As Yugoslavia collapsed in the early 1990s, many observers were astonished by the belligerents' fixation with history and the seemingly sudden resurgence of “ancient ethnic hatreds”.¹ In offering an explanation, academics and journalists alike frequently pointed to the Serbs' reputed obsession with the Ottoman past and the experience of the Second World War, while neglecting the First World War. Conversely, western memory studies have revealed the Great War to be at the crux of the twentieth-century “memory boom”.² With the dual aim of shedding light on Serbian collective memory and of introducing a non-western perspective to the study of Great War memory, this essay will examine Serbian soldiers' recollections as well as the development of the conflict's master narrative from 1918 to the turn of the twenty-first century.

To this author’s knowledge, no Serbian-language study of Serbian Great War memory has been written, while English-language studies are heavily focused on British (including Commonwealth) and French war memory.³ The Serbian case can only augment the comparative study of Great War memories as it is fundamentally different to that of other belligerents: Serbia entered the conflict as an ethnically homogeneous state, but emerged from it as the preponderant plurality of an ethnically heterogeneous Yugoslavia,⁴ which politicized the conflict's commemoration in the interwar and post-1945 periods. The memory of the war was suppressed by the Communists after 1945, and while this distinguishes Serbia from the western belligerents, Yugoslavia's het-

² Jay Winter, Remembering War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 271.
⁴ The country was named the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 and was renamed Yugoslavia (“land of the South Slavs”) in 1929. For simplicity’s sake, “Yugoslavia” will be used throughout the chapter, even when referring to the period 1918–1929.
erogeneity separated it from other, more ethnically homogeneous socialist countries where pre-1945 history was also censored. Part One of this chapter examines the experiences and memories of Serbian war veterans, and charts the construction of the war’s master narrative as a religious chronicle of crucifixion and resurrection, and as an epilogue to the national epic. Part Two examines the war’s commemoration in the Yugoslav Kingdom (1918–1941), while Parts Three and Four look at the suppression of those memories during the Communist era (1945–c.1991) and their return during the national revival (c.1991–present).

**Note on Sources**

The sources that are principally used in this chapter to establish the master narrative of the First World War are: the *Ratni album* (*War Album*) edited by Colonel Andra Popović, originally published privately in 1926 and republished in 1988 in honour of the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war; and Antonije Đurić’s *Solunci govore* (*The Men of Salonika Speak*), a collection of interviews which first appeared in 1978 and has been republished numerous times since. While little is known about the individuals and creative processes behind the original *War Album*, Đurić’s work is significant in that it portrays memory on two levels, giving us insight into both the veterans’ own stories and the memory culture of the 1980s. Given their popularity and accessibility, both works are ideal primary sources for studying the master narrative which appears in the vast majority of non-Marxist Serbian secondary literature.

**1389–1918: Experiencing and Constructing the Epilogue to the National Epic**

The Serbian master narrative of the First World War holds that the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand was plotted and carried out by a group of young Bosnian Serb revolutionaries who were inspired by romantic nationalism. Following the declaration of war and Austria-Hungary’s offensive in 1914, Serbia scored stunning victories at the battles of Cer and Kolubara against a

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