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in Russian &  
East European Studies

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Be Equal in Death:**

A Local Community's Struggle to  
Remember Its Fallen Soldiers in  
the Shadow of Serbia's Civil War,  
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No. 2008, November 2010

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ISSN 0889-275X

*Image from cover:* Family members of fallen Partisans gathered in the central square of Čačak on 17 November 1956. The coffins were buried later that day in a nearby cemetery. Local residents angered the authorities in the following years by lighting candles for the dead at these two locations. Photograph courtesy of the People’s Museum of Čačak, collection “Prenos posmrtnih ostataka palih boraca u zajedničku grobnicu, 1956.”

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## **Abstract**

In the spring of 1956, a plaque was hung in the Orthodox Church in the village of Brezna, located in western Serbia. On it were carved the names of local men who had been killed fighting during the Second World War. However, contrary to Communist policy, the list included not only those who had fought with the Communist-led Partisan resistance movement, but also those they had fought against, the Chetniks. Based on archival documents, the contemporary press, and interviews with local residents, this essay reconstructs the experience of the war years in this region, the factors that led to the hanging of the plaque, and the consequences faced by the village priest for its creation. The purpose is to examine how a local community, composed of combatants and their families from both sides of the wartime and postwar ideological divide, dealt with the mandate to simultaneously remember and forget the war dead. The main argument is that the incident in Brezna was a clash between traditional local practices of inclusive commemoration of the war dead and new exclusionary forms that emerged after the Second World War, due to the fratricidal nature of wartime violence, which were supported by Communist political elites as well as many local villagers.

On the morning of 17 November 1956, the Serbian town of Čačak was alive with the activities of those remembering the dead. Local residents of all ages were gathered inside the hall of the Yugoslav People's Army. They stood in silence next to sixty-six red coffins, each marked with a five-pointed star, which held the remains of fallen Partisan soldiers. Their bones had been collected and prepared for an official burial eleven years after the end of the Second World War. At noon the crowd made its way outside. Many held wreaths, while others, especially young soldiers, carried the coffins. They were eventually set down next to a monument dedicated to the fallen, and then Radislav Nedeljković, the secretary of the local committee of the League of Communists, climbed on a podium and began to speak. "We have gathered here around the bones of our best comrades, the best sons of this region, who died heroically in the struggle for the liberation and creation of our socialist homeland. We have gathered here to pay them our final respects."<sup>1</sup> A short while later, Dragoslav Mutapović, the political commissar of the battalion to which the fallen Partisans belonged, took the microphone. After describing dramatic events during the war, he directed his words toward the families grieving for their fathers, sons, and brothers. "I share your pain, but I also share your pride in having given birth to such heroes. Do not hold it against me that I share them with you, because they belong not only to you, but to all of us, to our entire nation. . . . Praise them!"<sup>2</sup> Then military music began and the crowd was once again on the move, this time toward the graveyard. More speeches followed once the column arrived at a mass grave in the cemetery dedicated to the Partisans. The names of the fallen soldiers were read aloud and it was stressed that, having given their lives for freedom, "they should never ever be erased from memory." The ceremony concluded with a military gun salute.<sup>3</sup>

This act of remembering fallen Partisans in the Čačak region of Serbia, like thousands of others throughout Yugoslavia, reflected President Josip Broz Tito's call during the postwar period to "cultivate everywhere the great traditions and legacy of the People's Liberation War."<sup>4</sup> This was a central task—to create a cult of heroism around those considered to have given their lives for the liberation and creation of the "socialist homeland." Actively remembering these individuals embodied what Tito once referred to as the imperative to protect "everything that is positive in the history of our peoples."<sup>5</sup> The other equally crucial side of Tito's philosophy of remembering was concerned with what he considered to be a darker aspect of Yugoslavia's past, particularly with regard to the war. "It would be desirable, and we must achieve this, that everything that is negative, everything that our peoples are not able to be proud of, that we forget it all."<sup>6</sup>

This imperative to selectively remember while simultaneously forgetting aspects of the violence that occurred during the Second World War was not specific to Yugoslavia; it was widespread throughout Europe during the decades after 1945. Governments in both the East and West adopted a highly selective approach to the remembrance of wartime events and suffering in order to legitimate and stabilize their postwar political orders, and to promote national recovery and cohesion. In such an environment, as the historian Tony Judt has suggested, the memory of “things done by others to us” usually received great emphasis, while “things done by us to others” quickly got lost.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, if the remembrance of wartime victimization conjured up any unpleasant memories of defeat and collaboration, such issues were generally set aside and replaced with state-sponsored cults of heroism and resistance.<sup>8</sup> When applied to the Second World War in Yugoslavia, which quickly turned into a complex series of civil wars after an initial interstate conflict, these general dynamics of selective remembrance and enforced forgetting were bound to encounter, at best, a shaky reception in the many communities torn apart by locally-driven violence.

This essay is a study of one incident in western Serbia in which a group of villagers and an Orthodox priest differed sharply with the Communist authorities and their supporters about what was “positive” and “negative” when it came to remembering the war. Eight months before that solemn day in Čačak in November 1956, when the coffins of the fallen Partisans were carried through the city to the cemetery, a plaque was hung in an Orthodox church fifty kilometers away in a small village called Brezna. Carved on it were more than eighty names of men who died during the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 and the First World War, as well as a number of local Partisans who were killed during the Second World War. But it was the inclusion of eleven Chetniks—archenemies of the Communist Party and the Partisan Army during the years 1941–1945—that set this memorial apart. Knowledge of the plaque quickly spread to the authorities, and a confrontation eventually took place that resulted in the imprisonment of the church’s priest, Father Tihomir Veličković.

Drawing on archival documents, the contemporary press, and interviews, this reconstruction of the events in Brezna from December 1955 to July 1956 provides a unique opportunity to examine how a local community, living in a highly polarized postwar political context, attempted to remember the men who fought on opposite sides in a civil war. The main argument is that the incident in Brezna demonstrates the impossible intermingling of traditional commemorative practices with the postwar political context in which, for the first time in the community’s history, all the war dead could no longer be publicly remembered.

Important studies have been written during the past two decades about war remembrance as practiced by political and cultural elites.<sup>9</sup> More recently, scholars have shifted their focus to the dynamics of how various groups in “civil society” engage in commemoration of war and its victims.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the study of how local communities reconstituted themselves through commemorative acts in the shadow of wartime violence remains relatively uncharted terrain. We have little understanding of how small units of people engage in remembering those killed in war.<sup>11</sup> How do local agents in small communities such as villages shape the remembrance of violence? To what extent do their traditional commemorative practices affect their approach to remembering those who died by violence? Do their activities stand in opposition to the grand narratives of elites and their local supporters? In what ways do the deep divisions of civil conflicts continue to reverberate in these communities through acts of remembrance after the violence stops? Studies that analyze official commemorations, most of which attempt to explain how the winning side goes about promoting the remembrance of its losses while remaining silent about those endured by the losing side, are of little use in answering these questions. So too are works that investigate the remembrance activities of social groups such as war veterans and concentration camp survivors. Such studies generally examine how specific groups engage in remembrance, but usually do not pay much attention to how the local communities they exist in shape the possibilities and limits for this activity.<sup>12</sup>

This essay expands the field of war remembrance studies by reconstructing the dynamics of how people at the level of the local community, that is, a population small enough that its members engage in regular face-to-face interaction, dealt with the remembrance of civil violence. Regarding the Serbian village of Brezna, it is hardly surprising that a plaque which had the names of fallen soldiers from both the winning and losing side carved on it caused conflict and resulted in punishment for those believed to have been responsible for its creation. The underlying logic of commemoration of the World War Two dead across Europe—including Eastern Europe—turned on whether those who died had fought on the winning side, and thus deserved to be remembered, or on the losing side, and thus were to be forgotten.<sup>13</sup> A demonstration of this European trend through the Yugoslav case, while a worthwhile research topic, would not add substantially to what is already known about post-World War Two remembrance.<sup>14</sup> This essay breaks new ground by examining how a local community, composed of combatants and their families from *both* sides of the wartime and postwar ideological divide, dealt with the mandate to simultaneously remember and forget the dead in light of their wartime experiences and traditional commemorative practices.

The discussion that follows begins by sketching a portrait of the village of Brezna, its region, and how its residents experienced the Second World War and the first postwar decade. A brief biography of the story's main protagonist, Father Tihomir Veličković, will then be offered before the discussion turns toward reconstructing the events that unfolded in Brezna from late 1955 until mid-summer 1956. The concluding remarks will be devoted to dealing with unanswered questions, contradictions in source materials, and interpreting the significance of this local struggle over how to remember the war dead.

## The Village

Located in the Čačak region of western Serbia, the village of Brezna was engulfed in the spring of 1941 first by the Second World War, and then, by early November of the same year, a civil war.<sup>15</sup> With a population exclusively of Serbian nationality, agriculture was the predominant form of subsistence in this village of approximately thirty-four extended families.<sup>16</sup> Its residents lived in houses spread out over hilly, wooded terrain divided by poorly maintained roads, and like others in their region, were known as hard workers who took pride in a long tradition of engaging in armed resistance against foreign powers.<sup>17</sup> Their resolve would be put to the test when, in the aftermath of the German invasion that began on 6 April 1941, two competing domestic factions emerged that sought to expel the foreign occupiers and seize authority in order to determine the future structure of the state. The Partisans, under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia waged war in pursuit of socialist revolution and a new federal Yugoslavia in which all nationalities would be equal. The Chetniks, commanded by a former colonel of the Yugoslav Army, Dragoljub Mihailović, fought not only for the restoration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia under the Serbian monarchy, but also for a state in which Serbs would be unified while most non-Serbs, especially Muslims, would be extirpated.<sup>18</sup>

While the two factions did initially collaborate against the Germans, the vast ideological gulf that separated them left little space for sustained collective action. As two historians of the Čačak region have suggested, “the Partisans saw the Chetniks as domestic traitors and Serb fascists. The Chetniks saw the Partisans as traitors of the Serbian nation and *srpstvo* [Serbdom].”<sup>19</sup> By November 1941, this ideological chasm led to the outbreak of a civil war that quickly created an environment of intense hostility among neighbors and even within families that lasted long after

the formal end of the war in 1945. The battles between the two factions frequently led to mutual killings, often in bloody and sadistic ways. It was not uncommon for bodies to be mutilated after fighting, including decapitation. With each wave of killing came more sorrow, anger, and hatred, all of which had the effect of further dividing villages, neighbors, and families.<sup>20</sup> It appears that the Partisans had significant support in the Takovo region where the village of Brezna is located. However, immediately to the west was the heartland of the Chetnik movement. The close location of this fault line, which led to brutal fighting in the area, was most likely a central reason that the Takovo region had one of the highest death rates in the wider area during the war.<sup>21</sup>

In 1944, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia formed a series of commissions to investigate war crimes committed during the years 1941–1945, and its many local organs continued their work until 1947. Investigators operated with clear political objectives such as settling scores with wartime enemies and postwar political opponents. As a result, information on killings that Partisans committed does not exist. In addition, the survivors of wartime violence who testified before the commissions were often under political pressure that colored what they said, which means the documents present a skewed portrait of wartime events. Nonetheless, the archival material available for the village of Brezna and its surrounding region is useful for sketching out some of the general dynamics of wartime violence to better understand what local residents experienced between 1941 and 1945.

It appears that a key feature of the violence was what the historian Jan Gross has called “the privatization of politics.”<sup>22</sup> The Nazi invasion destabilized the traditional order in the region’s villages, presenting individuals with unprecedented opportunities to settle personal scores, as well as to profit by plundering their neighbors. Chetniks and their local supporters often gave lists to the Germans of neighbors whom they suspected of being Partisans or their supporters. The individuals in question were then arrested and sent to prisons and concentration camps. Many were simply executed. In other cases, the Chetniks joined the Germans on these roundups of suspected Partisans and sometimes participated in the killings.<sup>23</sup> A majority of victims appear to have been male. It was not uncommon for the surviving female relatives to have no information for years as to whether or not those arrested were dead or alive.<sup>24</sup> What was striking about much of this violence was its intimacy: neighbors frequently denounced their lifelong neighbors to the Nazis and then participated in murdering them and stealing their property.<sup>25</sup>

Cycles of revenge killings were another feature of the violence. A series of murders between December 1941 and March 1942 in Takovo, located not far from

Brezna, vividly illustrates this pattern. One local resident decided to show the Germans where Partisans from the village were hiding. It appears that several were arrested and killed because of this man's information. In response, local Partisans executed the informer, whose brother then incited several local Chetniks to cut the throat of the Partisan responsible for killing his brother.<sup>26</sup> This dynamic, in which local residents, Partisans, Chetniks, and the Germans committed violence against each other, while simultaneously using each other to achieve various objectives, was a regular occurrence during the war. Each wave of killing led to more killing as the desire for revenge rapidly snowballed.

While war against foreign enemies had been a feature of life in the region since the early nineteenth century, the Second World War triggered an unprecedented dynamic in the local community: widespread killing among neighbors and even family members. The formal end of the war in May 1945 did not bring a halt to this fratricidal violence in the Čačak region. After the Partisans defeated the Chetniks they pursued a policy of making their enemy "pay in blood."<sup>27</sup> A key event in the Communist regime's settling of scores with the Chetniks was the capture in 1946 of Dragoljub Mihailović, his subsequent trial (along with twenty-three other leading Chetnik figures), and his execution.<sup>28</sup> Despite the trial, confrontations between the new authorities and the Chetniks continued in Brezna for several years. This was the case throughout the entire Čačak region, as more than a few Chetniks fled to the forests and continued to attack and evade the Communist regime, with some holding out as late as 1956.<sup>29</sup> The various organs of state security hunted down these renegade groups and individuals and had no qualms about executing those whom they suspected of aiding them.<sup>30</sup> Often the bodies of Chetniks who had been "liquidated" were put on display in villages for days at a time in order to demonstrate to the public that the Communist regime was in control.<sup>31</sup> The authorities devoted special attention to "pacifying" the entire Čačak region, as it was located very close to Ravna Gora, the mountains where Dragoljub Mihailović and his associates formed the Chetnik movement in 1941. Čačak was considered to be a heartland of support for the Chetniks, and thus the Communist regime undertook extra effort there to destroy all real and perceived remnants of those fighters.

Yet while state security could physically remove the remaining Chetniks, it had much more difficulty in controlling how people remembered them. Already during the war, the Partisans and their supporters had begun to destroy graves built in memory of Chetniks and other "enemies of the people" (*narodni neprijatelji*).<sup>32</sup> As in many post-World War Two societies, it was a Communist imperative both to vilify their wartime opponents and to destroy any physical signs of remembrance

dedicated to them.<sup>33</sup> One group that threatened to derail this project consisted of orthodox priests who lived in the Čačak region. The authorities regarded the Serbian Orthodox Church as a bastion of the Chetnik Movement, as well as of the Serbian monarchy that ruled Yugoslavia during the interwar period.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, the Communist Party of Serbia instructed its cadres in the localities to keep a close eye on the clergy and to be alert for any signs of “reactionary activity.”<sup>35</sup>

The Party had special concern when it came to the priests of the Čačak region. A regional committee of the Party reported in 1946 that out of eighty-three priests, over 90 percent were either passive or directly opposed to the new authorities. Informants who attended church noted that priests frequently ended their sermons by saying, “Long Live the King!” (*živeo Kralj!*), or “For the King and the Fatherland, amen,” (*za Kralja i otadžbinu, amin*), which were slogans that the Chetniks used during the war.<sup>36</sup> Such information led the authorities to conclude that most of the region’s priests were “enemy elements.”

In Brezna, the committee noted that the situation was especially unfavorable. The village priest, Father Miodrag Milovanović, was described as having been an active Chetnik supporter. As a regional official of the Ravna Gora Council, he publicly declared his total opposition to the Partisans during the war, even insisting that local residents take up arms against the Communists. His stance, the committee noted, had not changed since 1945.<sup>37</sup> As state security continued to hunt down and execute Chetniks from Brezna during the second half of the 1940s, Father Milovanović either passed away or left the village. Whatever the case, his parish found itself without a priest by 1950. That is, until a new priest named Tihomir Veličković arrived.

## The Priest

His name was Tihomir Veličković, but to many in Brezna he was known simply as “fast legs” (*brze noge*) because of his endless amounts of energy and ceaseless activity.<sup>38</sup> Born in 1918 in the village of Donja Gorevnica, he grew up in a large rural family that worked the land in order to survive. His childhood consisted of assisting with agricultural work and attending school. The first extended trip he took outside his village was when he did his army service for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1940. Stationed in Belgrade, he lived the life of an average soldier.<sup>39</sup>

According to interviews with his wife and children in 2005, he was at home when the Germans invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941. Mobilized and immediately sent to defend the town of Valjevo, he and his unit eventually headed toward the

bridge over the Danube near the town of Pančevo, not far from Belgrade. It was there that he experienced firsthand the disintegration of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. With the German *blitzkrieg* and subsequent victory, soldiers found themselves in the uniform of a state that had suddenly ceased to exist. In response to this chaos, Tihomir Veličković returned home as quickly as possible. Some Partisan veterans have claimed that he joined the Chetniks at some point during the war; however, according to his family, he remained hidden at home and thus avoided mobilization by both the Chetniks and Partisans.<sup>40</sup> Documents from the war crimes commission formed by the Communist Party that investigated German and Chetnik killings in the Donja Gorevnica region do not mention Tihomir Veličković as having been a Chetnik, or as guilty of any crime committed during the years 1941–1945.<sup>41</sup> According to the existing evidence, it is thus possible that he did not fight with any armed group during the war.

During the first few years after 1945, Tihomir Veličković, like most others in the region, participated in Communist-led “work actions” (*radne akcije*) geared toward rebuilding the country’s shattered infrastructure. In 1946, he met and married a young woman named Rosanda. They had three children, a son Petar, and two daughters, Ljubinka and Milanka. Then, around the same time, Tihomir Veličković decided to begin his studies to become an orthodox priest. After finishing four years of theological training he received his first posting in the village of Brezna in 1950. Waiting for him was an old church and a village still deeply divided and recovering from the physical and psychological wounds of the Second World War.<sup>42</sup> Adding to the tension was the ongoing attempt by the Party to forcibly collectivize agriculture, which affected the majority of the population. The ensuing conflicts, resulting in a sizable number of arrests, as well as passive and active peasant resistance, contributed to the already polarized environment in the countryside.<sup>43</sup>

Given the Communist regime’s hostility to the Serbian Orthodox Church, it is not surprising that Father Veličković had his first run-in with the authorities shortly after beginning his work in Brezna. Many priests who had supported the Chetniks and other groups opposed to the Partisans during the war fled abroad in 1945, to Germany, Canada, the United States, and other countries. But they did not give up hope that one day the Communist regime would crumble, and they strove to maintain contact with their counterparts in Serbia. One group based in Munich conducted a mass mailing of Serbian religious calendars, speeches by nationalist politicians, and photographs of saints and wartime heroes to churches, monasteries, and individuals in Serbia. On a day sometime in 1953 one of their packages arrived for Father Veličković.<sup>44</sup>

Post office workers in the town of Gornji Milanovac opened the box and discovered a Serbian calendar with pictures of King Petar of Yugoslavia, Saint Sava, and Dragoljub Mihailović, the Chetnik leader executed in 1946.<sup>45</sup> Father Veličković was allowed to receive the package, but only because the authorities wanted to see if he would report its contents as “anti-state.” He did not, and state security ordered him to appear for an interrogation.<sup>46</sup> Thus already by 1953, the authorities had their eyes on the new priest in Brezna. While known as “fast legs” to many in his parish, he now was considered by those working in the Ministry of Internal Affairs as a pro-Chetnik element.

## The Plaque

Unconcerned with what the authorities thought of him, Father Veličković went back to Brezna after his interrogation and continued his work. Attending to the needs of those in his parish in the early 1950s, meant assisting people still suffering from the loss of loved ones during the Second World War. Those in Brezna who happened to be relatives of “Fallen Fighters” (*pali borci*) or “Victims of Fascist Terror” (*žrtve fašističkog terora*), the two categories that the Communist regime created for those it deemed to have died in the service of the Partisan Movement, had multiple outlets for their grief.<sup>47</sup> With the formation in 1947 of the Union of Fighters of the People’s Liberation War, known as SBNOR (Savez boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata), the Communist regime created a powerful organization of Partisan veterans which sought to cultivate and protect the memory of those who were killed fighting for the Partisan cause.<sup>48</sup> Its members throughout Yugoslavia undertook a massive project, beginning in the early 1950s, of landscaping the physical environment with thousands of monuments and graves to Fallen Fighters. By the second half of the decade, nearly three thousand such memorial sites had been built in Serbia alone.<sup>49</sup> They also organized commemorations and burials of remains discovered in the years after 1945. In short, families in Brezna of those killed in the name of the Partisan cause had a considerable amount of moral and financial support available to them.<sup>50</sup>

It was not unheard of, however, for other organizations and individuals to take the initiative in burying and building monuments to those killed in the war.<sup>51</sup> Some of them, particularly during the first decade after the war, were members of the clergy. For example, in 1953, a full thirteen years before the Communist authorities built a memorial to the many thousands murdered at the notorious concentration camp Jasenovac in Croatia, many of whom were Serb civilians, local orthodox priests



Figure 1: Father Tihomir Veličković with his wife Rosanda and his daughters Milanka (left) and Ljubinka (right) in front of the church in Brezna in the spring of 1956. His son Petar is not pictured. Photo courtesy of the Veličković family.

had already begun to collect contributions in order to build a church near the site in memory of the victims.<sup>52</sup> The involvement of priests from the Serbian Orthodox Church in such activities was in large part rooted in the particular nature and central importance of “the cult of the dead” (*kult mrtvih*) in the practice of Serbian Orthodoxy.<sup>53</sup> Especially in rural areas, caring for the dead blends Orthodox Christianity with pagan practices, based on the belief that a soul inhabits a person’s body and lives forever in the “other world” (*drugi svet*) once that body dies. For this transition to take place, however, the living must find ways to regulate their relations with the souls of the dead.<sup>54</sup> As a result, an elaborate set of practices emerged over the centuries. These include holding feasts immediately after burial and at regular intervals thereafter, burning incense and candles during such gatherings, placing money in the mouth or pocket of the deceased, and building a proper gravestone.<sup>55</sup> All such rituals are geared toward assisting the souls of the dead in gaining entrance into, and existing peacefully in, the “other world.”<sup>56</sup> Serbian priests had historically taken a leading role in guiding their communities through many of these rituals. The centrality of their position grew in importance with the increasing numbers of dead resulting from Serbia’s wars against the Ottoman authorities during the nineteenth century, and the carnage of the Balkan Wars and First World War.<sup>57</sup>

Given these long-standing traditions and practices, it was not so out of the ordinary when some of the residents of Brezna assembled with Father Veličković in the village church on a Sunday in December in 1955 to discuss building a memorial for those killed in the war.<sup>58</sup> It is unclear who first suggested the idea of carving the names of the dead on a plaque. Hanging on the wall while they talked was such a plaque with the names of all those from Brezna who lost their lives in the Balkan and First World Wars. Perhaps those present looked at it while they debated what to do and felt that the names of those killed in the most recent war needed to be added to it. Historically, it was a common practice in Serbia to carve names of the war dead on existing plaques, or create new plaques that would include names of both the new and old fallen soldiers.<sup>59</sup> There were also several plaques attached to the outside of the church, as well as a number of gravestones in the nearby cemetery, which were dedicated to local soldiers who had died in wars during the nineteenth century.<sup>60</sup> Such objects of remembrance may have also provided inspiration for those meeting in the church. After all, beginning with the First Serbian Uprising (*Prvi srpski ustanak*) in 1804 against the Ottoman authorities, the trend in Serbia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been to commemorate all the men killed in war with stone monuments and plaques. These objects fostered an intimate connection between the fallen soldiers and the freedom of the fatherland

(*otadžbina*) and Serbdom (*srpstvo*) that they had purportedly given their lives for. The fallen were in effect holy martyrs, and it was considered a sin not to remember them.<sup>61</sup> Whenever possible, local villagers would go to great lengths to retrieve the remains of the fallen in order to have a proper burial. If feasible, monuments called *krajputaši* (meaning “a next-to-the-road monument”) were placed beside the main road in a village, especially for those men killed far from home. Valuable plots of land were often made available for such monuments, and gardens frequently were cultivated around them.<sup>62</sup> These practices reflected the importance that local residents attached to commemorating the war dead.

All these long-term traditions likely played some role in motivating the group in Brezna to decide to build a monument on that Sunday in December. They agreed to collect contributions from those who wished to have the names of their relatives carved on a new plaque that would be hung in the church, and they decided that Father Veličković would act as the coordinator of the project. He would collect funds from the families and find the stonecutter to carve the names.<sup>63</sup>

Even though many of Brezna’s residents barely had enough bread to eat, those who participated found ways to make a contribution so that the names of their relatives could be added to the list.<sup>64</sup> While perhaps economically illogical, this makes sense when interpreted with reference to the specific understandings of the cult of the dead in rural Serbia, particularly in regard to those killed in war. It is believed that those who die unnatural deaths and whose graves are unknown—two common features of individuals killed in war—do not easily enter “the other world.” Their souls are considered especially dangerous because they roam around this world traumatizing the living. The unknown location of their graves makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the living to perform the necessary death rituals, the great majority of which revolve around practices at the gravesite.<sup>65</sup> Assisting the soul in its journey to the next world is only possible with the building of a gravestone, which has a twofold function: it is a house for the deceased’s soul and provides a place for the living to fulfill their obligations to the dead. All this enables the soul to enter and exist peacefully in “the other world.”<sup>66</sup>

It was thus no surprise that families in Brezna wished to create a plaque for their loved ones, many of whom had died far from home.<sup>67</sup> The plaque would not only serve as a permanent remembrance of those killed; it could also provide those in mourning with an additional site at which to perform certain death rituals. Of equal importance, the plaque would show the fallen soldiers a proper level of respect, given that they had died for freedom. In the village setting, the tradition of holding such heroic individuals in the highest regard had deep historical roots. The plaque

would thus bestow respect upon the fallen soldiers and appropriately celebrate their ultimate sacrifice for the welfare of the community.<sup>68</sup> Mothers of those killed, who were often seen in the church praying and crying for their dead sons, were among those who apparently felt most strongly about the need to commemorate their loved ones. Several fathers and other male relatives of fallen soldiers appeared to have shared these sentiments. Discussing together the need for a memorial and agreeing to collect money for the plaque seems to have presented an opportunity for a number of villagers to remember the fallen soldiers in a way in accordance with traditional practices and understandings about the dead.<sup>69</sup>

In the first few months of 1956, Father Veličković traveled the winding roads from Brezna to Gornji Milanovac and back again through other small villages such as Beršići, Takovo, and Leušci, meeting families and collecting money. Having gathered together 82,000 dinars and a list of names, he went to Gornji Branetići where he met Radivoje Vasović, a stone carver. Father Veličković presented him with the list and an inscription to be carved on the plaque. Out of the eighty-two names, eighteen were men who had been killed during the Second World War, while the rest had fallen in the Balkan and First World Wars. The work was completed swiftly and the plaque was hung in the church on 10 March 1956. Those present that day brought with them two tables and covered them with food and *rakija* (home-made wine). There they sat for several hours, eating and drinking while remembering the war dead.<sup>70</sup>

## The Offense

Then the problems began. It was not long before word spread about the plaque among some of Brezna's residents who had not participated in its creation. What raised some people's eyebrows was its inscription, which read as follows: "Those Who Gave Their Lives for the Freedom and Unification of the Serb People from 1941 until 1947."<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that this formulation was in keeping with the language that the Serbian Orthodox Church had used historically when commemorating fallen soldiers.<sup>72</sup> It was also entirely in keeping with inscriptions on war monuments built before the Second World War, which generally stressed the soldiers' heroic sacrifice for "freedom," "unity," and "Serbdom."<sup>73</sup> However, several elements of the inscription diverged from the common practice under the Communist regime. To begin with, it was not customary in Serbia, or, for that matter, anywhere in Yugoslavia, to emphasize the struggle during the war for the "freedom"

or “unification” of a particular nationality.<sup>74</sup> Such a linkage was construed as an affront against the “Brotherhood and Unity” (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) of the multinational Partisan army. Inscriptions instead used nonnational terms such as “Fallen Fighters” or “Victims of Fascist Terror.”<sup>75</sup> Moreover, their deaths were not for the unity and freedom of a particular people, but rather for the creation of the “Socialist Homeland” (*socijalistička domovina*).

Much more troubling, however, were the dates. The period from 1941 to 1945, which linked the beginning of the war with the Partisan uprising during the summer of 1941, and its end with the surrender of the Germans in May 1945, was for Yugoslavia’s Communist regime the only acceptable time frame for the war.<sup>76</sup> The plaque in Brezna extended this to 1947 because some of those listed had actually been killed two years after the formal end of the war. For some residents of Brezna, this was by far the most disturbing aspect of the plaque: they quickly determined that it included more than a few local men who had fought as Chetniks during the war. More shocking, some had managed to evade state security until 1947 when they were finally executed. The chronology and the names on the plaque therefore referred not to the Communist construct called the “People’s Liberation War” of 1941–1945 and its “Fallen Fighters”; instead, it was a list of the residents of Brezna—both Partisans and Chetniks—who were killed in the fighting that began between the two in 1941 and ended with the date of the last man’s death in the conflict between remnants of the Chetniks and state security in 1947. All their names were carved in the same way and were placed next to one another as if to stress that all were equal in death and should be remembered in the same way.<sup>77</sup>

It was not long before several local residents informed the regional authorities in Gornji Milanovac about the plaque in the church.<sup>78</sup> State security then faced the dilemma of how to respond. It was already concerned about the political situation in Brezna because of its wartime anti-Communist priest, Father Milovanović, and his successor, Father Veličković. After the war, state security’s general practice had been to arrest, sometimes place on trial, and either imprison or execute those priests whom it considered responsible for reactionary activities.<sup>79</sup> The hanging of the plaque in Brezna, however, happened to occur after a shift in the Communist regime’s approach to dealing with the clergy. Instead of sending a small detachment to deal quietly with Father Veličković, the local authorities followed new instructions issued in 1952 by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia:

It has been determined that in the struggle against the reactionary clergy, the exclusive use of the organs of internal affairs [i.e., state security]—sometimes employing illegal measures—is flawed. Moreover, these sorts of measures have

in some cases strengthened the reactionary clergy. It is therefore necessary to mobilize all party and mass organizations, especially the Communist Youth and the People's Front, in the political struggle against reactionary priests. This should be carried out through conferences, meetings, etc.<sup>80</sup>

This strategic shift sought to mobilize the greater population behind the regime in dealing with what it considered to be troublesome members of the clergy.<sup>81</sup> In Brezna, this directive most likely provided the impetus for local authorities to call upon all villagers to meet and discuss what to do about the plaque in the church.

## The Meeting

It was a sunny spring day in 1956 when around three hundred people gathered at noon in Brezna's cooperative farm building.<sup>82</sup> Many of those present were local residents, but a sizable number had also come from nearby villages. While some were already aware of the plaque, others had no idea why the meeting had been called. They quieted down when the president of the Takovo region (to which Brezna belonged), Đorđe Cajić, began the meeting by reading a complaint written by the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War condemning the plaque in Brezna for putting the names of "evildoers" (*zlikovci*) alongside fallen Partisans. The Union said that some residents of Brezna had given money for the plaque, listed the names of the Chetniks that had been carved on it, and claimed that Father Veličković had masterminded and carried out the entire project.<sup>83</sup>

Cajić finished reading the document and then asked if anyone wanted to speak. Over the next hour, speaker after speaker stood and described the losses they had endured during the war years. One man told of a father and son whose throats the Chetniks had cut right next to the building where the meeting was taking place. Others, with a mixture of tears and anger, recounted how some of the Chetniks whose names were on the plaque had murdered members of their families. And a woman recounted how one of those men had viciously killed her young daughter in the nearby village of Leušci.<sup>84</sup>

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the telling of these stories was completely spontaneous, or perhaps, at least partially, the result of conversations between members of state security and local villagers before the meeting. The authorities may have encouraged certain individuals in the crowd to recount their wartime experiences as a way of inciting others to do the same. This had the effect of dramatically raising emotions in the room, which is most likely what the authorities wanted. It

is also likely that more than ten years of constant Communist propaganda about the war, in which Partisans were portrayed as heroes and Chetniks as enemies, almost certainly exerted considerable influence on how villagers recounted their memories of wartime loss. They may have consciously tried to make their stories fit into the Communist regime's overarching wartime narrative of "good" Partisans, who strove to liberate the people, and "evil" Chetniks who betrayed and murdered them. If this was the case, the recounting of stories at the meeting was not only about telling "what happened" during the war, but also about using the narration of war memories to fit oneself into the polarized postwar ideological environment in the village.

Whatever the case, the telling of wartime stories appears to have triggered a flood of painful memories among many of those present. By around 1:30 p.m. emotions in the room had risen dramatically, coalescing into a mixture of intense anger and sadness. It was at this point that President Cajjić suggested that everyone walk together to the church in order to pull down and destroy the plaque. Several members of state security were in attendance at the meeting, and they had obviously prepared for such an action by bringing large pickaxes with them. Everyone in the room agreed. They streamed out of the building, marching together in a long column toward the church. It took only a few minutes for them to cover the three hundred meters, and then they slowly fanned out around the entrance, anxious to have a look at the plaque. The door, however, was locked, and soon a resident of Brezna appeared who had not been present at the meeting. It was Father Veličković.<sup>85</sup>

## **The Confrontation**

"Give us the keys!" the members of state security apparently shouted. "Give us the keys now!" Local residents remember two different versions of what happened next. The first says that Father Veličković, apparently frightened by the large crowd, immediately handed the keys over.<sup>86</sup> But others claim that a much more serious confrontation ensued: "I will not!" he supposedly yelled back, refusing to move away from the door. "I'm not giving up the keys!" The two sides then shouted back and forth in the same way for around ten minutes.<sup>87</sup>

According to this second version, Father Veličković apparently continued to defend the entrance of the church. When he extended his arms, as if to provide the doorway with an extra layer of protection, two members of state security, dressed in long leather coats and high boots, supposedly rushed forward and grabbed him. They took him by the head and began to bang his skull on the door to the church.

While they assaulted him, several in the crowd yelled out: “Come on priest, give up the keys! What do you want? For them to kill you?” It was at this point that Father Veličković either handed the keys over or they fell from his hands while he was being attacked.<sup>88</sup>

The “truth” about what happened in front of the church may be impossible to determine. One of the two differing interpretations may be more accurate, but the disparate memories may reveal less about those few moments by the door, and more about how local residents have chosen to remember the event in light of their personal needs and political views. For a former Partisan who agreed to be interviewed, Father Veličković was terrified of the crowd and immediately handed over the keys. He portrayed Father Veličković as weak and cowardly and the incident as a simple battle between “good” (those marching to the church) and “evil” (Father Veličković and the Chetniks whose names were carved on the plaque). For others who agreed to be interviewed about the incident, including Father Veličković’s wife and son, his words of resistance and the assault he endured make him appear as a fighter and martyr. All, some, or none of these acts and qualities may be true; yet they vividly reveal how the event continues to polarize historical memory among eyewitnesses, and how the personal views of an eyewitness continue to play a decisive role in shaping competing interpretations of the confrontation.

Regardless of what happened in front of the church, the officers quickly opened the door and rushed inside, followed by several members of the crowd. In a matter of seconds those outside could hear the pickaxes prying the plaque from the wall. After a minute or two it fell to the ground, making a loud noise, but did not break. Those inside the church then dragged it to a side entrance. They pushed the door open, threw the plaque out, and set about smashing it with the pickaxes. Some from the crowd began to walk toward the corner of the church to see what was happening. The closer they came the better they could hear the officers cursing as they took turns hammering away at the slab of stone. As more gathered around the side of the church, some caught a glimpse of the plaque as it shattered into several pieces.<sup>89</sup>

## **The Trial**

Around a month later, on 2 June 1956, the authorities again summoned Father Veličković to Gornji Milanovac. This time, however, he was not to report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for an interrogation. Instead, he was to appear in the district court to stand trial. Before he left his house that day his wife Rosanda asked



The Church of Saint Dimitrija in Brezna. The main entrance is located in the lower left of the photograph. This is where the crowd confronted Father Veličković. After entering through this door, they threw the plaque out through another door located on the opposite side of the church, where state security smashed it. Branko Vujović, "Brezna: skica za kulturno-istorijsku monografiju naselja," *Zbornik radova Narodnog muzeja Čačak*, 11, (1981): photograph 14, 33.

him if he was afraid. He was not, he told her. He believed in God and felt that if he was to be punished in some way, then that was God's will. He was ready to accept whatever sentence the court handed down.<sup>90</sup>

Father Veličković was unaware that state security had already spent the past weeks interrogating a number of Brezna's residents, as well as others in nearby villages, about the entire incident.<sup>91</sup> Several had been present in the church in December 1955 when the decision to erect a plaque was made. Some had given money to have the names of their relatives written on it. One was the man who had cut the stone and carved the inscription and names.

It thus appeared that the authorities had struck a bargain with those whom they had questioned: in exchange for not being prosecuted, a number of villagers who were directly involved with the creation of the plaque would serve as the chief witnesses against Father Veličković. So when the priest from Brezna entered the courtroom, he saw not only the judge and other officials, he also recognized eight of his neighbors and a number of others from nearby villages. They were waiting to be called to testify against him.<sup>92</sup>

The case against Father Veličković was based on the claim that he had broken Law 311 of the criminal code, which prohibited the misuse of religion for any kind of political purpose. Breaking this law carried with it the punishment of up to two years in prison.<sup>93</sup> In order to convict, the prosecutors sought to establish the priest's guilt in four areas: first, he bore chief responsibility for the creation and hanging of the plaque; second, he intentionally decided to have the names of known Chetniks carved on it; third, he had not sought permission from the proper authorities to carry this out; and, finally, his actions, as well as his personal history, made him dangerous to the existing social order.

The trial began with the prosecutors showing the court a photograph of the plaque taken by state security.<sup>94</sup> Eleven of the names carved on it were of known Chetniks. Seven had been killed fighting the Partisans, while four had survived the formal end of the conflict. They had then continued to hide from, and fight against, the Communist regime. During the first two years after the war state security had managed to execute three of them, including Miodrag Kovačević, known to the authorities by his nickname "the Pistol," and a father and son, Milojko and Tihomir Borovnjak. The fourth, Živojin Žižović, was eventually arrested by state security, put on trial for war crimes, and executed.<sup>95</sup> The prosecutors stressed that all four of these men had committed "severe and mass crimes" during and after the war against the supporters of the People's Liberation Movement. Because of their acts, they were especially well known to the residents of Brezna and other nearby villages.<sup>96</sup>

The prosecutors then sought to establish that Father Veličković was the sole organizer of the project. Two witnesses testified that after finishing church services on a Sunday in December 1955, Father Veličković had called upon all those present to give what they could so that a plaque could be built in memory of the local soldiers killed in the war. He was the one, they said, who visited families, asked for their participation, and collected the money. He was the one who found a stone carver and paid for the construction of the plaque.<sup>97</sup> In short, the testimony of these men supported the contention of the prosecutors that Father Veličković had acted alone in conceiving and carrying out the entire process.

The testimony by another witness strengthened this thesis. Aleksandar Žižović (grandson of Živojin Žižović, the Chetnik whom state security had arrested and executed) explained that Father Veličković had asked him if he wanted his grandfather's name on the plaque. Aleksandar agreed. But he also stressed that the priest had never inquired about how or under what circumstances the man had been killed. This part of his testimony raised a larger question: Did Father Veličković believe such issues held any importance in determining which names of Brezna's fallen soldiers could appear on the plaque? His comments at the time, as recalled by this witness, provide the beginnings of an answer. "Every man's name can be written [on the plaque]," he told Aleksandar, "regardless of how he was killed or which side he fought for."<sup>98</sup> Such a view was obviously in direct opposition to that of the authorities and their supporters: only those judged to have died in the war serving the Partisan cause could be publicly remembered and memorialized.

The testimony of another witness showed that Father Veličković was not alone in challenging the official policy. Radivoje Vasović, the man who carved the plaque, recalled that Father Veličković had brought him a list of names and an inscription. Initially, he paid little attention to either. Later, another resident of Brezna, Đorđe Filipović, brought him a revised list, and it was only then he realized that the names of several Chetniks were included. As a member of both the Communist Party and the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War, Vasović was concerned and attempted to warn Filipović not to include these names on the plaque. But Filipović responded: "The church is building the plaque and, regardless of how people were killed, faith does not divide them."<sup>99</sup>

It thus emerged during the trial that at least some of those involved in the project (Father Veličković and Đorđe Filipović) shared the view that anyone killed fighting in the war had the right to be remembered on the plaque. They applied this conception of remembrance not only to Chetniks, but also to Partisans. Several fathers testified that they had given money to have the names of their Partisan sons included. They

told the court that they were especially offended to see the memory of their boys desecrated by having their names—those of “real warriors” (*pravi ratnici*), as one man put it—placed next to those of Chetniks.<sup>100</sup> One in particular said that it was exceptionally painful for him to see the name of the Chetnik Miodrag Kovačević on the plaque, because his son, whose name was only a few inches away, had died in a battle against that man.<sup>101</sup>

But Father Veličković’s view on this matter, as remembered by witnesses during the trial, did not offer relief to those who sought to make political divisions and enforce a hierarchy among the dead. Jeremija Borovnjak, the son and brother of the Chetniks Tihomir and Milojko Borovnjak, testified that he had asked Father Veličković, when the priest invited him to have their names carved on the plaque, whether doing so was in accordance with the law. The reply he received was unambiguous: “The church,” he said, “does not divide people by the side they died fighting for.” To this he added that anyone who gave the required amount of money could have a relative’s name on the plaque, regardless of how that person had been killed during the war.<sup>102</sup>

Father Veličković had provoked some of his neighbors and the authorities not only because he had allowed the names of Chetniks to be carved on a plaque, which in itself was a major offense. He had gone even further by hanging a plaque with the names of both Partisans and Chetniks on it, thus ignoring the regime’s binary division of “heroes” (the Partisans and their supporters) and “enemies” (all those opposed to them in some way). For him, it seems, all were equal in death, and all had the right to be publicly remembered.

The prosecutors, however, were not interested in probing the nuances of Father Veličković’s approach to remembering fallen soldiers. In their eyes he was simply a reactionary priest who made a conscious decision to have the names of “renegades and enemies” carved on the plaque next to those of Partisans.<sup>103</sup> They now sought to demonstrate this in court. The testimony of a number of witnesses, especially from the relatives of the deceased Chetniks, suggested that Father Veličković was indeed aware that not all the names were of Partisans. Aleksandar Žižović testified that the priest had on several occasions come to his house, and while he never explicitly mentioned that his grandfather had been a Chetnik, he felt that Father Veličković understood that state security had executed him after the war. In the same vein, Jeremija Borovnjak said that he could not remember whether he had actually admitted that his father and brother had been killed as Chetniks or had simply said that they had died while fighting on “the other side.”<sup>104</sup>

The prosecutors argued that after the plaque had been carved and hung in the church several villagers warned Father Veličković about the danger of including the names of the Chetniks. One witness testified that he had immediately recognized the names and wasted no time in alerting Father Veličković. The priest claimed that he did not know the history of those men and that he was not sure what could be done now that the plaque was finished. Two other residents of Brezna recalled that after mentioning that some of the names were Chetniks, Father Veličković told them that he did not feel that he was responsible for any wrongdoing, because he had no idea who the men were or what they had done during the war.<sup>105</sup> Radivoje Vasović, the stone mason, said that after realizing some of the names were Chetniks he told Father Veličković not to hang plaque. The priest, he said, ignored his warning, and told him that the plaque would be raised in the church as it had been carved, but added that the names could be erased if the authorities asked questions.<sup>106</sup>

The prosecutors then turned to questioning Father Veličković's work as a priest. The deputy archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church from Gornji Milanovac, Petar Ljubičić, testified that only the higher authorities in the church, as well as the appropriate organs of local government, could grant permission to hang such a plaque. Apparently Father Veličković had not sought the necessary approval from either.<sup>107</sup> Another priest from the region took the stand and told the court that while at a funeral in 1953, Father Veličković had shown him what he called a "real Serbian calendar" which included pictures of St. Sava, King Petar, and the notorious leader of the Chetnik movement, Dragoljub Mihailović.<sup>108</sup> The prosecutors argued that these behaviors demonstrated a misuse of his duties as a priest that constituted violations of the constitutional order.

With the trial nearly over, only one task remained for the prosecutors: to expose Father Veličković as an "enemy of the people." To accomplish this, they introduced a final witness and two documents. Miodrag Acović testified that he had placed a wreath in the church for his son, a Partisan. Other parents of fallen Partisan soldiers had done the same. This demonstrated how the plaque in the church had the support of families of both fallen Chetniks and Partisans, even though they may not have been aware of this fact when they gave contributions. Father Veličković, he said, had then taken these wreaths and thrown them into the yard directly outside the church. When confronted as to why he did this, the priest purportedly said that it was his business, and that he was the boss of the church and not anyone else.<sup>109</sup> This testimony painted Father Veličković as a man who had no qualms about desecrating the memory of fallen Partisan soldiers.

Two final documents then linked Father Veličković directly to the Chetniks whose names were on the plaque. First, a report from the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War from the municipality of Mrčajevci revealed that one of the names—Radomir Veličković—had been Father Veličković's uncle. He had fought with the Chetniks in many battles during the war, and, in 1944, the Partisans had executed him.<sup>110</sup> So much, it seemed, for Father Veličković's claim that he did not know anything about the history of the men whose names appeared on the plaque. Second, a collective complaint, written again by the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War, claimed that Father Veličković was guilty of much more than simply having "acted against the social order on numerous occasions" as a priest; the document asserted that he had been a Chetnik during the war, although he had managed to conceal this from the authorities since liberation.<sup>111</sup> With these revelations reverberating through the courtroom, the prosecutors brought their case to a close.

The court now gave Father Veličković the chance to defend himself. The records of the trial, however, do not contain any stenographic notes of what he actually said. The only information available is a short summary of his comments in which he asserted that he did not know who the people were whose names were on the plaque. To this he added that he had not received notification from anyone about any impending problems with hanging the plaque. The court dismissed his defense, arguing that he had indeed received ample warning, citing the testimony of those witnesses who said they had told him about the danger of including the names of Chetniks. The court placed special emphasis on the testimony of Jeremija Borovnjak, the man who had, in effect, told the priest that his father and brother had been killed fighting as Chetniks. That he had gone ahead and placed the names of these "well-known war criminals" on the plaque demonstrated in the court's eyes that Father Veličković had made a clearly informed and intentional decision about what he did.<sup>112</sup>

After hearing this defense, and taking into consideration the testimony of the witnesses and the documents that the prosecutors presented, the court rendered its verdict. It found Father Veličković guilty of misusing his duties as a priest for a political purpose for three reasons: first, he was responsible for the creation of a plaque that honored (among others) eleven Chetniks killed between the years 1941–1947; second, he had hung this plaque in the church in Brezna without having sought proper approval from the authorities; finally, he demonstrated a high level of "stubborn and persistent criminal will," as he had consciously ignored the warnings from a number of people that his acts were harmful. In so doing, he had seriously offended a great majority of citizens who interpreted what he did as the desecration

of the memory of fallen Partisan fighters and the legacy of the People's Liberation War in which they lost their lives.<sup>113</sup>

The court thus concluded that Father Veličković posed a high level of danger to the existing social order. It sentenced him to twenty months in prison.<sup>114</sup>

## The Aftermath

No more than a day or two passed before Father Veličković had to leave his family in Brezna for a cell in the maximum security prison in the southern Serbian city of Niš.<sup>115</sup> This caused panic in his household because of the shock and sadness his wife and children felt about his imprisonment and what would be a long separation from him. But his family also faced an existential crisis because of his impending absence. Father Veličković's wife, Rosanda, like most women who grew up in Serbia before the Second World War, had finished only a few years of elementary school and had no way of supporting herself and her two daughters and son.<sup>116</sup> In a matter of days she would have to dismantle her life in Brezna and travel with her children to the town of Mrčajevci to live with her husband's parents. There, as the wife of a convicted "enemy of the state," she would find no work and receive no assistance from the government. For the next two years she and her children would survive by relying on the good will of her extended family. During that time she resolved to never say anything to anyone about what had happened to her husband. The events in Brezna, she said, compelled her to "learn to keep quiet, to keep quiet, and to keep quiet . . ." <sup>117</sup>

As for Father Veličković, little is known about what he experienced while in prison. He never wrote about it, and while his wife did visit him on a number of occasions, she declined to speak about the subject.<sup>118</sup> When he arrived at the prison in Niš one of the first things that the authorities did was shave off his long beard, the key outward sign of his status as a priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church. As a political prisoner, it is likely that he endured some kind of physical abuse at the hands of prison guards. It also seems probable that the authorities placed him in solitary confinement for at least the initial stages of his imprisonment.<sup>119</sup>

After Father Veličković's release from prison in 1958, he was forbidden to return to Brezna. He did, however, continue to work as a priest, moving his family to Bajina Bašta (located in Serbia near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina). It appears that his nearly two years in prison did not dissuade him from engaging in further acts that challenged the authority of the Communist regime. In the early

1970s, Father Veličković made a public statement in which he criticized the authorities for regularly holding state-sanctioned youth work actions on the same days as religious holidays. He lamented out loud in front of a large crowd that, because of such actions, “young people are further and further away from the church.” He was sentenced to thirty days in prison for again misusing his role as a priest for a political purpose.<sup>120</sup>

Even though Father Veličković left Brezna during the summer of 1956, the story of the plaque in his church lived on publicly, albeit in a carefully constructed form suitable to the contemporary political context. Two newspaper articles appeared in the aftermath of his trial, and their content reveals how the Communist authorities sought to frame what had happened in Brezna. The first was published a week and a half after the trial in the regional newspaper *Čačanski glas* (Čačak’s Voice). Its headline left no ambiguity as to what the authorities wanted citizens to know about the priest: Father Veličković, described in a derogatory way as a *pop*, was nothing more than “A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing.”<sup>121</sup>

The unidentified author constructed this article around one of the details that emerged during Father Veličković’s trial, namely, that he had received a calendar from Germany with the pictures of King Petar, St. Sava, and the Chetnik leader Dragoljub Mihailović. Using this calendar to interpret the recent past, Brezna’s priest had decided to “rewrite history” by hanging a plaque in his church that challenged the fact that the Second World War had ended in 1945. In what this author called “the culmination of historical and linguistic sophistry,” Father Veličković proposed the years 1941–1947 as the period in which Brezna’s soldiers had given their lives for the “Freedom and Unity of the Serbian People.” Finding this formulation ridiculous and offensive, the article declared that “no contemporaries remember any kind of struggle for any kind of ‘freedom’ or ‘unity’ after 1945. By then, the people had already achieved both.”<sup>122</sup>

According to the article, however, Father Veličković had decided to continue the struggle against those (the Partisans and their supporters) who had laid down their weapons in 1945. He had done so, not by picking up a rifle and going to the forests like other Chetniks, but by honoring a number of those who had: that is, by hanging in his church a plaque with the names of the Chetnik “renegades” who had invoked fear among the residents of the region until state security executed them in 1947. These acts, the article explained, had ultimately led the priest into a “dead end” because, having not sought permission from either civil or church authorities to hang the plaque, it became clear that he was the only one who believed in his “real Serbian calendar” and the false interpretations of history he had derived from it.

In the end, the author concluded that, having misused religion and the church for a political purpose, Father Veličković's prison sentence of twenty months would "probably be enough time for even the priest to learn the [proper] historical calendar."<sup>123</sup>

Six months later, the story of Father Veličković was transmitted throughout Yugoslavia when an article appeared in *Crvena zvezda* (Red Star), the official newspaper for the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War. Like the first, its headline left no doubt as to how the authorities were framing the story. It read: "The Wolf Changes Its Skin, But Never Its Ways." This article drew heavily on the piece that had appeared in *Čačanski glas*; in fact, a number of paragraphs were nearly identical. Again, the author's main argument was that Father Veličković had drawn inspiration from the calendar he had received from abroad and decided to "rewrite our history" by hanging a plaque that challenged the fact that the Second World War had ended with the defeat of the German army. It condemned once again the use of the years 1941-1947 as a period of struggle by the Serbian people for freedom and unity, when such things had already been achieved by 1945. And it characterized Father Veličković's inclusion on the plaque of "renegades" and "enemies of the people" as nothing less than a direct attack against the new state and its citizens, albeit without weapons.<sup>124</sup>

Then, in a new twist, the author of this article turned to criticize other targets. How was it possible that the main political organizations in Brezna—the League of Communists, the Socialist Alliance, and the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War—had allowed the creation of such a plaque? And how could Radivoje Vasović, a member of the League of Communists and a former Partisan fighter, have agreed to carve the names of Chetniks and the inscription which Father Veličković had prepared in his attempt to rewrite history? Finally, the author noted that soon after the trial the Association of Fighters of the People's Liberation War in Brezna had made a promise that still remained unfulfilled. It had pledged to erect a new plaque for the village's fallen Partisan fighters, that is, for those "who had really fought for the freedom of their people." But six months had passed and nothing had been done.<sup>125</sup>

While no new plaque could be found in Brezna during the first months of 1957, the two newspaper articles demonstrated that another, perhaps more important task was now complete. The local authorities, driven to action and assisted by local residents, had succeeded in extinguishing the challenge the plaque had posed to their sense of which fallen soldiers could be publicly remembered. They had organized a meeting, marched to the church, smashed the plaque, and convicted and imprisoned Father Veličković, the man they held responsible for the whole incident.

And now, with the stories told in the newspaper articles, the authorities had succeeded in framing the entire incident as a simple narrative of good versus evil. Successfully accomplishing this, however, required the suppression of two crucial elements of the story. First, the authors of these articles neglected to say that the names of both Partisans and Chetniks had appeared on the plaque.<sup>126</sup> This was no small omission. By failing to note that the plaque had been dedicated to *all* who had fought and died in the war—regardless of which side they had fought for—the articles characterized it as a site of remembrance solely for “enemies of the people.” Second, neither article mentioned that local villagers had given all the money for making the plaque, and had done so during a time of serious economic hardship. Omission of these details concealed a significant aspect of the project: that it was an act of collective remembrance made possible through the contributions of local residents, and was not merely the work of the village priest.

This selective portrayal of the events in Brezna demonstrated that, although the articles condemned Father Veličković for using “historical and linguistic sophistry” in interpreting the past, it was their authors and, in effect, the Communist regime, that were busily rewriting history. By selecting and omitting elements of what had happened in Brezna, the writers of these articles provided the authorities with a carefully scripted and politically digestible interpretation of the entire incident. According to them, what had happened in Brezna was not about grieving villagers struggling over how to remember their relatives who had fought on opposite sides and killed one another in a civil war. On the contrary, their articles told the story as a simple battle between families mourning for fallen Partisan heroes and an “enemy priest” who had desecrated their memory by having the names of their killers carved on a plaque in the village church.

During the time of the publication of these articles, the regional authorities attempted to accomplish one final task as a way of concluding the events in Brezna: they sought to demonstrate that they had reasserted control over the rituals of public remembrance of those killed in the war. Just over four months after Father Veličković was sent to prison, on 17–18 November 1956, the authorities held a series of widely publicized burials of the remains of fallen Partisans from the Čačak region, like the one described in the introduction to this essay. A few more details about these events are worth mentioning, as they demonstrate the degree to which the authorities continued to face the challenge of dealing with a population that often relied on traditional and religiously-based death rituals in mourning fallen soldiers.

A week before these burials took place, on 10 November 1956, many people throughout the Čačak region gathered in cemeteries both large and small, as they had

done for centuries, to mark Zadušnice, or All Souls' Day. This is one of the most important religious holidays for the dead in Serbian Orthodoxy. On this day the relatives of the deceased assemble at the gravestones of their loved ones and make offerings to them, which usually consist of placing various foods, wine, and flowers on the grave, burning incense, and lighting candles. These acts are considered symbolic ways of feeding the souls of the dead and are seen as a type of communication with those who have passed on to the next world.<sup>127</sup>

A week later, the authorities staged the elaborate burials in the Čačak region. It seems likely that these occasions of collective remembrance were designed in part to bring closure to the people of the region after the recent troubling events. Yet, ironically, the authorities chose to hold them not on a state-sponsored holiday related to the People's Liberation War, but on a weekend which closely followed one of the most important religious celebrations for the dead.<sup>128</sup> This suggests that the Brezna incident may have prompted the authorities to use elements of traditional death rituals to better mobilize the population in the collective remembrance of fallen Partisans. Whatever the case, what took place in the aftermath of these burials illustrated both the challenge that they posed to Yugoslavia's Communist regime, and the general hostility that it held for such practices. Indeed, what happened next showed that not even those mourning for fallen Partisans were immune to a form of punishment.

In the years following the burials of November 1956, family members of fallen Partisans congregated on Zadušnice around the monument in the center of Čačak and in the cemetery where the soldiers were buried. Following the traditional practice, they lit candles to provide the dead with light and warmth in the next world. In 1961, under the guise of "regulating the core of the city," the local authorities responded to this behavior by removing the monument and digging up the bones of the Partisans, which they transferred them to a new cemetery in a park outside the city limits.<sup>129</sup> It appeared that publicly caring for the war dead according to traditional death rituals—even when practiced by the relatives of fallen Partisans—would not be tolerated.

## The Questions

Several questions remain after attempting, with the available evidence, to reconstruct the events in Brezna between December 1955 and July 1956. First, was Father Veličković an "enemy of the people" as the authorities argued, a Chetnik posing as an Orthodox priest? The evidence that the prosecution presented at the



Family members of fallen Partisans gathered in the central square of Čačak on 17 November 1956. The coffins were buried later that day in a nearby cemetery. Local residents angered the authorities in the following years by lighting candles for the dead at these two locations. Photograph courtesy of the People's Museum of Čačak, collection "Prenos posmrtnih ostataka palih boraca u zajedničku grobnicu, 1956."

trial seemed to make a convincing case that he was, but at least two issues regarding this question deserve further comment.

To begin with, the document that purported to show that Father Veličković had been a Chetnik during the war either no longer exists or the court archive did not release it, so it is impossible to determine on what it was based. It is likely that members of the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War in the municipality of Mrčajevci (to which Donja Gorevnica, the village where Father Veličković was born, belonged) created the document on the basis of testimonies from other Partisan veterans who claimed to know something about Father Veličković's wartime record. However, former Partisan fighters across Yugoslavia later acknowledged (especially during the 1960s) that lying in such testimonies was rampant, with some individuals actually enriching themselves by selling false testimonies as a sort of side profession.<sup>130</sup> Thus, the prosecutors' claim that Father Veličković had been a Chetnik during the war can only be accepted, at best, as a problematic assertion. Casting further doubt on this claim is that his wife and children maintain that while he was certainly no friend to the Partisans, he did not join the Chetniks, but rather remained in hiding from both armies during the war, which was not an unheard of practice.<sup>131</sup> Their assertion, of course, may also point to how they wish to remember Father Veličković, especially in light of the punishment he endured at the hands of the Communist regime. It is possible that his family has constructed a narrative about his wartime past in which, to them, he appears as an apolitical individual with no direct connection to any of the military and political conflicts of 1941–1945. A more persuasive set of evidence that casts doubt on the idea that Father Veličković had been an active Chetnik during the war is the documentation compiled by the Communist regime's war crimes commission. In the files for Father Veličković's home village of Donja Gorevnica, which included information about all local villagers who joined the Chetniks, no document could be located that even mentions his name, let alone his participation in Chetnik units.<sup>132</sup> Had he been an active Chetnik, it is likely that his name would have appeared at some point in the files, especially given the small size of the village.

A second issue that arose during the trial was the prosecutors' attempt to paint Father Veličković as an enemy of the people by pointing out that his uncle Radomir, whose name was carved on the plaque, had been a Chetnik. The logic of this claim is problematic. It is well known that family members in the Čačak region often joined both the Partisans and the Chetniks, and sometimes even switched back and forth between the two sides during the war.<sup>133</sup> If having a relative who fought with the Chetniks meant that one was an enemy of the new regime, then it is no exag-

generation to say that the authorities could have arrested and put on trial at least half the population of western Serbia. The following example is instructive. A member of the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War in Brezna, who agreed to be interviewed, happened to be the nephew of Miloško Borovnjak, the notorious Chetnik whom state security had executed after the war and whose name had been carved on the plaque.<sup>134</sup> According to the prosecutors' logic of guilt through family ties, this man—a Partisan veteran and former member of the League of Communists—should have been considered an “enemy of the people.” The frequent division of family members between the Partisans and Chetniks in the Čačak region meant that large numbers of people were related in some way to “enemies of the people.” Having such a relative, however, did not automatically imply that one was guilty of any antistate activity.<sup>135</sup>

Thus two of the most provocative claims made by the prosecutors about Father Veličković's personal history and political orientation, have serious weaknesses.<sup>136</sup> One finds similar problems with the prosecutors' claim that Father Veličković was the individual chiefly responsible for the creation of the plaque. Witnesses testified that it was he who had first suggested it. In interviews conducted during the summer of 2005, however, Father Veličković's family claimed that he was not the initiator, that other villagers had first proposed the idea to which he then later agreed.<sup>137</sup> No witness who was present in the church that day could be located to clarify this discrepancy. Still, even if Father Veličković had been the instigator of the project, the prosecutors' argument that he bore sole responsibility for its completion is still flawed. There is no way that a priest in rural Serbia during the 1950s could have on his own accumulated the 82,000 dinars required. Amassing such a sum of money was only possible through the mass participation of local residents.<sup>138</sup> It should be underscored that the economic situation in Brezna during that time was far from prosperous. Making a donation to have a relative's name carved on the plaque entailed a serious financial sacrifice. Those who gave money, therefore, must have believed very strongly in what they were doing. So while it appears that Father Veličković did, at the very least, act as the main coordinator, going from house to house and collecting funds, he could not force anyone to participate; rather, it seems he acted as a conduit for those who felt strongly about the need to have some public form of remembrance. Understood this way, the responsibility for the plaque in Brezna rests not only on his shoulders, but also on those who made contributions—a sizable number of citizens in that village. The prosecutors, however, ignored this, choosing instead to assign blame to only one individual.

The reason for this is most likely rooted in the Communist regime's shift during the first half of the 1950s from open persecution of the clergy through state security to the mobilization of the population against the influence of religion. In such a political context, it did not make sense for the local authorities to prosecute all those who gave money for the plaque because that would have surely alienated people from the regime. Making an example only of Father Veličković was most likely sufficient because it would crush the subversive form of war remembrance that had appeared in Brezna, send the message that the Orthodox Church was ultimately under the control of the regime, and frighten the village's residents who had participated in creating the plaque.<sup>139</sup>

Finally, there is the question of whether Father Veličković knew in advance that a number of the names for the plaque were of Chetniks. Here the prosecutors' case appears stronger. After all, how could Father Veličković not have known that his own uncle had fought with the Chetniks? Furthermore, it seems that several residents of the village (for example, Aleksandar Žižović and Jeremija Borovnjak) had at least indirectly told him that their relatives had been Chetniks. Finally, one must take into account the small and intimate nature of a village like Brezna. Less than forty extended families lived there after the war and, by the end of 1955, when the idea of the plaque first arose, it is likely that most people had at least a general idea (if not detailed knowledge) about who had fought on which side. Could the village priest have been oblivious to this information?

If one says Father Veličković probably knew that some of the names were indeed those of Chetniks, then a more important question is why he went ahead and had the plaque made and hung in the church. The prosecutors argued that it was his "stubborn and persistent criminal will," with roots in his personal history and political orientation (especially during the war), that led him to do it. Father Veličković's political convictions probably played at least some role in his decision; the testimonies of his son Petar and daughter Ljubinka, recorded in 2005, suggest that he was not a supporter of the Partisan movement during the war, or of the postwar Communist regime. One might suppose that, by including Chetniks, the plaque became a symbol of the anti-Communist, pro-Chetnik opposition. Yet elsewhere in Serbia (and in other parts of Yugoslavia), a few monuments and graves were dedicated to "enemies of the people" and to them alone, thereby challenging the regime with a highly confrontational form of remembrance. The plaque in the church in Brezna was radically different because it was for *all* those who were killed fighting in the war, both Chetniks and Partisans.<sup>140</sup> Thus, it cannot be categorized as a memorial solely to "enemy elements."

For his children, Father Veličković's stance as an ideological opponent of the Communist regime did not automatically mean that he consciously sought to use the plaque as a symbol of explicit political opposition. As Petar Veličković explained: "My father was for *srpstvo* [Serbdom]. Many members of our family had been supporters of the Chetniks, which was normal, as people saw them as an army of liberation [*oslobodilačka vojska*] from the Germans. Our family was large and very mixed. Others joined the Partisans. But my father was never a nationalist or a chauvinist. Other people in the parish [of Brezna] were different, but he advised them not to hate. My father did not want to create a provocation [by hanging the plaque]."<sup>141</sup> Why, then, did he hang the plaque? Father Veličković's daughter Ljubinka offered this explanation: "I think that dad believed that all those who were killed had the right to have their names carved on the plaque. He believed that all were human beings. If some had sinned then people who are believers [*vernici*] could come and pray and ask God to forgive those sins. For that reason their names were carved so people could pray for them. I want to say that dad supported faith."<sup>142</sup>

These testimonies suggest a portrait of Father Veličković's personal convictions and religious beliefs that does not fit into the black and white categories of "supporter of the People's Liberation Movement" or "enemy of the people" which were so pervasive in postwar Yugoslav society. According to his children, Father Veličković believed in, and supported, things Serbian, yet was not a national chauvinist. He counseled people not to hate others. His rationale for hanging the plaque with the names of all those killed in the war was based on two elements. First, all people are human beings and, in the eyes of the Orthodox Church, all have a right to be publicly remembered, regardless of ideological affiliation. Second, those in his parish needed a place to pray and ask for forgiveness for the sins committed by those killed in the war. These conclusions are in accordance with the testimony that Father Veličković gave during his trial in which he, and several others who recounted his comments, stressed that the church would not divide the dead by the side they fought with during the war.

Two apparently incompatible interpretations thus exist for why Father Veličković decided to hang a plaque that included the names of Chetniks alongside those of Partisans. To the prosecutors, he was a former Chetnik and an "enemy of the people." To his children, he was an apolitical proponent of Orthodox Christianity and a believer in the equality of the dead.<sup>143</sup> It is possible that some elements of each interpretation were at work in Father Veličković's thinking, although it remains impossible to determine precisely what compelled him to hang the plaque. Perhaps more important, both interpretations suggest the powerful need, by the Communist

regime and its supporters over fifty years ago, and by Father Veličković's children in the present, to deploy totalizing categories when accounting for what happened in Brezna in 1956. The regime's purpose was to punish any act it perceived as threatening to its monopoly on shaping the remembrance of the war dead. This position led to the erasure of the fact that the plaque included names of both Partisans and Chetniks, and to the creation of the myth that it was only a monument to "enemy elements." Father Veličković's children, who watched him go to prison, and who were forced to leave Brezna because of the plaque, understand his actions in completely moral and religious terms, more or less divorced from the political context of postwar Serbia.

It is difficult to accept their interpretation as a sufficient explanation of the incident in Brezna. A strong belief in the equality of the dead and the tenets of Orthodox Christianity may have been an important motivating factor in their father's decision to hang the plaque; however, it is hard to believe that he was ignorant of the political implications of his act. The interpretation offered by his children, while perhaps partially accurate, may ultimately say more about how they wish to imagine their father's actions than what "actually really happened." As the historian Alessandro Portelli has suggested: "the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that 'untrue' statements are still psychologically 'true,' and that these previous 'errors' sometimes reveal more than factually accurate accounts."<sup>144</sup> The testimonies of Father Veličković's children, like the interpretation constructed by the authorities in 1956, demonstrate how historical actors make sense of the past in light of their present-day concerns. In doing so, they may illuminate elements of the "truth" about what happened, while simultaneously obscuring, erasing, or reconfiguring others that do not fit with their personal needs. In the end, it is easier for the historian to identify the limitations of such competing interpretations than to definitively ascertain Father Veličković's "true" motivations for hanging the plaque.

## **The Significance**

This reconstruction of the events in Brezna between 1955 and 1956 offers a window into how a local community struggled to remember its fallen soldiers in the shadow of civil war. Tito based his approach to remembering the war, on the importance of dealing with both "positive" and "negative" pasts. He stressed the necessity of remembering the former while equally emphasizing the imperative to forget the latter. The main objective of this essay has been to analyze how the

members of a local community in western Serbia dealt with the imposition of this mandate on their lives in light of their wartime experiences and traditional commemorative practices.

In the years following the end of the Second World War, large numbers of citizens in Serbia were occupied with remembering those whom they had lost. On one hand, there was nothing exceptionally political about this activity; it was an entirely normal human response to the painful losses that people experienced in the course of war and the years of low-level conflict that had followed its formal end. On the other hand, this mass remembrance did not occur in a political vacuum. The Yugoslav Communist regime sought, beginning even before 1945, to shape the population's understanding of those who had fought and killed one another into binary categories. The men and women who had battled for the creation of the new socialist state were to be heroes, martyrs, and revolutionaries, while those whom they had fought against were enemies, traitors, and counterrevolutionaries.

This highly politicized division of the war dead was hardly unique to post-World War Two Yugoslavia. All European governments were concerned with national recovery and securing their postwar legitimacy. Selective war remembrance was a crucial means of contributing to the realization of these objectives. A similar dynamic can also be seen in countries emerging from civil conflicts in other periods, such as the United States of America in 1865, Spain in 1939, and Greece in 1949.<sup>145</sup> In postwar Yugoslavia, the division of the war dead took a simple, binary form. This was the political context in which those attempting to remember fallen Partisans and Chetniks in the Čačak region found themselves.

The zeal of the Communist regime in enforcing this division of the dead was exemplified in the fact that it counted among the war's official victims only those killed as Partisans or in the service of the People's Liberation Movement.<sup>146</sup> Public monuments and graves could be built for these victims and for them alone. The act of remembrance—a normal human need in such a time of loss—was thus transformed into a declaration of either political allegiance or dissent. To publicly remember a relative in postwar Serbia was also to publicly declare oneself as either “for” or “against” the Communist regime and its supporters.

The events in Brezna demonstrate that this political context did not extinguish the need among villagers to publicly remember their relatives who had fought as Chetniks. Based on the available evidence, the creation of the plaque appears to have been less an attempt to directly confront the Communist regime, and more a product of a practice over many generations of publicly remembering all fallen soldiers from the village. Since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, the

residents of Brezna, like those in other villages across Serbia, had made the building of monuments to the war dead a sacred priority. It was considered a sin to forget any of those who were killed fighting against foreign powers for the freedom of the fatherland. However, what was completely new between 1941 and 1945 was that although the Germans had invaded and indeed were a foreign conquering power, much of the local killing of villagers had resulted from a civil war among neighbors.

Given the nature of wartime violence, the attempt to remember all of the dead together by Father Veličković and those who gave contributions for the plaque brought about unintended consequences. In the contemporary political context, the type of traditional remembrance they attempted to practice was, in a word, indigestible. The authorities could only interpret a plaque that equated Partisans and Chetniks as the desecration of the former by carving their names alongside those of “enemies of the people.” Equating the two dissolved the regime’s crucial division of the warring parties and, as a result, implicitly challenged the moral legitimacy of the Partisan victory that was the cornerstone of Yugoslavia’s socialist revolution. Local residents mourning for fallen Partisans most likely shared these sentiments, but less for political and ideological reasons rather than out of genuine emotional anguish at seeing the names of men who had caused them such pain and loss memorialized in public. Their disgust and anger may have been even greater than that of the authorities.

This emotional reaction is of central importance when trying to understand the dynamics of how the authorities dealt with the plaque and Father Veličković. The degree to which local residents initiated and drove the process of retribution is striking. It was several villagers who had first gone to the authorities and informed them about the plaque. Many more had assembled in large numbers at the meeting, and when they marched together to the church to pull down and smash the plaque they were acting on the suggestion of local leaders. But more than anything it seems that raw emotion—profound grief manifested as intense anger—was what drove them toward that site of remembrance in order to help destroy it, to silence those whose own need to remember they found deeply offensive.

The events in Brezna, therefore, should not be interpreted simply as another instance of a repressive Communist state apparatus crushing voices of opposition. What needs to be underscored is the degree to which local villagers acted to stop their neighbors from remembering some of the war dead. The conflict in Brezna was indeed framed within the broader binary interpretation of the war that the regime sought to impose on all citizens. But a major element at play was a more basic unwillingness by a number of villagers to accept a memorial that proposed the

equality in death of all those killed in the civil war. It bears repeating that this was a completely new situation in the village. Previous wars had always been waged against foreign powers (the Ottomans, the Bulgarians, the Austrians, etc.). The local community had never before been forced to contend with remembering the war dead who had been killed by their neighbors. The trauma of such intimate killing was a central reason behind the unwillingness of many local residents to accept a plaque that equated all the village's fallen soldiers. In this sense, the binary understanding of the war—the division of its victims into heroes and villains—was widespread, both among the authorities and many villagers.

Here is where the analytical lens of the local community is essential for better understanding how and why ordinary people come to internalize certain conceptions of war remembrance. The case of Brezna suggests that the adoption of a binary understanding of the war dead is not merely the result of intense propaganda and control by a one-party dictatorship over all forms of public war remembrance. The specific nature of wartime violence was also crucial. In this case, the traumatic experience of neighbors killing neighbors left many local residents highly receptive to the Communist regime's one-sided approach to remembering the dead. There was a strong confluence of interests between a sizable part of the local community and the regime, and not merely the one-way transmission of the regime's wishes down to the greater population. The dynamics of the incident in Brezna thus challenge the views of theorists and other scholars who propose that totalitarian regimes generally impose forms of remembrance on a population. A view from the local community suggests the crucial role of local actors and their experiences in determining whether a given form of state-sanctioned remembrance will be accepted or rejected, even under a dictatorial regime.<sup>147</sup>

Of equal significance is how investigation of the microdynamics of remembrance at the level of the local community reveals the complex interaction between traditional cultural practices and postwar political imperatives. Prior to the Second World War, those who had died on the "right" side had been easy to discern: these were the local men who had been killed fighting for the freedom of the fatherland. The "wrong" side was also easy to identify: these were the various foreign powers that had threatened the fatherland. The new experience of civil war destroyed this legible approach to identifying "us" and "them." The enemy now included former neighbors, and sometimes even members of the same families. How could traditional approaches to remembrance, which had always stressed the imperative to remember all fallen soldiers from the local community, be practiced in this radically new context? Ultimately, as the case of Brezna vividly illustrates, they could not.

The incident of the plaque in that small village is significant because it demonstrates precisely why the war dead, who had all been held in sacred and equal regard for so long, could no longer be treated that way. Examining this struggle through the lens of the local community reveals how the dispute in Brezna was not simply about how the “victors” went about erasing the memory of the “vanquished.” The incident was also very much about a clash between traditional practices of inclusive commemoration and new exclusionary forms that emerged due to the nature of wartime violence. Traditional practices cracked in profound ways because of the unbridgeable ideological divisions that exploded in 1941 and the localized, intimate killing that ensued. The end result was the continuation of the fault lines of the fratricidal violence of 1941–1945 through a fratricidal approach to the remembrance of the war dead, demanded by the Communist regime as well as a sizable part of the local community. Most of the killing stopped in 1945, but the deep divisions of the war dragged on for decades, enshrined in a politics of commemoration in which the dead could no longer be equal.

## Notes

### Acknowledgements

The research on which this essay is based was supported by fellowships from the International Research and Exchanges Board, American Councils ACTR-ACCELS, Fulbright IIE, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. None of these organizations is responsible for the views presented here. Many thanks to the anonymous reviewers from the Carl Beck Papers, as well as to Milica Bakić-Hayden, Maria Todorova, and Nikolai Vukov, whose suggestions greatly improved the analytical focus of this essay. Special thanks are due to Borisav Čeliković, the director of the of the Muzej rudničko-kotkovskog kraja. This essay could not have been written without his exceptional goodwill and generous assistance. Thanks to Boro Majdanac of the Arhiv Srbije, Goran Davidović of the Međuopštinski istorijski arhiv u Čačku, and Miloš Timotijević of the Narodni muzej Čačak. Finally, a huge and heartfelt thank you to all the individuals who agreed to be interviewed, especially the members of the Veličković family of Guča, Čačak, and Mrčajevci.

1. “Svečano su ispraćeni ostaci palih proletera: ogromna masa naroda na pogrebu u Čačku,” Čačanski glas: Organ gradskog i sreskog odbora Narodnog fronta Čačak, 21 November 1956, 1–2. All translations in this essay from Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian are by the author.

2. Ibid., 2.

3. Ibid. Similar burials and commemorative ceremonies took place on the same day in a number of other towns in the Čačak region. For examples, see *ibid.*, “Gornji Milanovac se poklonio senima boraca,” 1–2; “Preljina je bila u znaku žalosti,” 1.

4. From Tito’s speech at the founding congress for the Union of Fighters of the People’s Liberation War (Savez boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata). Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond 297, Savezni odbor Saveza udruženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata Jugoslavije (SUBNOR J), inv. I, f-1, *Osnivački kongres Saveza boraca Narodno-oslobodilačkog rata*, 29–30 October 1947, 10. “The People’s Liberation War” (Narodnooslobodilački rat), or “the People’s Liberation Struggle” (Narodnooslobodilačka borba), was the name given by the Yugoslav Communist regime to the Second World War in the context of Yugoslavia.

5. Ibid., inv. II, f-111, Idriz Čejvan (quoting Tito), *Tradicija NOR i Revolucija i uloga muzeja*, 1972, 5.

6. Ibid.

7. Tony Judt, “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-war Europe,” in Jan-Werner Mueller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 163.

8. See Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 232; Pieter Lagrou, “Victims of Genocide and National Memory: Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, 1945–1965,” *Past and Present*, 154, no. 1 (February 1997): 220.

9. See, for example, Henri Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Robert Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

10. On the study of war remembrance outside the sphere of elite-level activity, see Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, “Setting the Framework,” in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29–39.

11. On the lack of attention among scholars to the dynamics of war remembrance in local communities in Europe, see Francesca Cappelletto, ed., *Memory and World War Two: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford: Berg, 2005). For examples of case studies that use the local community as a lens of analysis, see Mart Bax, “Mass Graves, Stagnating Identification, and Violence: A Case Study in the Local Sources of ‘The War’ in Bosnia-Herzegovina.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (Jan. 1997): 11–19; Riki Van Boeschoten, “The Impossible Return: Coping with Separation and the Reconstruction of Memory in the Wake of the Civil War,” in Mark Mazower, ed., *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943–1960* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), 122–141.

12. On war veterans, see Paloma Aguilar, “Agents of Memory: Spanish Civil War Veterans and Disabled Soldiers,” in Winter and Sivan, *War Remembrance*, 84–103; on concentration camp survivors, see Annette Wiewiorka, “From Survivor to Witness: Voices from the Shoah,” in idem., 125–141.

13. See Nikolai Vukov, “Death and Vitality in Monumental Art in Eastern Europe After the Second World War,” *New Europe College Yearbook* 9 (2001–2002): 275.

14. For an introduction to the topic of war remembrance in Yugoslavia, which suggests how a rigid division of the dead according to the side they were perceived to have fought for was of crucial importance in determining whether they would be publicly remembered, see Wolfgang Hoepken, “War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society: The Case of Yugoslavia,” *East European Politics and Society* 13, 1 (Winter 1999): 190–227.

15. *Bratoubilački rat* is what many historians in Serbia use for the phrase “civil war.” This formulation—literally meaning “brother-killing war”—places added emphasis on the fratricidal nature of the violence that occurred in Serbia during and after the Second World War. The region now includes the municipalities (*opštine*) of Lučani, Čačak, and Gornji Milanovac.

16. According to figures for 1950, each family occupied between one and sixteen residences. The total number of residences was around one hundred fourteen houses. See Milenko Filipović, *Naselja i poreklo stanovništva takovskog sreza* (Gornji Milanovac: Grafika “TM,” 1997), 179–182; Branko Vujović, “Brezna: skica za kulturno-istorijsku monografiju naselja,” *Zbornik radova Narodnog muzeja Čačak*, 11 (1981): 5–28.

17. Arhiv Srbije (AS), fond Đ 2, Centralni komitet (CK) Saveza komunista Srbije (SK S), f-103, Izveštaj o radu i stanju Sreskog komiteta Saveza komunista Srbije Gornji Milanovac, 30 December 1947, 1; Goran Davidović and Miloš Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost: Istorija ravnogoraca čačanskog kraja*, vol. 1, *U plamenu ustanka. Ratna 1941 godina* (Čačak: Međuopštinski istorijski arhiv i Narodni muzej; Gornji Milanovac: Muzej rudničko-takovskog kraja; Kraljevo: Narodni muzej, 2002), 39.

18. The term “Chetnik” (*četnik*) is rooted in the Serbian word *četovanje*, which means to resist through armed struggle. It originally referred to Orthodox Christian peasants who resided in the territory now known as Serbia who engaged in resistance in small armed groups (or *čete*) against the Ottoman authorities. The meaning changed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the drive to unite all those considered to be (or who perceived themselves to be) Serbs took precedence. Used in the context of the Second World War, Chetnik refers to those who fought sometimes against foreign occupiers, but especially against domestic forces such as the Communists, with the goals described above. For a partial definition of the term which avoids mentioning the extirpation of non-Serbs, see Davidović and Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost* 1:20–21.

Several other more minor factions also engaged in this struggle (e.g., the armed units of Milan Nedić, the Chetniks of Kosta Pećanac, and the armed units of Dimitrije Ljotić), but the central conflict during the Second World War was between the Communist-led Partisans and the Chetniks led by Dragoljub Mihailović. For a concise introduction to the complex history of the civil war in the Čačak region, see Goran Davidović and Miloš Timotijević, “Drugi svetski rat u čačanskom kraju—suprostavljena tumačenja,” *Zbornik radova Narodnog Muzeja Čačak* 37 (2007): 194–248. For a general survey of the Second World War in Serbia, although limited to political and military events, see Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu, 1939–1945* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1992).

A number of studies have been published in Serbia during the last fifteen years attempting to revise the Communist historiography of the Chetnik movement, which the historians of this newer literature generally refer to as the “Ravna Gora movement” (*Ravnogorski pokret*). While based on a substantial amount of previously unseen archival documentation, these studies have several weaknesses. First, rather than only explaining the dynamics of politics and violence during the war through the lens of the Chetnik movement, most seem more concerned to portray the Chetniks as legitimate antifascists. This overarching purpose detracts from the analytical focus of the works in question and unfortunately leads to a moralizing polemical tone against the Communists. Second, and more important, none of the newer works deals in any serious way with participation of Chetniks in the mass killing and expulsion of non-Serbs (especially of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sandžak). They thus have a blind spot regarding Chetnik use of violence to create a “Greater Serbia.” The most significant of these works are Kosta

Nikolić, *Istorija ravnogorskog pokreta*, 3 vols. (Beograd: Srpska reč, 1999); Bojan Dimitrijević, *Valjevski ravnogorci: Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini u valjevskom kraju, 1941–1945* (Beograd: Srpska reč, 1998); Goran Davidović and Miloš Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost: Istorija ravnogoraca čačanskog kraja*, 3 vols. (Čačak: Međuopštinski istorijski arhiv i Narodni muzej; Gornji Milanovac: Muzej rudničko-takovskog kraja; Kraljevo: Narodni muzej, 2002–2004).

On Chetnik war crimes against non-Serbs, see Vladimir Dedijer and Antun Miletić, *Genocid nad Muslimanima, 1941–1945: zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990); Semso Tucaković, *Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanima: 1941–1945* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 1995); Safet Bandžović, *Ratna tragedija Muslimana* (Novi Pazar: Sandžački odbor za zaštitu ljudskih prava i sloboda—Udruženje pisaca Sandžaka, 1993).

19. Davidović and Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost*, Vol. 1: 292. See also 137–147 for an extended discussion of the difficulties the two sides experienced during their short period of collaboration that ultimately paved the way for civil war. The word *srpstvo* essentially refers to all things Serbian, especially “the Serb people,” their history, culture, traditions, and Orthodox Church.

20. *Ibid.*, 378, 361, and 377. For examples of the types of atrocities that were committed in the Čačak region, see Davidović and Timotijević, “Drugi svetski rat u čačanskom kraju,” 15, 34–34, 36–37. Such acts were not unique to this region, as shown by Kosta Nikolić in *Strah i nada u Srbiji, 1941–1944 godine: Svakodnevni život pod okupacijom* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2002), 216–229.

21. Miloš Timotijević, “Čačak u predvečerje Drugog svetskog rata: Socijalna, ekonomska i politička struktura,” *Zbornik radova Narodnog muzeja*, 29 (1999): 53–54.

22. See Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (1988; repr., Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); see also Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), who draws from Gross in his study of the dynamics of violence in the Greek civil war.

23. See, for example, Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond 110, Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomagača (DKUZ), kut. 484, dos. br. 4565, Sresko povereništvo sreza takovskog zemaljske komisije Srbije za utvrđivanje zločina i njihovih pomogača, Zapisnik o saslušanju oštećenika Zorke Marjanović iz Leušića sastavljen pred Sreksim povereništvom za ratne zločine u Gornjem Milanovcu po predmetu nepoznatog odvođenja muža joj Momčila, 29 June 1945, 1; dos. br. 4574, Okružno povereništvo zemaljske komisije za utvrđivanje zločina i njihovih pomogača, 25 January 1946, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju svedoka Milana Obradovića, 20 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Mileve Đorđevića iz Donje Gorevnice, 18 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Jane Aleksandrića iz Donje Gorevnice, 17 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Ljubiše Aleksandrića iz Donje Gorevnice, 16 November 1945, 1.

24. See, for example, *ibid.*, dos. br. 4565, Sresko povereništvo sreza takovskog zemaljske komisije Srbije za utvrđivanje zločina i njihovih pomogača, Zapisnik o saslušanju oštećenika Zorke Marjanović iz Leušića sastavljen pred Sreksim povereništvom za ratne zločine u Gornjem

Milanovcu po predmetu nepoznatog odvođenja muža joj Momčila, 29 June 1945, 1; dos. broj. 4563, Sresko povereništvo sreza takovskog zemaljske komisije Srbije za utvrđivanje zločina i njihovih pomogača, Zapisnik o saslušanju oštenćenika Mileve Kozoder iz Brezne sastavljenom pred sreskim povereništvom za ratne zločine u Gornjem Milanovcu po predmetu nepoznatog odvođenja muža Mihaila, 4 June 1945, 1.

25. See, for example, *ibid.*, dos. br. 4574, Zapisnik o saslušanju Vasa Aleksandrića iz Donje Gorevnice, November 1945, 1; dos. br. 4745, Zapisnik po predmetu streljana Milijane Smiljanić iz Takova, 21 September 1945, 1.

26. *Ibid.*, kut. 742, dos. br. 27, Okrug čačanski, Zapisnik o saslušanju Milandina Ćirić, mesto zločina: selo Takovo, srez takovski, 25 July 1945, 1.

27. Goran Davidović and Miloš Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost: Istorija ravnogoraca čačanskog kraja*, vol. 3, *Agonija i slom: Ratne 1944 i 1945 godina* (Čačak: Međuopštinski istorijski arhiv i Narodni muzej; Gornji Milanovac: Muzej rudničko-takovskog kraja; Kraljevo: Narodni muzej, 2004), 166; *idem.*, “Dan posle: uništavanje Jugoslovenke vojske u otadžbini i uspostavljenje vlasti komunista u čačanskom kraju krajem 1944 i početkom 1945. godine,” *Istorija 20. veka 2* (2004): 23–46.

28. On the trial, see AJ, fond 110 DKUZ, kut. 824, Vrhovni sud Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije—Vojno veće, Suđenje Dragoljuba-Draže Mihajlović i drugih, 31 May–1 June 1946 and 10–11 June 1946.

29. Davidović and Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost*, Vol. 3: 195, 200, 215.

30. *Ibid.*, 206–207, 212–213. The security organs were OZNA (Odeljenje zaštite naroda), which began its work in Serbia in 1944, and UDBA (Uprava državne bezbednosti), which took over in 1946. For the genesis of these branches of state security, see Bojan Dimitrijević, *Građanski rat u miru: Uloga armija i služba bezbednosti u obračunu sa političkim protivnicima Titovog režima, 1944–1954* (Beograd: Srpska reč, 2003), 9–26.

31. On this tactic, see Dimitrijević, *Građanski rat u miru*, 131–132. Around five hundred Chetniks were executed in the Čačak region after the war, including several from Brezna. See Davidović and Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost*, 3: 215. The regime also relied heavily on the courts to discredit and imprison its political opponents. See Momčilo Mitrović, *Izgubljene iluzije: Prilozi za društvenu istoriju Srbije, 1944–1952* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1997), 71–142. For an encyclopedic treatment of Communist repression in postwar Serbia, see Srđan Cvetković, *Između srpa i čekića: Represija u Srbiji, 1944–1953* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2006).

32. Davidović and Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost*, 3: 283. Recently published documents in the Republic of Croatia indicate that this policy originated at the highest levels of government in the new Communist state. It is highly likely that similar orders came down from the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Serbia to all localities about the imperative “to erase every trace . . . to raze

to the ground” (*isbrisati svaki trag . . . da se sravne sa zemljom*) all graves and monuments to any enemy units. See the document “Uklanjanje vojničkih groblja okupatora, Federalna država Hrvatska, Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova,” dokument broj 2.811/45, 6 July 1945, in Mate Rupiċ, ed., *Partizanska i Komunistiċka represija i zloċini u Hrvatskoj, 1944–1946: Dokumenti* (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest; Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2005), 176–177.

33. On Communist efforts to create historical consciousness about the Second World War in the Ćaċak region based on the binary categories of good (the Partisans) and evil (all those opposed to them), see Miloš Timotijeviċ, “Hrabri partizani i zli ċetnici. Istoriografija Ćaċka o opsadi Kraljeva 1941 godine,” in *Okrugli sto Kraljevo oktobra 1941. godine* (Kraljevo: Narodni muzej i istorijski arhiv, 2003), 276–298. For a general discussion about such efforts across Yugoslavia, see Kosta Nikoliċ, “Bitka za prošlost: Stvaranje istorijske svesti o Drugom svetskom ratu u Jugoslaviji,” in *Srbija (Jugoslavija), 1945–2005: Ideologije, prokreti, praksa* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2005), 33–41.

34. State security believed that more than three hundred priests (including a number of bishops) had actively helped the Chetnik movement during the war, while an even larger number were said to have been sympathizers. See Radmila Radic, *Verom protiv vere: Država i verske zajednice u Srbiji, 1945–1953* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1995), 305.

35. See AS, fond-Đ 2, CK SK S, Komisija po pitanju religije, f-1, Direktivo pismo, Centralni komitet Komunistiċke Partije Srbije, 27 August 1946, 1.

36. *Ibid.*, Podaci o radu sveštenika na teritoriji ċaċanskog okruga, 8 September 1946, 2. Twenty-four priests were listed as passive, while fifty-one were described as directly opposed to the Communist regime. *Ibid.*, 3–9.

37. AS, fond-Đ 2, CK Sk S, Komisija po pitanju religije, f-1, Podaci o radu sveštenika na teritoriji ċaċanskog okruga, 8 September 1946, 9. The council was an organ of the Chetnik organization. Ravna Gora (literally “flat highland”) is a mountain range in Western Serbia, around sixty kilometers from Brezna. It was there that Dragoljub Mihailoviċ formed the Chetnik movement in the summer of 1941.

38. A number of elderly interviewees in Brezna had difficulty recalling Father Veliċkoviċ by name. But when told a few details about the incident with the plaque in the village church, they responded: “Do you mean ‘fast legs’? . . . Of course I remember him!” Interview with Milenko Mihajloviċ on 12 August 2005 (on the telephone); Slavka (no last name given) on 11 August 2005 in Brezna.

39. Interview with Petar Veliċkoviċ (son of Father Tihomir Veliċkoviċ) on 26 September 2005 in Ćaċak.

40. See Arhiv Opštinskog suda Gornji Milanovac (AOSGM), presuda protiv Tihomira Veliċkoviċa, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 4.

41. On the commission's investigations in the Donja Gorevnica region, see AJ, fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 466, dos. br. 4249, Zapisnik, Donja Gorevnica, Srez Ljubički, 17 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik, Donja Gorevnica, Srez Ljubički, 18 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik, Donja Gorevnica, Srez Ljubički, 19 November 1945, 1; kut. 484, dos. br. 4574, Okružno povereništvo zemaljske komisije za utvrđivanje zločina i njihovih pomogača, 25 January 1946, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju svedoka Milana Obradovića, 20 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Mileve Đorđevića iz Donje Gorevnice, 18 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Jane Aleksandrića iz Donje Gorevnice, 17 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Ljubiše Aleksandrića iz Donje Gorevnice, 16 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Vasa Aleksandrića iz Donje Gorevnice, November 1945, 1.

42. Interview with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak.

43. The Party abandoned its attempt to collectivize agriculture in 1953. On the importance of international factors in this decision, see Momčilo Pavlović, *Srpsko selo, 1945–1952: otkup* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1997); on the role of peasant resistance, see Melissa Bokovoy, *Peasants and Communists: Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav Countryside, 1941–1953* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998).

44. Interviews with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak; Ljubinka Kerezović (daughter of Father Tihomir Veličković) on 26 September 2005 in Čačak; Rosanda Veličković (wife of Father Tihomir Veličković) on 26 September 2005 in Mrčajevci. The mass mailing of these materials without the prior consent of those on the receiving end is corroborated by documentation in the Archive of Serbia. The name of the group in Munich appears to have been “Svečanik” (solemn one). See AS, F-Đ 2, CK SK S, Komisija po pitanju religije, f-1, Izveštaj u vezi pojačanja delatnosti verskih zajednica, 1953, 6–7.

45. The Communist-dominated Constituent Assembly, convened in Belgrade on 29 November 1945, voted unanimously to abolish the monarchy, thus ending the reign of King Petar II, who remained exiled in Great Britain. Saint Sava (born Rastko Nemanjić) was the son of the Grand *župan* (chief) of the medieval Serbian Kingdom, Stefan Nemanja. He founded the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1219. For a concise portrait of his life, see Špiro Kulišić, Petar Petrović, and Nikola Pantelić, *Srpski mitološki rečnik* (Beograd: Etnografski institut SANU, 1970), 263–264.

46. Interview with Petar Veličković and Ljubinka Kerkezović on 26 September 2005 in Čačak. According to his son Petar, Father Veličković cut out the pictures of King Petar, St. Sava, and Dragoljub Mihailović from the calendar before going to Gornji Milanovic for his interrogation. The package also contained an émigré newspaper called *Srbobran* (Serb Defender). Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain the stenographic notes from Father Veličković's interrogation, as it appears that the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Gornji Milanovac no longer has such documents in its archives.

47. The Communist regime defined a “Fallen Fighter” as one who was killed while fighting as a Partisan during the years 1941–1945, while a “Victim of Fascist Terror” was killed during

the war as a noncombatant, either at the hands of the foreign armies or the various factions the Communist authorities grouped under the rubric “domestic traitors” (*domaći izdajnici*), the Chetniks, Ustashas, and others. For complete definitions of these terms, see Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine (ABiH), fond Republički odbor Saveza udruženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata Bosne i Hercegovine (SUBNOR BiH), Uputstvo za prikupljanje podataka o poginulim i preživjelim borcima Narodnooslobodilačkog rata od 1941–1945 i poginulim žrtvama fašističkog terora, undated document, 9–16. The Union of Fighters of the People’s Liberation War generally determined which individuals fit into these categories, and it issued certificates (called *spomenice*) to the families of those killed that entitled them to benefits and special treatment in regard to schooling, housing, and employment. On these certificates, see Danko Fućak in *Vojna enciklopedija* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1967), 9: 92.

48. For its platform, as laid out during its founding congress, see AJ, fond 297, SUBNOR J, inv. I, f-1, *Osnivački kongres Saveza boraca Narodno-oslobodilačkog rata*, 29–30 October 1947, especially the speeches by Tito, 3–10, Aleksandar Ranković, 11–15, and Ivan Gošnjak, 17–32.

49. By 1961, 2,866 monuments had been built in Serbia to “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of Fascist Terror.” The number for all of Yugoslavia was 14,402, the equivalent of building nearly three monuments a day—everyday—for sixteen years. For complete statistics for all republics, see *ibid.*, fond 20, Izveštaj Centralnog odbora o radu Saveza boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata, 1961, 52.

50. See Istorijски arhiv Čačak (IAČ), fond Opštinski odbor Saveza boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata (OO SBNOR) Čačak, kut. 2, Izveštaj po pitanju materijalnog obezbeđenja porodica Narodnih heroja i obeležjenja važnih mesta iz Narodne revolucije, 6 November 1951, 1. The central role played by veterans in organizing World War Two remembrance activities was hardly unique to Serbia or Yugoslavia. On similar activities among veterans in the Soviet Union, see Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 314, 342, 344–346.

51. Such organizations included the Communist Party (Komunistička partija), renamed The League of Communists (Savez komunista) in 1952; the People’s Youth (Narodna omladina); Peoples’ Councils (Narodni odbori), the organs of local government; the Socialist Alliance of Working People (Socijalistički savez radnog naroda); as well as a number of other sociopolitical organizations. Individuals who built monuments and graves were generally family members of those who had been killed in the war.

52. Hrvatski Državni Arhiv (HDA), fond 1241, Republički odbor Saveza udruženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata Hrvatske (SUBNOR H), “Memorijalni centar Jasenovac,” Izvještaj Kotarskog odbora Socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Novska, 30 December 1953, 1. It should be noted that the Communist authorities eventually acknowledged the widespread role that the clergy of all faiths played in burying and commemorating many of those killed in the war, particularly “Victims of Fascist Terror.” For example, in the early 1980s the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina created a working group to survey the sites of mass killings of civilians that took place during the war and the types of monuments built during the years 1945–1985 in memory of them. It concluded in a classified report that it was

the relatives of victims—and not any official organ of the Communist government—who had buried most of the remains of those murdered. They had often done so in religious cemeteries according to religious customs, and they had frequently placed symbols of their faith on the gravestones and other monuments. Moreover, the report emphasized that the clergy—again, of all confessions—had participated on a mass scale in assisting these individuals with the burials and commemorations. See ABIH, fond SUBNOR BiH, Materijal sa sastanka radne grupe za pregledanje stratišta i žrtava fašističkog terora i stanje njihove obilježnosti u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1 January 1986, 4.

53. See Slobodan Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba* (Beograd: Etnografski muzej, 1982).

54. This belief rests on an animistic conception of the world, that is, the belief that all people have souls that can exist separately from their bodies. According to this view, the soul leaves the body once it dies and attempts to travel to “the other world.” Death, therefore, is not the end of the soul’s life, but rather its transformation from one form of existence to another. See Dušan Bandić, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko. Ogledi o narodnoj religiji* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 1990), 112; idem., *Tabu u tradicionalnoj kulturi Srba* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 1980), 108; Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 6–7.

It appears that a majority of people held onto their pagan beliefs despite the arrival of Christianity in Serbia during the thirteenth century. Some have argued that the subsequent Ottoman conquest actually strengthened these beliefs and practices, as it led to a general crisis in faith and existence, ultimately resulting in “the paganization of Christianity.” See Bojan Jovanović, *Srpska knjiga mrtvih. Tanatologike I* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2002), 20–23.

55. Five feasts are held during the first year after death. People believe that circumstances are not easy in “the other world,” and therefore the living must offer the dead food and drink for the hunger and thirst that they will encounter (Bandić, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko*, 112; idem., *Tabu u tradicionalnoj kulturi Srba*, 154; Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 73; Jovanović, *Srpska knjiga mrtvih*, 109). Incense is burned in the cemetery so that the smell will put the dead in a better mood, and candles are lit to offer light and warmth to the soul for its existence in the darkness and cold of the other world (Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 80, 83). Money is placed on the body of the deceased because the soul must pay a “toll” (*mostarina*) on a bridge that connects this world with the next (Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 55). The gravestone functions as the site for communication with the dead. It is a sacred place that houses the soul and prevents it from wandering about and causing problems for those still living (Bandić, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko*, 117; idem., *Tabu u tradicionalnoj kulturi Srba*, 129–132; Jovanović, *Srpska knjiga mrtvih*, 121–122).

56. Although these mortuary practices certainly contained elements that were specific to the Serbian context, many general aspects are found in other European and non-European societies. For studies that emphasize the crucial importance of establishing a proper relationship between the worlds of the ancestors and the living, see Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post-Socialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1981); E. Bendann, *Death Customs: An Analytical Study of Burial*

*Rites* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930); Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Robert Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, trans. Rodney and Claudia Needham (1907; repr., Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960); Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, eds., *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

57. Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 80; Bandić, *Tabu u tradicionalnoj kulturi Srba*, 180. See also Miroslav Timotijević, “O proizvođenju jednog nacionalnog praznika: spomen dan palima u borbama za otadžbinu,” *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, godina 9, nos. 1–3, (2002): 69–78.

58. It is difficult to explain why the meeting had not occurred earlier. One possible explanation for the timing of the meeting is that on 28 November 1955 the authorities unveiled a large monument in the center of Čačak dedicated to fallen Partisans (“Sa osećajem zahvalnosti i poštovanja za njihovo delo i herojsku borbu mi se danas sećamo naših palih drugova,” *Čačanski glas*, 7 December 1955, 1). In addition, a monument had been unveiled in July 1955 in Father Veličković’s home village of Donja Gorevnica (“Svečano proslavljen Dan ustanka naroda Srbije,” *Čačanski glas*, 13 July 1955). These events may have inspired the residents of Brezna, and their priest, to build their own monument. They met in December possibly because many in rural Serbia believe that the souls of the dead are especially active during the winter season. See Bandić, *Tabu u tradicionalnoj kulturi Srba*, 181–182, 184.

59. Research on monuments to fallen soldiers in Serbia that were erected during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shows the existence of plaques that included names of the dead from several wars (e.g., against the Ottomans, Bulgarians, and Austrians), and thus demonstrates a tradition of continuously adding names of the war dead to pre-existing plaques. See Radojko Nikolić, *Kamena knjiga predaka* (Beograd: Novinsko izdavačka radna organizacija “Zadruga,” 1979), 127–128.

60. For photographs and a discussion of these objects of remembrance, see Vujović, “Brezna,” 11–16. On the practice of placing monuments and plaques to fallen soldiers in (or nearby) churches in Serbia, see Nikola Dudić, “Život u trajanju u naseljima upokojenih Srbije,” in Tibor Živković and Snežana Đenić, eds., *Srpsko selo: mogućnosti i dalji pravci istraživanja* (Beograd: Istorijski institut; Sirogojno: Muzej na otvorenom “Staro selo,” 2003), 140.

61. Nikolić, *Kamena knjiga predaka*, 133, 138.

62. Ibid., 131, 133; for photographs of *krajputaši*, see Miroslav Draškić, *Krajputaši: okoline Kraljeva* (Beograd: Književne novine, 1967).

63. It is likely that a small group of villagers attended this meeting. Aside from major religious holidays, regular attendance at church services in the Čačak region tended to be sparse. While no detailed studies exist on organized religious life in this region after the Second World War, this situation receives some comment in Miloš Timotijević “Čačak u predvečerja Drugog svetskog rata, 1938–1941: Socijalna, ekonomska i politička struktura,” *Zbornik radova Narodnog muzeja Čačak*, 21 (1999): 14. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the predominately

peasant population practiced an intensive religious life outside the formal sphere of the church. See Petar Kostić, “Godišnji običaji u Dragačevu, okolini Čačka i Gornjeg Milanovca,” *Glasnik Etnografskog muzeja*, knjiga 60 (1996): 27–76.

64. Interview with Rosanda Veličković on 21 September 2005 (on the telephone).

65. It is believed that the soul of a person who dies an unnatural death must undergo a sort of judgment that takes place forty days after death. It is at this point that the soul must cross a bridge. If the person sinned in life then his or her soul falls into a gorge under the bridge. The water in this gorge is said to have a cleansing power which will eventually enable the soul to enter the other world. The soul, however, can remain in this gorge for many years, and the amount of time spent there will depend on to what extent the living engage in the appropriate death rituals (Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 12, 71, conclusion).

66. Ibid.; Jovanović, *Srpska knjiga mrtvih*, 40, 121–122, 131.

67. See Dragoljub Subotić, ed., *Čačanski kraj u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi, 1941–1945: Pali borci i žrtve* (Čačak: Centar za kulturu, 1977); Davidović and Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost*, 3: 329–462; idem., “Drugi svetski rat u čačanskom kraju,” 49–50.

68. Nikolić, *Kamena knjiga predaka*, 127–128, 133–134, 138.

69. The central role that women played in the mourning process is discussed in Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 45–47, 80; Jovanović, *Srpska knjiga mrtvih*, 65. The information about mothers of fallen soldiers in Brezna supporting the creation of a plaque comes from an interview with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak. He specifically referred to a number of women (e.g., the mother of Miodrag Kovačević) who favored the project. For examples of male relatives who participated, see AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 2–4.

70. AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 1–2, especially the testimony of Đorđe Filipović, 2. Holding a feast when the gravestone (or any object designed to mark death) is finally built is considered to be a concrete way for the living to assist the souls of the dead in entering and existing in the next world. It is believed that all the food and drink consumed during such a feast goes directly to the dead. Therefore people try to make such occasions as lavish as possible. See Bandić, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko*, 112; Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 53, 75, conclusion.

71. In Serbian: “Za slobodu i ujedinjenje srpskog naroda dadoše živote svoje od 1941 do 1947 godine.” See “Vuk dlaku menja,” *Crvena zvezda: list Saveza boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata*, 29 January 1957, 4.

72. Such formulations came into wide usage particularly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For examples, see Timotijević, “O proizvođenju jednog nacionalnog praznika,” 72; see also Mihailo Popović, *Istorijska uloga srpske crkve u čuvanje narodnosti i stvaranju države*

(Beograd, 1933), on the historical relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the commemoration of those killed in acts of resistance to foreign occupiers and in wars for national liberation.

73. Nikolić, *Kamena knjiga predaka*, 134.

74. For a sense of what typical inscriptions on monuments to the People's Liberation War looked like in the Čačak region, see Milovan Vulović, *Spomenici i spomen obeležja NOR-a čačanskog kraja* (Čačak, 1971).

75. However, exceptions to this rule did exist, particularly in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina where inscriptions to “innocent Serbs” (*nevini Srbi*) murdered by the Ustashas sometimes appeared on monuments. For examples, see the collection of photographs of monuments to “Victims of Fascist Terror” in ABH, fond SUBNOR BiH. The major exception was Yugoslavia's small Jewish community, which had been almost entirely destroyed during the war. By 1952, Jewish activists had already built nineteen monuments to their brethren and, interestingly, the Communist regime gave its blessing to these memorials that, while paying proper respect to the Partisan movement, also frequently included specifically Jewish motifs such as inscriptions and prayers in the Hebrew language. See “U spomen na postradale i pale jevreje,” *Crvena zvezda*, 15 September 1952; Emil Kerenji, “Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944–1974,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 179–236.

76. The Communist regime assigned each republic a date for the start of its Partisan uprising: 7 July for Serbia, 13 July for Montenegro, 22 July for Slovenia, 27 July for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, and 11 October for Macedonia. The choice of these dates was often more a reflection of postwar politics rather than wartime realities. See Drago Roksanđić, “Shifting References: Celebrations of Uprisings in Croatia, 1945–1991,” *East European Politics and Societies*, 9, no. 2 (1995): 256–271.

77. The names were arranged according to which war the individual was killed in and which village he came from. No other distinction was made among the names. See AOSGM, Presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 2, testimony of Radovije Vasović.

78. Interview with Milija Talović on 11 August 2005 in Brezna.

79. For figures on the number of Orthodox priests arrested in Yugoslavia and the reasons for their arrest, see Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice, 1945–1970*, 2 vols. (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2002), 1: 369; for a discussion of arrests and trials of the clergy during the 1950s, see 2: 26–29. Although presented in a highly polemical tone, see Velibor Džomić, *Stradanje srbske pravoslavne crkve od komunista* 3 vols. (Cetinje: Svetigora, 2002), for a sense of the persecution Orthodox priests endured during the initial postwar period at the hands of the Communist regime.

80. AS, fond-Đ 2, CK SK S, Komisija po pitanju religije, f-1, Direktivno pismo, Centralni komitet Komunističke partije Jugoslavije, 22 January 1952, 1.

81. On the Communist regime's shifting attitude towards the clergy in Serbia during the first half of the 1950s, see Radić, *Verom protiv vere*, 195–196, 251–283; see also Klaus Buchenau, "What Went Wrong? Church-State Relations in Socialist Yugoslavia," *Nationalities Papers*, 33, no. 4 (December 2005): 549.

82. It is impossible to determine the exact date of the meeting, as the minutes have not been preserved (as far as could be determined) in either the Archive of Serbia or the Historical Archive of Čačak. The Ministry of Internal Affairs in Čačak intervened while research was being conducted in the archive in Čačak and, as a result, it was not possible to view all the relevant archival materials. A police officer apparently called and inquired as to whether an American researcher was at the archive. He wanted to know what materials were being examined and whether or not this American was actually a real historian. The archivist in charge of the materials for the Communist Party, apparently frightened by the phone call, then abruptly declared that no more documents were available, saying that nothing else existed in the storage room. He revised this when he was shown the archive's index, which clearly demonstrated the existence of more documents. He then claimed that the remaining materials had not been properly catalogued and thus could not be examined. At this point another archivist whispered, "It would be a good idea for you to leave Čačak as soon as possible." Therefore, the account presented here is based on the oral testimony of one man (a member of the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War in Brezna) who attended the meeting and believes that it most likely took place in late April or early May. Interview with Milosav Borovnjak on 25 September 2005 (on the telephone).

83. Interviews with Milosav Borovnjak on 12 August 2005 in Gornji Milanovac and 25 September 2005 (on the telephone).

84. Ibid. It is not known whether any family members of the Chetniks whose names appeared on the plaque attended the meeting. If some did, they kept a low profile, as this informant did not recall any being present nor any of the comments being directed toward the relatives of the fallen Chetniks.

85. Ibid. Interview with Petar Veličković 26 September 2005 in Čačak.

86. This version is based on an interview with Milosav Borovnjak on 25 September 2005 (on the telephone).

87. Interviews with Milenko Mihajlović on 11 August 2005 and 24 September 2005 (on the telephone); Rosanda Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Mrčajevci; Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak.

88. Interview with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak.

89. Ibid.; interviews with Milenko Mihajlović on 11 August 2005 and 24 September 2005 (on the telephone).

90. Interview with Rosanda Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Mrčajevci.

91. Interview with Milosav Borovnjak on 25 September 2005 (on the telephone). An attempt was made to obtain the stenographic notes of these interrogations, but the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Gornji Milanovac claimed that no such documents existed in its archive.

92. AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 1.

93. The full text of the law read: “The religious representative who misuses the freedom of performing religious duties and rituals for a political purpose or against the constitutional order will be punished with a prison term of up to two years.” *Službeni list Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, Broj. 13, God. VII, 9 March 1951.

94. It was not possible to obtain the photograph of the plaque from either the district court or the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Gornji Milanovac. It may have been destroyed, lost, or simply remains unavailable for reasons known only to those in charge of these institutions.

95. In addition to the photograph of the plaque, the People’s Council of the municipality of Beršići submitted report 2444/56 confirming the identities of the Chetniks whose names appeared on the plaque. AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 1, 4. For documents pertaining to charges of war crimes committed by Živojin Žižović, see AJ, fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 339, dos. br. 3058, Okružno povereništvo zemaljske komisije za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača Čačak Zemaljskoj komisiji Srbije za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, 24 July 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Milana Talovića iz Brezne sastavljen pred Sreskim povereništvom za ratne zločine u Gornjem Milanovcu, 4 June 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju oštećenika Milana Talovića iz Brezne sastavljen pred Sreskim povereništvom za ratne zločine u Gornjem Milanovcu, 4 June 1945, 1.

96. AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 4. An interview with Milenko Mihaljović (a lifelong resident of Brezna) conducted fifty years after the incident vividly demonstrates just how well known some of these men were (and still are). While generally hesitant and vague in discussing Father Veličković and the plaque, he became quite animated when asked whether people in Brezna were either happy or sad when state security pulled down the plaque and smashed it. “They were happy!” he exclaimed. “The name Miloško Borovnjak was written on the plaque! He was a Chetnik. Everyone knew about him.” Interview with Milenko Mihaljović on 24 September 2005 (on the telephone).

97. AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 4, 2, testimony of Radenko Pavlović and Đorđe Filipović. This claim contradicts the interviews conducted with Father Veličković’s son Petar and wife Rosanda, who maintain that those present in the church that day agreed together to begin to collect money for building the plaque and that Father Veličković was not the initiator. Moreover, once the project got underway, he not only asked people for contributions; many sought him out in order to give money, thus actively participating themselves. Interviews with Rosanda Veličković 21 September 2005 (on the telephone); Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak.

98. AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 2–3, testimony of Aleksandar Žižović.

99. Ibid., testimony of Radivoje Vasović quoting Đorđe Filipović.
100. Ibid., 3, testimony of Rajko Stoković. The phrase “real warriors” is from the testimony of Radenko Pavlović (Ibid., 2).
101. Ibid., 3, testimony of Radenko Solujić.
102. Ibid., testimony of Jeremija Borovnjak (quoting Father Veličković).
103. Ibid., 1.
104. Ibid., 2–3, testimonies of Aleksandar Žižović and Jeremija Borovnjak.
105. Ibid., testimonies of Stanimir Brajović and Đorđe Filipović, and Jezdimir Kovačević.
106. Ibid., 2, testimony of Radivoje Vasović. Interestingly, despite his concerns, a member of the League of Communists and Union of Fighters of the People’s Liberation War, had completed the plaque as requested. One man who knew him well said that even though “Vasović was from a Partisan family, he did it [carved the plaque] for the money!” Interview with Milosav Borovnjak on 25 September 2005 (on the telephone).
107. AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, document KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 3, testimony of Deputy Archbishop Petar Ljubičić.
108. Ibid., testimony of Father Adam Vasiljević. This testimony suggests that Father Veličković had not cut out the photographs from the calendar that he had received from Germany, and that he was apparently proud to have it. As noted above, Veličković maintains that his father had destroyed these photographs soon after receiving this calendar.
109. Ibid., 4, testimony of Miodrag Acović.
110. Ibid., 4. The report was entitled: Izveštaj organizacije Saveza boraca NOR-a opštine Mrčajevci. The court documents state that Radomir was Father Veličković’s cousin. However, the priest’s son said that Radomir was actually his uncle. Interview with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak.
111. AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 4. The complaint was entitled: Zajednički zahtev organizacija Saveza boraca NOR-a, Socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda, Narodne omladine, Udruženja rezervnih oficira i Saveza komunista opštine Beršići za pokretanje krivičnog postupka. This document was not available in the court’s archive, either because it was not preserved after the trial or could not, for some reason, be released for viewing. It is therefore impossible to analyze the basis of the document’s claims about Father Veličković’s wartime activities.
112. AOSGM, presuda protiv Tihomira Veličkovića, dokument KC-br. 193/56, 2 June 1956, 4.

113. Ibid., 1, 4.

114. The court also ordered him to pay a 10,592 dinar fine, a significant amount for anyone living in rural Serbia during the 1950s. Ibid., 1.

115. Interview with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak.

116. Statistics indicate that high levels of illiteracy existed among female residents in the Čačak region during years immediately prior to the Second World War, with over eighty percent unable to read or write. For precise data, see Momčilo Isić, *Pismenost u Srbiji između dva svetska rata* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2001), 156.

117. Interviews with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak; Rosanda Veličković on 21 September 2005 (on the telephone) and 26 September 2005 in Mrčajeveci.

118. Ibid.

119. Interview with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak. The authorities eventually sent Father Veličković to the prison's workshop to participate in the building of tables and chairs.

120. Ibid.

121. "Kurjak u jagnjćoj koži: Pop Tihomir Veličković iz Brezne osuđen na dvadeset meseci zatvora," *Čačanski glas*, 11 July 1956, 4. The literal translation is "A wolf in lamb's skin: Father Tihomir Veličković from Brezna Sentenced to Twenty Months in Jail." The word *pop* is a word that is often used in rural communities in Serbia for "priest," but it can have a negative, disrespectful connotation when used in any sort of official context. The proper word to use to show the appropriate level of respect would be *sveštenik*.

122. Ibid.

123. Ibid. Once again the author of this text used the word "*pop*" instead of "*sveštenik*": "toliko će, valjda, biti dovoljno da i pop nauči istoriski kalendar."

124. Milan Đoković, "Vuk dlaku menja . . .," *Crvena zvezda*, 29 January 1957, 4. The original title of the article is the first phrase of a popular saying in rural Serbia that newspaper readers would instantly recognize: "Vuk dlaku menja, ali ćud nikad." The second part, "But Never Its Ways," has been inserted here for clarity.

125. Ibid.

126. In the process of researching the incident in Brezna, these texts were the first clues discovered. Without any other evidence, it was difficult to imagine what happened in the village, other than that an Orthodox priest decided to have a plaque made and hung *only* for Chetniks. Later, after interviewing local residents, the first major surprise was hearing that the names on the plaque

were not just those of Chetniks, but also Partisans. The records for Father Veličković's trial later confirmed these oral testimonies. It was only through these difficult-to-obtain pieces of evidence that it became possible to move beyond the sanitized version of the incident presented in the newspaper articles. Interview with Milija Talović on 11 August 2005 in Brezna; Slavka (no last name given) on 11 August 2005 in Brezna; Aleksandar Kozoder on 11 August 2005 in Brezna.

127. *Zadušnice* literally means “for souls” (*za duše*). A concise definition of this holiday can be found in Kulišić, Petrović, and Pantelić, *Srpski mitološki rečnik*, 132–133. For discussions about the beliefs that Orthodox Christians in Serbia have regarding *Zadušnice*, see Bandić, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko*, 117–118; idem., *Tabu u tradicionalnoj kulturi Srba*, 179–180; Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 79–80; Jovanović, *Srpska knjiga mrtvih*, 39. See also, Milina Ivanović-Barišić, “Zadušnice—vid komunikacije živih sa mrtvima,” *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta* 53 (2005): 301–304.

128. The burial in Čačak, described above, was even held on a Saturday, the day traditionally set aside in Serbian Orthodoxy for honoring the dead. On this practice, see Ivanović-Barišić, “Zadušnice,” 297; Zečević, *Kult mrtvih kod Srba*, 80.

129. On the removal of the monument and the exhumation and reburial of the bones of the Partisans, see Davidović and Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost*, 3: 286.

130. Numerous examples of documents supporting this claim were found among the materials for the Union of Fighters of the People's Liberation War in the following archives in Serbia: Arhiv Jugoslavije, Arhiv Srbije, Arhiv Vojvodine, Istorijski arhiv Kraljevo, Istorijski arhiv Čačak, Istorijski arhiv “Ras” Novi Pazar.

131. Interview with Petar Veličković and Ljubinka Kerkezović on 26 September 2005 in Čačak; Rosanda Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Mrčajevci.

132. On the commission's investigations in the village of Donja Gorevnica and its immediate region, see AJ, fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 466, dos. br. 4249, Zapisnik, Donja Gorevnica, Srez ljubički, 17 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik, Donja Gorevnica, Srez ljubički, 18 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik, Donja Gorevnica, Srez ljubički, 19 November 1945, 1; kut. 484, dos. br. 4574, Okružno poverništvo zemaljske komisije za utvrđivanje zločina i njihovih pomogača, 25 January 1946, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju svedoka Milana Obradovića, 20 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Mileve Đorđevića iz Donje Gorevnice, 18 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Jane Aleksandrića iz Donje Gorevnice, 17 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Ljubiše Aleksandrića iz Donje Gorevnice, 16 November 1945, 1; Zapisnik o saslušanju Vasa Aleksandrića iz Donje Gorevnice, November 1945, 1.

133. See Davidović and Timotijević, “Drugi svetski rat u čačanskom kraju,” 29.

134. Interview with Milosav Borovnjak on 25 September 2005 (on the telephone).

135. Some people in the Čačak region, acutely aware that the authorities suspected the relatives of Chetniks of being “enemies of the people,” even went so far as to try to change their last names in order to avoid any problems. See Davidović and Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost*, 3: 282.

136. A third issue that arose during the trial was why Father Veličković had thrown out the wreaths for fallen Partisan soldiers. The prosecutors argued that such an act could only be carried out by an “enemy of the people.” It is difficult, however, to draw such a clear conclusion from the sparse testimony provided in the court document. No living witnesses could be found in Brezna who could speak more precisely about this event. It is possible, as the prosecutors claimed, that Father Veličković simply wanted to desecrate the memory of Partisan soldiers. But if that is true, why would he have consented to having their names carved on the plaque together with Chetniks? This would seem to contradict the authorities’ interpretation of Father Veličković’s action as a demonstration of anti-Partisan bias. He may have simply removed the wreaths (and perhaps all the wreaths—that is, those for both Partisans and Chetniks) after some time had passed, and the witness may have been offended by this. In any case, the testimony and the circumstances surrounding the removal of the wreaths are not sufficiently clear from the available evidence for one to determine exactly what happened, let alone conclude that such an act was that of an “enemy of the people.”

137. Interviews with Petar Veličković and Ljubinka Kerkezović on 26 September 2005 in Čačak; Rosanda Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Mrčajevci.

138. Local residents were primarily responsible for financing the construction of the majority of monuments for those killed in the Second World War in Yugoslavia. Only for monuments of republican or national significance did the government donate sizable funds.

139. Some of the interpretations presented here on the possible motivations of the local authorities in Brezna are based on an interview with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak.

140. To cite just one example, see “Drskost koja vrijeđa . . .,” *Pobjeda: list Narodnooslobodilačkog fronta Crne Gore i Boke*, 14 September 1958, 1. This article describes a monument built for a Chetnik commander in the city of Ivangrad (known today as Berane) in Montenegro. According to the author, the statue appears to be saying to the Partisan fighters in nearby graves: “Here I am above your heads, in the same uniform, only without the bombs and bullets that I once had when I would come to beat you.”

141. Interview with Petar Veličković on 26 September 2005 in Čačak.

142. Interview with Ljubinka Kerkezović on 26 September 2005 in Čačak.

143. Orthodox Christianity’s approach to caring for the dead holds that all people are one in the eyes of God. Therefore, the church accepts everyone in death, regardless of whether or not they are considered to have been believers or had sinned, and the living must be given the opportunity to openly pray for the forgiveness of the sins committed by the dead. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 245–255; Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002), 202–227; Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, New York: 1988), 136, 181–183.

144. Alessandro Portelli, “The Peculiarities of Oral History,” *History Workshop*, 12 (Autumn, 1981): 100.

145. On the United States, see John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005). On Spain, see Paloma Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy*, trans. Mark Oakley (New York: Berghahn, 2002); Michael Richards, “From War Culture to Civil Society: Francoism, Social Change and Memories of the Spanish Civil War,” *History & Memory* 14, no. 1–2, (2002): 93–120. On Greece, see David Close, “The Road to Reconciliation? The Greek Civil War and the Politics of Memory in the 1980s,” in Philip Carabott and Thanasis D. Sfikas, eds., *The Greek Civil War: Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004), 257–278.

146. The first work that attempted to provide statistics of those killed during the Second World War in the Čačak region was not published until 1977 and only included data for those who had fought for, or sympathized with, the Partisans. The book counted eleven men from Brezna as being either Partisans or victims who supported the People’s Liberation Movement (Subotić, *Čačanski kraj u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi*). The first study to include data for all those killed in the Čačak region—regardless of ideological affiliation—was published only in 2004. (Davidović and Timotijević, *Zatamnjena prošlost*, 3: 329–462). Publication of this data was met with protests from the Union of Fighters of the People’s Liberation War in Čačak and with the eventual counterpublication by Radisav S. Nedović (a member of that organization) of *Zatamnjena istina: manipulacije, obmane i prevare u knjizi “Zatamnjena prošlost—istorija ravnogoraca čačanskog kraja”* (Čačak: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a; Okružni odbor SUBNOR-a, 2006), which challenged these numbers. Davidović and Timotijević have attempted to answer these criticisms in *Osvetljavanje istine. Dokumenta za političku i vojnu istoriju Čačka, 1938–1941. I* (Čačak-Kraljevo: Narodni muzej, 2006).

147. For a paradigmatic example of a theorist who suggests that the state, particularly a totalitarian one, is all powerful in its imposition on society of a particular form of remembrance, see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.



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