives for peace and reconciliation are absent, yet political élites abuse the past with an aim to mobilize the public for their support and legitimize themselves and their policies. This political discourse is strongly influenced by the work of historians who are on the other side presenting themselves as victims of the interest of the politicians and the interfering in their affairs. On the other side, many historians see themselves as state historians and statesman/stateswoman and give political speeches not only in public speeches and interviews, but also in their works.

Regarding the history of WWI and Macedonian historiography from its foundation in the 1950s till present day, there is no more than 10 books and articles dedicated only to the history of WWI in both socialist/Yugoslav and post-socialist/post-Yugoslav context. Moreover, some of these academic works are taking into account the WWI as part of a long series of wars from 1912 till 1918. However, the history of WWI and questions considered to be important for national history are examined in studies dealing with broader questions. For example, we frequently read about the history of the WWI in Macedonia in studies dealing with the question of the “Macedonian national movement”, the politics of the Balkan countries and Great powers or the activities of certain groups fighting for autonomous Macedonia, in brief, topics dealing only with questions from political and national history. No study attempts to examine the WWI as social history.

The reasons behind this are many, but two of them are important to underline. The first explains the nature of the Macedonian historiography and the understanding of the history in Macedonia. Namely, history is seen mainly as political history with her role to serve the goals of the nation. In such context, the WWI is mostly regarded as military history which explains why historians studying WWI are focusing on a topic related to the national idea and completely ignore the social aspects of the war. The second reason is the role of some Macedonian activists during the period of WWI. Their controversial role and allegiance to Bulgaria, considered to be the enemy of the Macedonian people and the Macedonian national idea, has put the historians in a difficult position. However, the negligence of the history of WWI and the selectivity in studying this event has not prevented the historians to use it in shaping the myth of victimhood and the siege mentality. Moreover, the wars from 1912 to 1918 are defined as a turning point in the historical development of the Macedonian people.

The first study on the WWI in Macedonia written in Macedonian was published back in 1969. Its author was a member of the first generation of the Macedonian national historians. He authored a monography that paved the path for studying the history of the WWI in Macedonia in terms of chronology and topics. Namely, in terms of chronology, the WWI is only a segment of wars fought from 1912 till 1918. This chronological concept was followed by scholars in the following decades. As an illustration to this point, in 1988, a conference on the Balkan Wars and the First World War was organized by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Regarding the topics discussed in this conference, questions like recruitment of Macedonians in the Balkan armies, Macedonia under the occupation, the Macedonian question in the politics of central powers and allies, the military history, i.e. the front line and different forms of resistance of the Macedonian people against the occupying forces are questions elaborated in almost all presentations dealing with the WWI. Until the present day, except in terms of ideology and some modifications in the interpretation of the role of some personalities and political groups, this approach has not been significantly changed. The history of WWI remains political and military history.

Regarding the narrative in socialist/Yugoslav context, studies dealing with the WWI represent a solid example of the Marxist and nationalist historiography with intense rhetoric of national victimization. Namely, we often read about the Macedonian victimhood and the division and occupation of Macedonia (often represented as economic and political subject, not as an imagined geographical region) ignoring other ethno-religious communities and the complexity of the Ottoman and post-Ottoman geography, economy and politics. Regarding the Marxist narrative, the WWI is defined as imperialist war. Moreover, some events are defined through the paradigm of classes and events in 1917, i.e. the October revolution. Not taking into account the intention to discuss whether the October revolution had significant influence or not or the other regional socio-economic factors, the problem of these interpretations is the selective approach in studying this topics. It is exactly the selectivity, the frequency of the interpretations of crimes committed against the Macedonians and their framing that has a central place in the creation of the myth of victimhood, but also in the myth of continuous resistance of the Macedonians against their enemies (Bulgarians, Serbians and Greeks supported by the Great powers).

The selectivity in the interpretation and the definition of some Macedonian political and national activists are also worth mentioning. Namely, while left-oriented political activists are defined as being on the positive side of the history, the members of the right wing are usually defined as collaborators and traitors to the Macedonian national cause. It is exactly the exploitation of this term that makes the historical interpretation and the role of historians very controversial in the development of the narrative of patriots vs. traitors in the Macedonian political discourse. Another point worth of mentioning is the continuous insistence on different Macedonian ethno-national identity. This reveals the main concern of the Macedonian historiography, i.e. to prove the existence of a distinct Macedonian ethno-national identity.

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the socio-economic and political changes, we witness also changes in the interpretations of the WWI, but more importantly we witness also an increase of the nationalist rhetoric in historical studies. However, this did not lead to an increase of interest in research of the WWI. Since 1990s we witness less than 5 books and/or articles. Moreover, like in the previous context, the history of WWI is part of the studies dealing with a question considered to be important for national history. In many ways, the topics and the interpretation offered in all these studies repeat the previously established views on the character and the consequences of the WWI for Macedonia and the Macedonian people. It is only the Marxist rhetoric that is removed but not completely absent. Still we find use of terms, such as “imperialistic conflict” or definitions of some events through the paradigm of classes. However, the 1917 and the October revolution and its impact are much less exploited in the interpretation of some events and completely absent in some studies.

We see more important changes in the definition of some political activists and groups, previously defined as collaborators to the enemies and traitors to the Macedonian national cause. Namely, their role is re-examined, and now they are represented as either neutral or positive. However, some historians still continue underlining their collaboration with Bulgaria. Today, these interpretations represent one of the most important debates between historians, a debate strongly influenced by the now former ruling right-wing party of VMRO-DPMNE. Another change worth of mentioning which also serves as testimony to the increased nationalist rhetoric and shaping of the myth of victimhood is the change of naming the main front line in the Balkans, i.e. the *Macedonian front* or *Salonika front* or *Front d’Orient*. Namely, while in Yugoslav period the front was exclusively named as *Salonika front*, today Macedonian historians insist on naming the front as *Macedonian front*. Other interpretations related to the WWI remains unchanged. The war and

its consequences are defined as very catastrophic for the Macedonian people as we read interpretations like: “strong destruction of the historical development” of the Macedonian people. Moreover, the neighboring countries helped by the Great powers who “took part in the partition of Macedonia” are responsible for the catastrophe. In addition to the question of the dominant narrative, the terms like traitors or people committing treason to national cause are still used in shaping the national narrative of the struggle of the Macedonian people for independence.

To summarize, the Macedonian historiography defines the history of the WWI in Macedonia through an ethnic prism, ignoring its complexity. Moreover, the history of WWI is politically engaged, i.e. in specific periods this history serves more to the needs of the official politics of the government than to the purpose of better understanding the past. The recent political developments are strong evidence for the (ab)use of history, to be more precise the narratives of the past. Namely, the rhetoric of victimhood and the role of the Great powers in Macedonian question are frequently exploited in the political speeches. Thus, in the context of the last political crisis in Macedonia President Gjorgji Ivanov and the former prime minister and president of the VMRO-DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski, in the latest speeches referred that the foreign actors’ (International community or the Great Powers) with support of domestic politicians and political parties attempts to destabilize Macedonia with the ultimate aim to redefine country. These are examples of statements in which the Great Powers and “traitors of the nation” are defined as the enemy of Macedonia and the Macedonians. Moreover, the recent examples of increase of abuse of history and strong nationalistic rhetoric led to worsening of the neighboring relations between Bulgaria and Macedonia. Namely, last November, a Bulgarian delegation placed a plate commemorating the fallen Bulgarian soldiers during the WWI on the mountain pick of Kaimakchalan, i.e. the border line between Macedonia and Greece. Few days later the plate was destroyed by a nationalist group led by a person who was a strong supporter and promotor of the VMRO-DPMNE policies.

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