Remembrance of Marshal Stepa Stepanović in Čačak between (trans-)national memory and local politics

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses commemorative practices and public debates revolving around the local remembrance of military commander Marshal Stepa Stepanović in the Serbian town of Čačak. The geographical concept of place is used as the coming together of processes and agencies operating on different scales (local, national, transnational) and manifesting themselves through material settings around which social interactions take place. It is argued that Stepanović’s legacy served as a medium for directing how different groups within the local community processed contentious historical experiences, concurrently revealing polyphonic collective and individual interests and agencies. Ultimately, this example of local remembrance can be viewed as a microcosm of wider mnemonic dynamics in Serbian society, as well as of the influences of broader processes on locally based social relations.

Throughout the twentieth century, the memory of the First World War in Serbia was usually subsumed within the broader mnemonic complex of the "Liberation and Unification Wars", encompassing numerous military conflicts with the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century and the two Balkan Wars 1912–13. This militarised mnemonic canon became one of the crucial identity markers for the Serbian state and, subsequently, for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Šarenac 2014; Newman 2015). Alongside commemorating the collective heroism of Serbian soldiers who succeeded in liberating the occupied country and enlarge it with the southern part of the Habsburg Monarchy, especially important was the veneration of renowned military commanders as a means of making the “military genius” of the Serbian nation more individualised and applicable to material representations. Among the most prominent members of this national military pantheon was Stepa Stepanović (1856–1929), one of the four marshals in Serbia’s Second Army. Born into a peasant family in Kumodraž near Belgrade, Stepanović advanced quickly up the military hierarchy, becoming known for introducing the Prussian model into Serbian military education. His biggest martial breakthrough occurred in summer 1914 when he led a sweeping victory over Austria-Hungary at Mount Cer, which was the first battlefield success of the Entente, and for which he was promoted to the rank of Marshal (vojvoda), the highest echelon in the Serbian army (Opačić and Skoko 1974, 349–360).

This article will analyse commemorative practices and public debates revolving around this prominent individual in Čačak, where he spent the last decade of his life. The investigation will cover the changing palette of local memory agents (Winter 2006), their interactions on the local and national level, and how the interplay of broader political developments, localised power struggles and personal motivations was articulated through specific material arrangements and their interpretations within the local community. Precisely the tête-à-tête networks and circumstances of a relatively small urban setting (notwithstanding significant demographic growth that this community underwent during the past century), in many respects conveniently “secluded” from state-level policies, directed and shaped the utilisation of memory of a military hero for formulating one’s position in the local political, cultural and social milieu. Furthermore, considering biographical trajectories of the main actors (veteran associations, political functionaries, church representatives, local artists, journalists and cultural workers) helps shed light on how individuals framed different social practices and narratives in the course of balancing between official (state-level) and vernacular memory (Bodnar 1994, 13–14).

The evolution of local memory practices will be exemplified by studying the transformation in terms of memory carriers, forms, contents and practices (Erl 2011, 12–13), on account of several chronologically ordered case studies: naming educational facilities after the Marshal; commemorative activities dedicated to him during socialism; and erecting...
a statue in the city centre. In order to better connect the social and cultural factors that informed the local travels of the memory of Marshal Stepanović with their material representations, the conceptual lens of “place” will be utilised as the mechanism of bringing together social processes operating on different scales (local, national, transnational) and manifesting itself in physical settings around which social interactions take place.

Place as the coming together of scales

Place, once the cornerstone of regional geography, experienced resurgence with the advent of the humanist geography of Edward Relph and Yi-Fu Tuan, who saw the place as space endowed with cultural meanings (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977). Place was thus a spatially represented result of human agency that provided the setting for social activity and conflicts (Cresswell 2014). John Agnew (Agnew and Duncan 1989) articulated the trialectics of place: location (absolute point in space with specific coordinates, the “where” of place), locale (the material settings for social relations, “how a place looks”), and sense of place (the individual and shared meanings attached to place). In other words, locale and sense of place stand for objective and subjective dimensions of local social arrangements, respectively, whereas location represents the impact of macro-order, “the fact that place is just one of many” (Johnston 1991, 55).

The issue of geographical and social scope of a place has pointed researchers to the concept’s multi-scalar nature. Tuan vividly described this multi-scalarity as the possibility to perceive both one’s armchair and the whole planet Earth as place (Tuan 1977, 149), whereas Agnew’s triadic structure implicitly emphasised the interplay of local social relations with broader forces in configuring material structures and behaviour of humans inhabiting them (Jones and Olwig 2008, xi). Jeff Malpas envisioned place as “open out to sets of other places through being nested, along with those places, within a larger spatial structure or framework of activity” (Malpas 1999, 195, 2012). The nested character of place can thus be imagined as bringing together local, national and transnational (Glick Schiller 2012), putting forward the issue of scale. In this research, scale figures in its operational sense, as the level at which certain processes operate (Sheppard and McMaster 2004), and not always correlating to institutional or administrative spatial hierarchies, but revealing other kinds of positioning of different senses of place. Since actors and processes that make up one place most often operate on several scales (Fernandes and Carvalho 2007, 121), place as their product would ideally need to be approached in its relation to these different levels of social organisation. This pertains to historical analyses too, since history does not happen through a smooth sequence of clearly outlined scales, but in-between them, as synchronic and diachronic relation of tensions between different levels of social organisation (Benko 1995, 148). Simultaneously, scales themselves have to be seen as socially constructed, because their existence and mutual relations in particular historical contexts are conditioned by specific actors and their practices (Marston 2000; Carr and Lempert 2016).

Although in this research, emphasis will primarily be on the scale of the city of Čačak and its public sphere and institutional practices (often narrowing the focus even more by looking at the interaction of particular individuals), the influence of processes occurring in other local communities, as well as on the level of state framework (Yugoslavia/Serbia) and transnational scale will be taken into account. Thus, the dynamics of memory’s multi-scalarity (De Cesari and Rigney 2014) will be studied through the lens of continually recreated interplay of geographical positioning (location), available material settings and its usage (locale), and personal meaning-making and attachments (sense of place) by different actors positioned in different social constellations. The hereby analysed example of local remembrance thus presents the locatedness of memory-production (Radstone 2011, 118) as conditioned by particular interpersonal networks, in which “travelling” and transformation occur within clearly identifiable communication channels and media (Erll and Rigney 2009). Memory inevitably travels, be it in terms of its media, contents, or carriers, but simultaneously it is necessarily always situated, in place, in order to be meaningful and tangible. Memory’s emplacement entails its location in concrete historical conditions, webs of interpersonal networks that come together at particular spots, and physical settings and media through which specific collective and individual agendas can be articulated. Yet, the processes at the intersection of which place is constituted operate on different scales, involving different social, geographical, and administrative scopes of actors and their practices. Place, therefore, as the intersection of multiple trajectories, each of which trails its own set of histories (Massey 2005), as well as the coming together of processes occurring on different scales, can serve as a useful tool for capturing different paths that keep informing memory in concrete spaces and times.

From neighbourly veneration to reluctant negligence

When Stepa Stepanović retired to Čačak in 1919, the local population regarded this as a source of great pride. This was only helped by the Marshal’s
unobtrusive and modest lifestyle, arguably representing the idyllic patriarchal mentality of old times (Opačić and Škoko 1974, 659–660). The Marshal’s popularity among the local citizens and authorities alike can be testified by the curious honour bestowed upon him in 1925, when the street where Marshal’s house was located was named after its still living resident (Timotijević 2000, 226). Upon his death in 1929, a group of well-respected citizens of Cačak started fundraising for the construction of a monument and museum in the town centre as the deceased celebrity had already commissioned his own tomb in 1924. However, even seven years later the sum collected was insufficient, so the organising committee dismissed the monument initiative, deciding that the funds raised thus far should be reallocated to the completion of the new primary school, which was to be named after Stepanović (Tanasković 2009). Thus, the school building became the unexpected locus of remembrance of the liberation wars, together with the Marshal’s grave, concurrently being framed within the mnemonic medium of endowments (zadužbine) as a common way of articulating prominent individuals’ historical legacy in Serbian culture. Motivated by personal experiences of the involved memory carriers (above all people who had personally known Stepanović), the Marshal was anthropomorphically conflated with the historical narrative of a century-long struggle for the liberation of Serbs, and this interpretation was prevalent in public discourse and practices on both local and national (Yugoslav) scale.

During the socialist period, although never explicitly suppressed by communist authorities, the ethos of the First World War was implicitly marginalised in the public sphere for two reasons. Firstly, the new regime tried to internalise a new interpretation of the recent past, with the communist-led People’s Liberation Struggle at its core. Secondly, emphasising the Serbian army’s victories against Austria-Hungary could be politically inopportune, implicitly exonerating Serbian nationalism while problematising Croatian and Slovenian soldiers’ (as well as some Serbs who lived in the Monarchy) belonging to the enemy camp during the First World War. Concurrently, the fact that in the post-1945 period Macedonian national identity was officially acknowledged and recognised, implied that the Wars 1912–1918 (with which Stepanović was closely associated) could have ambivalent reception in Macedonian collective memory. These circumstances lead to the “Liberation and Unification Wars” being scaled down as identity marker from the level of whole Yugoslav community to that of Serbian nation (in this institutional context practically identified with the constituent unit People’s Republic of Serbia), and even so with ambivalent condemnation of the wars “bourgeois” character. In line with such circumstances, commemorations devoted to the First World War in Cačak during the early socialism were of rather modest character compared to the lavish attention and financial support that commemorative activities dedicated to the Second World War enjoyed. Symptomatic of such attitudes was the renaming of the aforementioned primary school after the interwar communist activist Milica Pavlović and cementing over the memorial plaque with the school’s old name (Davidović 2012, 149).

The landscape of memory carriers also underwent significant changes after the Revolution, not only due to the rapid demographic growth of Cačak. While in the previous period, remembrance policies involved a diverse and more informal network of civic groups, the absolute focus after 1945 was on the veterans of the Second World War, gathered under the umbrella organisation the League of Associations of the Fighters of the People’s Liberation Wars (SUBNOR). Those First World War veterans who fought on the partisan side during the fascist occupation subsequently remained within this officially supported veteran network, while the ones who behaved differently were effectively ousted from commemorative narratives and activities. Only around the 50th anniversary was there an increased interest in the First World War (foreshadowed in popular culture by the 1964 film Marš na Drinu), most notably manifested in restoring veterans’ associations that had been banned by Nazis in 1941. Cačak veterans quickly followed the suit by founding their local branches, yet failed to achieve the monolithic umbrella status as that of the Second World War fighters under SUBNOR (Baković 2013, 112). After 1969, there was also a centrally ordained effort to “reconcile revolutionary and national traditions” in politics of memory, which resulted in joint memorial complexes which presented the Wars 1912–1918 as “historical precursor” to the communist-led resistance of 1941 (Manojlović Pintar 2014, 164–166; Vujačić 2015, 226–231). In Cačak, such memorials were constructed in Vapa and Ljubić in 1976. However, when the local First World War veterans requested from local SUBNOR to build their own monument, SUBNOR concluded there was “no need” for building separate memorials for fighters 1912–1918, since they already had common monuments with partisan soldiers in every commune (Baković 2013, 114).

Concurrently, commemorative segregation between political authorities and the Serbian Orthodox Church became discernible in this period, reflected both in memory carriers and physical settings they chose for their activities. Since the aforementioned “memory-school” was renamed and effectively rid of mnemonic potential, this segregation was materially articulated in two almost adjacent spots at the town’s cemetery. The
“official” commemorations (organised by local authorities and SUBNOR) were held at the “Monument of Four Religions”, the ossuary of Serbian, Austro-Hungarian and German soldiers who died in Čačak’s vicinity during the Great War. Ever since its construction in 1934, the Serbian Orthodox Church had an uneasy attitude towards this monument due to its eucumenical symbolism (Baković 2014). It was no coincidence that the official veteran association and communist authorities chose precisely this monument as their main commemorative locus, since it emphasised the secular character of their mnemonic practices. On the other hand, the Church and its believers held commemorations by the Marshal’s grave, barely fifty yards away, as a statement of its symbolical appropriation of Stepanović. Everything about the Marshal that could have made the socialist authorities feel uneasy—patriarchal mindset, Serbian patriotism, and royalist political orientation—were precisely the values that the clerics wanted to cherish among the population in order to curb the overt influence of socialist ideology. Thus, the Marshal’s legacy was turned into an unacknowledged symbol of vernacular non-compliance with the officially professed communist historical narrative (Baković 2013, 111–112). This statement was made physically evident by choosing separate (yet recognisable and not too distant) physical location, whereas the emotional and meaning-making potential of Stepanović’s grave conditioned the spatial arrangement of particular actors’ mnemonic practices.

The subtle tension between the legacy of the First World War and the socialist historical narrative was reflected in another place connected to the Marshal, obfuscating the seemingly clear division between vernacular and official narratives. The house where Stepa Stepanović had lived in the 1920s was initially rented out as storage for a liquor factory, yet right before the Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito visited Čačak in the 1960s, a memory plaque testifying of the building’s famous former resident was put on the street-facing façade. The motivation for this “rehabilitation” can be found in local politicians’ fear that the country’s leader (curiously enough, also holding the military rank of marshal) would object to the neglect of the memory of famous military commanders. Yet the subsequent claim of the plaque’s author, sculptor Živorad Maksimović, that certain police officers complained about honouring the Marshal who had “harassed communists” (Maksimović 1991A) points to dissonant interpretations of influences coming from the national scale when applied on the local one. This was an indicator of the ambiguous role that the First World War played in the official memory politics in the second Yugoslavia as it was never clearly defined or pigeon-holed within the black-and-white communist framework of narrating the pre-revolutionary past. Its “appropriate” aspects (liberation of the Habsburg-ruled lands, defeating the occupiers of Serbia, and unification into the first South Slav state) were countered by the “inappropriate” ones (the blurred lines between Yugoslav patriotism and Serbo-centric national aspirations, as well as the royalist and bourgeois character of the interwar state), making it often a liability of locally based interests.

The abovementioned examples testify that explicitly negative characterisations of Stepanović in Čačak were noticeably lacking in the socialist period, since they would have contradicted the locally embedded positive associations of the locals towards his persona. The attitude of local officials in this period could instead be described as “reluctant negligence”, refusing to actively sideline the commander from local memory, yet omitting his name from official memory contents. Although the political system introduced after the Second World War (within the framework of socialist revolution at the national and international scale) was definitely a novelty to Čačak’s social reality, the actors that were implementing that system on the local scale were for the most part implicated in the local context of social relations, including local mnemonic patterns and contents. Moreover, due to ever-decentralising nature of Yugoslav political setup, the local political elite in Čačak felt sufficiently secluded from the federation’s control to allow a more lenient attitude towards the veneration of Stepanović, who could also be used as a local application of the country-wide “reconciling revolutionary and national traditions” that began in the 1960s. While for SUBNOR and the local authorities Stepanović served as the missing link that provided historical continuity between local representations of Serbian military traditions and the state-sponsored communist partisan myth (and hence a legitimisation tool), for oppositional groups and individuals, such as the Church representatives, the Marshal remained a symbol of repressed history. This subtle antagonism was physically manifested in separate commemorative locations, representing political interests of different memory carriers, whose structure increasingly shifted from personal acquaintances to institutional entities.

**Bronze of contention—erecting the monument to the Marshal**

In 1988, the decades-old idea of erecting a monument to Marshal Stepa Stepanović in the centre of Čačak was revived at a communal meeting of the district where Stepanović’s house was located. This was a result of increased public attention that the First World War was gaining in Serbian public in light of the 80th anniversary of the end of the war, conveniently coinciding with the installation of Stepanović’s bust at the site of his most famous battle on Mount Cer. Another local event that coincided with this
initiative contributed to its actuality: the layer of cement that covered the plaque at the former memory-school was removed in 1989, albeit the school’s name was not restored (Otašević 1991).

The monument proposal quickly became one of the hottest topics in local media, with journalists and other commentators acting as powerful forgers of public debate, which was not the case in the previous period of mostly uniform and dispassionate reporting language. During this period, the media landscape in Čačak was diversified due to the founding of a new weekly, Čačansko ogledalo, which gave space to more “dissenting” individuals, often with openly right-wing and anti-communist views, increasingly influenced by the dissident rhetoric and oppositional movements in the countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact. This broke the press monopoly of Čačanski glas, the content of which was more in line with whatever the policy of the authorities was at the time (although in this turbulent period even this weekly often published very provocative discussions and op-eds, not necessarily presenting Serbian authority’s policies in positive light). This lead to the curious situation where oppositionally inclined media decidedly sided with the borrowed East European anti-communist tropes that had originally been used against much more oppressive kind of socialist regimes, while the “pro-government” side still searched for an uneasy equilibrium between maintaining continuity with the previous historical narrative and jumping on the bandwagon of Serbocentrism and reinvention of the pre-1945 traditions that was happening within the cultural scene in Belgrade during the 1980s. Moreover, rapid pluralisation of permissible discourses and proliferation of media outlets featuring citizens’ voices meant that the crux of contention over memory politics was no longer played out behind closed institutional doors, but in widely consumed media.

Although at that time the revival of pre-communist Serbian traditions was already widely present in many spheres of social life, many actors still tried to present new contents as an enhancement to already existing frameworks rather than as rupture. Such implicit insistence on continuity prompted the local retired teacher Nikola Cvijović to defend his support of the monument initiative in the face of unnamed opponents accusing him of “wishing to completely rehabilitate the Marshal”. Cvijović pointed out that Stepanović was not some Soviet general killed in Stalin’s purges and was thus in no need of rehabilitation (Cvijović 1989). Despite such anonymous misgivings, the monument initiative quickly gained momentum among citizens, with a fundraising committee being formed in February 1989. However, local cultural workers were not impressed with the cooptation of the monument initiative by local higher-ups. Branko V. Radičević, one of the most famous poets in that part of Serbia, whose works were known for their folk-inspired and rustic undertones, was wary of the professed commitment of communist authorities. Although invited to be one of the Committee members, he officially distanced himself from this body (Radičević 1989).

Another bone of contention was the artistic vision of the monument. Due to insufficient funds, the Committee decided against issuing an open call for artists and instead directly commissioned Belgrade-based sculptor Drinka Radovanović to design the monument. It turned out, however, that her proposed statue would be a copy of the statue that she had previously made for Stepanović’s birth-house in Kuromđraž (“Pred sudom javnosti” 1990). The local authorities justified this fact by applying the supposed “convention” that the first four copies, if done by the same sculptor were still considered originals (Čačansko ogledalo 1991A). In January 1990, Radovanović’s model was put on public display in Čačak. The citizens’ impressions from the guestbook were mostly positively inclined towards the proposed model (“exquisitely done”, “perfectly reflects Marshal’s greatness”), but there were some dissenting voices as well, most of which criticised the plain design of the statue, lacking any rank symbols, weapons or other military insignia. One person suggested, in apparent mockery, that the Marshal “should wear a cowboy hat and drive a tank” (Marinković 1990).

The oppositional Serbian Reform Movement (a newly formed political party with strongly nationalist and anticomunist agenda) announced that they would design their own monument to the Marshal and place it on the central town square instead of in front of the Main Post Office. Art historian Mihailo Bošnjaković (also the local leader of this party) was most vocal in opposing the idea that former communists would get to honour the commander whom they had reviled for decades prior (Bošnjaković 1990). For him, the proposed model represented “petrified aesthetics of (so)crealism” that would do greater harm to the Marshal’s legacy than “his decades-long existence on mnemonic margins” (Bošnjaković et al. 1990). There were other more cynical comments regarding the model, calling it “a postman’s statue”, “untidy and derogated person” or “benevolent grandpa” (Mićović 1991). It is notable, however, that the majority of citizens who opposed Radovanović’s model were professional art historians and artists (who did not fail to also include personal insinuations in their criticism, derogatively calling her “Čačak’s daughter-in-law”). Many citizens entered the discussion, among them several former members of the military. Most of them opposed Radovanović’s artistic idea due to its lack of military insignia, yet, as representatives of the formerly privileged social group, they also criticised the opposition
for using the affair to gain political points as supposed defenders of national interests instead of focusing on how to help the authorities to pay due respect to Stepanović’s memory (Milovanović 1991). In defence of Radovanović, Miroslav Nikitović, who had known the Marshal personally, thought that the simple standing statue would best reflect Stepanović’s modest lifestyle (Nikitović 1991).

The fact that the selected sculpture was commissioned from an artist from Belgrade instead of someone from the local scene provided an additional basis for criticism. However, this quickly evolved from artistic disapproval into ideologically motivated media bickering. Artist Božidar Plazinić referred to committee members as “amateurs with mandate-given, bureaucratic-Bolshevik consciousness”, who intentionally prevented the aforementioned Živord Maksimović from offering his own model for the monument (Plazinić 1990). This was the moment when Maksimović got involved in the affair, sidetracking the discussion into a general showdown with communist politics of memory, more concretely by attacking the most famous Yugoslav architect Bogdan Bogdanović. At the internal competition in 1971, the local authorities had decided in favour of Bogdanović over Maksimović’s design for the Memorial Park of Freedom and Victory near Čačak, thus instigating a decades-long animosity between two artists. Whereas in the early 1990s Bogdanović became one of the most prominent opponents of Serbian president Slobodan Milošević’s nationalist policies, Maksimović stood on the opposite side of the political spectrum. Consequently, the artistic rivalry was coupled with ideological differences. Although Bogdanović had not been involved in the debate surrounding the monument to Marshal Stepanović, Maksimović launched extremely offensive media attacks against him, pointing out the “oriental” looks of the Memorial Park as the prime example of arrogance and cronyism of capital’s artistic elites close to Belgrade’s political leadership, forming a coalition that prevented the development of talented individuals coming from “civilisational peripheries” (Maksimović 1991B). Thus, Maksimović merged his newly discovered aversion towards communists (disregarding his previous work on numerous socialist monuments), provincial animosity towards the political centre, and the nationalist rejection of “anti-national elements” in the Yugoslav capital. Together with the resentment against commissioning a Belgrade-based artist to cast a copy of a statue that already existed in Belgrade’s suburb, the local scale was discursively constructed in juxtaposition against the national, by the means of invoking transnational (East European) anti-communist tropes of foreign occupation.

Finally, after three years of public debate, the monument to Stepa Stepanović was unveiled in August 1991. The Serbian Reform Movement boycotted the official ceremony, sparing no derogatory terms for the fact that the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia, “the ideological heirs” of those who “derided any sort of remembrance of the Marshal as the regressive Serbian darkness” was in charge of it (Ćačansko ogledalo 1991B). The ceremony itself was politically heightened by the presence of the Serbian minister of culture, the president of the parliament, and the country’s vice-chancellor Budimir Košutić, who (while booed by opposition supporters) said that “Marshal Stepa was also aware of the fact that Serbian people do not only live within the borders of Serbia, but across a much wider area” (Marinković 1991). With these words, he aligned the remembrance of the late commander with the ongoing events in other Yugoslav republics. By summer 1991, as he was speaking, the clashes between Croatian police and local Serb units (tacitly supported by the Serbian-controlled Yugoslav People’s Army) had escalated into fully fledged warfare. In that sense, events in the western parts of the disintegrating federation were reflected in the ceremony taking place in front of Čačak’s main post office.

Ultimately, the discourse around Marshal Stepanović served as a contentious prism through which the refraction of subsequent historical experiences took place. Concurrently, it figured as a vehicle for positioning oneself in the fluctuating social hierarchies that were increasingly reshuffled in the wake of political changes that accompanied the swansong of the Yugoslav socialism and the state. The attempt by local authorities to belatedly jump on the bandwagon of the vernacular rehabilitation of the legacy of the Great War while preserving their political hegemony was met by resistance from the local cultural elite. Their resistance rested as much on professional/artistic argumentation as on ideological antagonism towards reformed communists (conveniently disregarding their own previous contributions to the legitimisation of the suddenly reviled ideology). The contention over the location of the monument, its visual design and the authority to officially interpret its meaning for the community thus drew its emotional impact and social importance from the complex interplay of individual biographical trajectories, specificities of local tête-à-tête networks, and external political developments in other Yugoslav republics, federal institutions in Belgrade and East European post-1989 orders.

From normalisation to reinterpretation

Paradoxically, Stepa Stepanović disappeared from the public sphere very soon after the statue’s unveiling, giving place to more urgent and dramatic events happening in the region. Simultaneously, despite all controversies, the monument gradually became an intrinsic element of Čačak’s visual identity and, due to its central location, inseparable part
of its residents’ sense of place. Pacification of the public opinion was visible by 2015, when another “recycled” monument project was implemented in Čačak without a competitive call for proposals. Ironically, the new bronze of contention was also sculpted by Drinka Radovanović. Private donors recast and installed her statue of Tanasko Rajić (hero of the Second Serbian Uprising in 1815) from his birthplace Stragari, for the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Ljubići in which Rajić lost his life (“Spomenik Tanasku Rajiću na kružnom toku.” https://www.ozonpress.net/chronika/spomenik-tanasku-rajicu-na-kruznom-toku/ (accessed 08/04/2019)). Surprisingly, this curious déjà-vu hardly caused any debate on the local level, nor did it significantly affect local practices and discourses. This had to do with the fact that with socio-political changes that swept Serbian society during the 2000s, local political affairs were based on a different type of grouping, where one’s attitude towards the socialist system, Yugoslav federation or pre-1945 military traditions were not the primary bones of contention or ground for political confrontation. While memory of Stepanović was one of the main motors of social conflicts on the local scale in the late 1980s due to peculiar constellation of processes occurring on Yugoslav and European level, in the new century swords were clashing on other issues, for which the appropriation of symbols connected to pre-socialist martial prowess of Serbs was not a suitable means.

Nevertheless, on the national scale of Serbia, the political and mnemonic divides created by the “rediscovery” of Marshal Stepa Stepanović’s legacy in the late 1980s prepared the ground for the First World War reclaiming its role as one of the most potent symbols of collective sense of belonging throughout the post-Yugoslav period, proving especially prominent during the 2014 discussions around the war’s centenary (Dedović and Syndenk Andersen 2016). On the local scale, enduring political potential of the Liberation and Unification Wars (and consequently, Marshal Stepanović) was proven in the most recent times, when the local oppositional protests against Aleksandar Vučić’s rule are being regularly held on Fridays “in front of Stepa”. Thus, almost one century after his death, Stepanović was implicitly acknowledged as a powerful tool for articulating different political agendas and interests within the local community. It is yet to be seen if such reinterpretation would also occur on the national scale too, as the medium for political polarisation of the Serbian society in light of the ongoing negotiations regarding the recognition of Kosovo’s independence (which was basically the final undoing of the territorial gains of Serbia after the Wars of Liberation and Unification).

Conclusions
The study presented here showcased the interplay of agencies on different operational scales during the previous century in particular local community, the dynamics of which were manifested in the diversification and shift of mnemonic media and physical locations where memory narratives were materialised. This memory’s placial aspects entailed the gradual movement of “hotspots” of commemorative practices, from the interwar focus on the street and school naming, via socialist balancing between the two neighbouring spots inherited from the previous era, to a brand new commemorative location (in Agnew’s terminology) materialised in the form of a monument in front of the Main Post Office. Equally important were changes in the set of local actors who took part in memory production and transmission, and their position in broader frameworks. Initially, the range of memory carriers revolved mostly around men who either knew Marshal personally, or had a first-hand experience of historical events for which he was known (what Jan Assmann described as communicative memory). With the change of the socio-political system and the vast demographic changes in the local community, the conceptualisation of memory practices was mostly in the hands of the official veteran association and political representatives, allowing a certain degree of agency to other entities such as the Church or the First World War veterans. On the other hand, the late socialist period saw genuine diversification of mnemonic agents, be it in terms of age, gender, professional or political affiliation (including members of the military, political functionaries, local cultural workers and artists, nationalist opposition, teachers and journalists), thus marking the transition from a communicative to cultural memory of the Marshal.

The focus on memory carriers, however, reveals both continuity and rupture regarding different articulations of sense of place and how these were positioned vis-à-vis local and national settings. Due to the specific set of circumstances (impeccable military career, modest lifestyle and patriarchal image), Stepa Stepanović did not represent a divisive historical persona for the community, with practically all relevant local actors seeing his presence as a matter of prestige. Rather, the Marshall’s legacy was predominantly utilised for re-evaluating other historical experiences, such as the Second World War, the legacy of socialism, or the break-up of Yugoslavia, revealing peculiar locally
based collective and individual interests and agencies. Even the local communist officials, those most likely to problematise Stepanović’s legacy from working-class positions, were very reluctant in that respect, opting instead to discreetly sideline the Marshal from the official commemorative canon. This reluctance was also mirrored in commemorative locales through the appropriation of the ecumenist Monument of Four Religions and the controversial treatment of the Marshal’s home. Such ambivalence ultimately contributed to the undermining of the communists’ legitimacy in the late 1980s, while the circumstances of a relatively small urban setting led to a mnemonic conflict in which ad hominem arguments very often mingled with genuine ideological discord. An additional element in this conflict was the tension between the province and the capital, as the instantiation of the rupture between agencies on a local and national scale, exemplified in public response to the involvement of state officials and actors from without the community. Events occurring at the national level (breakup of federation, military conflict) found their reflection in local debates and confrontations (artistic vision of the monument, reexamination of socialist commemorative locales) due to actors constructing and crossing these scales through their political and professional activities (Zivorad Maksmimović, Bogdan Bogdanović, Drinka Radovanović).

Ultimately, the mnemonic potential of particular place was derived from the specific constellation of actors whose institutional and biographical properties made their agency be informed by processes taking place on other scales. Yet, while the developments on transnational and national scale (demise of state socialism, ethnically motivated hostilities between Yugoslav republics) could influence (as well as be utilised by) local actors in struggle for consolidating their positions in the changing socio-political order of the early 1990s, the most recent global revitalisation of the memory of the First World War failed to find fertile soil in the changed local conditions in Čačak. What is often described as travelling of memory is, thus, conditioned as much by the wider (transnational, transcultural, regional) phenomena as by intimate personal motivations and micro-contingencies for which a locally and biographically informed research prism is necessary in order to fully grasp the complexity of the local micro-cosmos of memory, as well as its representativeness for wider frameworks.

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