BETWEEN WARFARE AND WELFARE: VETERANS’ ASSOCIATIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITY IN SERBIA

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of PhD in Social Anthropology in the Faculty of Humanities

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GORAN DOKIĆ

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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Note on translation and pronunciation

I have translated all the terms, phrases, institutional names, and excerpts from interviews from Serbian into English myself. All italic words in parenthesis are in the Serbian language unless otherwise indicated. Below is a short list of some of the letters and sounds that are specific to the Serbian language and their approximate equivalents in English.¹ The spelling is phonetic and each sound has its own corresponding letter.

a as in father  
c ts as in cats  
c̣ ch as in cherry  
c̣̣ ch as in chile (only softer)  
d̪̪ soft j as in the British duke  
dž j as in jam  
e as in get  
h as in hot  
i long e as in he  
j y as in yellow  
lj ly as in milieu  
nj ny as in Sonya  
o o as in not  
r hard r rolled with one flip of the tongue  
ṣ̣ sh as in she  
u u as in school  
z z as in zebra  
ž zh as in measure

¹ I borrowed parts of this list from the Pronunciation Guide in Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings (2007).
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BiH</td>
<td>Bosna i Hercegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>Centar za ratnu trauma (War Trauma Centre)</td>
</tr>
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<td>CSR</td>
<td>Centar za socijalni rad (Centre for Social Work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZKD</td>
<td>Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju (Centre for Cultural Decontamination)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEMOS</td>
<td>Demokratična opozicija Slovenije (Democratic Opposition of Slovenia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOS</td>
<td>Demokratska opozicija Srbije (Democratic Opposition of Serbia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Demokratska stranka (Democratic Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSS</td>
<td>Demokratska stranka Srbije (Democratic Party of Serbia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECHR</td>
<td>European Court of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDZ</td>
<td>Hrvatska demokratska zajednica (Croatian Democratic Union)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HO</td>
<td>Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HV</td>
<td>Hrvatska vojska (Croatian Army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICTY</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia</td>
</tr>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>JNA</td>
<td>Jugoslovenska narodna armija (Yugoslav People’s Army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSO</td>
<td>Jedinica za specijalne operacije (Unit for Special Operations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPJ</td>
<td>Komunistička partija Jugoslavije (Communist Party of Yugoslavia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SKJ</td>
<td>Savez komunista Jugoslavije (League of Communists of Yugoslavia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SK-PJ</td>
<td>Savez komunista – Pokret za Jugoslaviju (League of Communists–Movement for Yugoslavia)</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>VBS</td>
<td><em>Voli bližnjega svoga</em> (Love Thy Neighbor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoD</td>
<td><em>Ministarstvo odbrane</em> (Ministry of Defense)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoLSP</td>
<td><em>Ministarstvo rada i socijalne politike</em> (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFTA</td>
<td>North American Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOR</td>
<td><em>Narodnooslobodilački rat</em> (National Liberation War)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONO</td>
<td><em>Opštenarodna odbra na</em> (Total National Defense)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIO</td>
<td><em>Fond za penzijsko i invalidsko osiguranje</em> (Pension and Disability Insurance Fund)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PVS</td>
<td><em>Pokret veterana Srbije</em> (Veterans’ Movement of Serbia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Posttraumatic Stress Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDB</td>
<td><em>Služba državne bezbednosti</em> (State Security Service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFRJ</td>
<td><em>Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija</em> (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIV</td>
<td><em>Savezno izvršno veće</em> (Federal Executive Council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>Srpska pravoslavna crkva (Serbian Orthodox Church)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPO</td>
<td><em>Srpski pokret obnove</em> (Serbian Renewal Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPS</td>
<td><em>Socijalistička partija Srbije</em> (Serbian Socialist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRS</td>
<td><em>Srpska radikalna stranka</em> (Serbian Radical Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRVIJ</td>
<td><em>Savez ratnih vojnih invalida Jugoslavije</em> (Association of Disabled War Veterans of Yugoslavia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBNOR</td>
<td>League of Associations of Veterans of the National Liberation War (<em>Savez udruženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TO</td>
<td>Territorial Defense Forces (<em>Teritorijalna odbra na</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>UBR90</td>
<td>Udruženje boraca rata od 1990-te (Association of Combatants of the Wars of 1990s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPPB</td>
<td>Udruženje porodica palih boraca (Association of Families of Killed and Missing Soldiers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UROR</td>
<td>Udruženje rezervnih oficira i ratnika (Association of Reserve Officers and Fighters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URMVIS</td>
<td>Udruženje ratnih i mirnodopskih vojnih invalida Srbije (Association of Disabled War and Peacetime Veterans of Serbia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>URVIS</td>
<td>Udruženje ratnih vojnih invalida Srbije (Association of Disabled War Veterans of Serbia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vojska Srbije (Army of Serbia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WVF</td>
<td>World Veterans’ Foundation</td>
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Figure 1: Map of former Yugoslavia

Figure 2: Map of Serbia
Short Abstract

This dissertation focuses on Serbian veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars and their attempts to secure symbolic and material recognition from the state after losing a series of wars. My main goal is to examine some of the main features of Serbia’s welfare system and to explore the ways in which war veterans negotiated their entitlements and secured access to social care. On a different level, I analyse Serbia’s transformation from a socialist society to a free market economy – a process in which a large part of the veteran population seems to have been caught in the middle, between warfare and welfare. Therefore, this study is an analysis of the predicaments of Serbian veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars and of the ways in which they were constructed, articulated and mobilised as a discourse and tool to differentiate and bestow a particular social group with particular rights to material and symbolic resources. The analysis here is two-fold: it tracks the practices through which war veterans consolidated and communicated their demands for recognition as well as problematises the responses by the Serbian state and society to those demands while, following Foucault, treating both acts as techniques of government and exercises in governmentality.
Loose Abstract

This dissertation focuses on Serbian veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars and their attempts to secure symbolic and material recognition from the state after losing a series of wars. My main goal is to examine some of the main features of Serbia’s welfare system and to explore the ways in which war veterans negotiated their entitlements and secured access to social care. On a different level, I analyse Serbia’s transformation from a socialist society to a free market economy – a process in which a large part of the veteran population seems to have been caught in the middle, between warfare and welfare. I raised the following questions: (1) in what ways did the Serbian state provide for the population of war veterans, (2) what was the role of VAs in this process, (3) how did the interplay between actors and their position within the local political and economic landscape influence veterans’ prospects for social recognition and access to care, and (4) how did war veterans justify their demands and in what ways did they reproduce or transform the official rhetoric that validated or challenged their privileged position?

Therefore, this study is an analysis of the predicaments of Serbian veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars and the ways in which they were constructed, articulated and mobilised as a discourse and tool to differentiate and bestow a particular social group with particular rights to state resources. This was occurring in what I described as zones of ambiguities and unsolved contradictions due to the fact that two decades after post-Yugoslav wars, Serbia still had no official records about the exact number of killed and missing persons, or about the size of its veteran population. This also means that the state officialdom had no information about postwar living conditions of a large portion of its population, which impacted veterans’ and other people’s ideas about nationality, the state and their rights as Serbian citizens. Veterans voiced their discontent with the state and wider society through what I have observed as narratives of multiple lacks and losses that pointed to particular sites of ‘injury’ that affected their sense of dignity. In the process of making their claims for status recognition they competed with other groups in Serbian civil society over their respective positions in a hierarchy of victims in need of state protection. This could be described as a paradoxical process in which subjects seem to oppose the state while replicating forms of state power to gain recognition. I analyse the practices through which war veterans consolidated and communicated their demands for recognition as well as the responses by the Serbian state and society to those demands while, following Foucault, treating both acts as techniques of government and exercises in governmentality.
Acknowledgments

The completion of this thesis would not be possible without the generous support of many people and organisations. I am deeply indebted to all those who have encouraged me to bring this project to its end. In addition to my first supervisor Stef Jansen whose trust and understanding made all this possible, I would like to thank my second supervisor Anthony Simpson and Mark Elliot, as well as all my and peers and lecturers at the University of Manchester. Thank you also to the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the School of Social Sciences at the University of Manchester for their financial support.

In Serbia I would like to thank all the veterans from Rakovica, and especially Mile Milošević for always trying to make me feel at home. Thanks also to all the people at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade, and especially to Noa Treister for making it possible to take my research to a level that I would never be able to reach on my own. Many other organisations provided their assistance, including the War Trauma Centre from Novi Sad, the Association of Disabled War and Peacetime War Veterans and the Association of the Families of Killed and Missing Soldiers form Belgrade, Love Thy Neighbor and Proaktiv from Niš, and many others. I thank all of you.

My special thanks goes to my friends and flat mates in Manchester, Erol-Valeriu Chioasca and Čarna Brković.

And lastly, I would like to send my deepest thanks to my mama Branka for all her care and understanding and for teaching me how to listen and tell good stories from an early age. Marek, I will forever stay indebted for all your love and relentless support.
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Figure 1: Map of the former Yugoslavia\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{2} Geographic Guide, Maps of Europe [http://www.europe-atlas.com/yugoslavia.htm], last accessed on 1 September 2013.
Figure 2: Map of Serbia

Introduction

**Ethnography between warfare and welfare**

We allowed for things to go too far
This fight was without honor, against reason
In bygone days we lost pride
In bygone days we lost everything

Ekatarina Velika, *Together*

This is a study about the predicaments of veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars and the ambiguities and unsolved contradictions in their relationship to the Serbian postwar state and society. I examine their attempts to regain a lost sense of dignity and to articulate and mobilise a particular discourse of victimhood and entitlement to gain a privileged access to state resources. Although an important element of veterans’ narratives concerned their direct participation in wars, I was interested in this part of their subjective experience only to the extent that they engaged particular practices of legitimisation. My interest in this topic emerged from my earlier work about the introduction of the diagnostic category of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) into the discourse of Croatian psychiatry and how this influenced the creation of an exclusive veterans’ policy. However, Serbian war veterans continued to puzzle me, as it appeared they were not suffering from the same kinds of maladies and seemed invisible in comparison to their counterparts in Croatia. I asked myself, ‘what happened to all those people who fought on the Serbian side?’

During my fieldwork in Serbia, as I was introducing this research project to my interlocutors, they would often make references to the writer Laza Lazarević and his short story *People Will Reward All This* (1952 [1882]). The story is a powerful critique of the nineteenth-century Serbian state and society for failing to care for its disabled war veterans. One of its main characters, a tradesman Blagoja, spends long hours waiting for a boat on which his son should

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4 Zajedno. The album Somebody is Watching Us *(Neko nas posmatra)* © 1993 PGP-RTS.


6 Sve će to narod pozlatiti. Laza Lazarević (1851–1891) was a writer, psychiatrist, lawyer and veteran of three wars. He is one of the main figures of Serbian literary realism (Babić and Babić 2010).
return from war. After a night of fear and anticipation, he is shocked to see that his son has lost an arm and a leg. Failing to hide his despair, Blagoja starts to shout ‘people will reward all of this!’; hoping that the people around them would show their respect and reward his son’s sacrifice. He keeps repeating those same words to reassure himself and his son that there is still some hope for them. Moved by the scene, the people start collecting coins and trinkets for the son. At that point, by accepting the offerings thrown at him, the son realises that he has become an ‘invalid’ and a ‘beggar.’ The tragic end of the story leaves no space for hope: Blagoja starts drinking and changes his line to ‘God will reward all this’ and dies soon after, while the son continues to receive aid from the state ‘invalid fund’ and to beg for help.

In hindsight, I can understand why this story was regularly evoked as an ironic reflection on the Serbian postwar context that I was investigating. It served as a critique of the ways in which war veterans were (not) rewarded by the Serbian state and to point out how the prospects for the valorisation of veterans’ sacrifices faded away with time. Although the context that Lazarević described was different from the postsocialist and postwar Serbia that I worked and lived in, many of my interlocutors thought that some of the main challenges that veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars were facing were in fact the same. However, I took these explanations with a grain of salt, as I could see that as much as the narratives about marginalisation and stigmatisation were true for some veterans, they were also used for the personal gain of others.

This dissertation is precisely about the ways in which different groups of war veterans evoked a sense of victimhood in order to compete for very limited resources from the state and achieved various degrees of success. My main goal was to examine some of the key features of Serbia’s welfare system and to explore the ways in which war veterans negotiated their entitlements and secured access to social care. This would allow for an analysis – from a particularly interesting angle – of Serbia’s postwar transformation from a socialist society to a free-market economy and liberal democracy: a process in which war veterans seemed to have been caught, as my title suggests, between warfare and welfare. In fact, as I will show ethnographically, despite the fact that they responded to the

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7 I make a distinction between ‘entitlement’ as the claim for special treatment and ‘privilege’ as the official state recognition of those claims.
call to arms by the Serbian state, upon their return most did not qualify for any special benefits, material or symbolic, except for those who were injured and consequently had a recognised war-related disability status. Nevertheless, like many before them, they grouped around shared experiences of war and organised through veterans associations (VAs), some of which became important ‘safe houses’ through which they could voice their concerns and exert pressure on the Serbian state. For this reason, I approached VAs as a specific type of social actors whose activities were an integral part of the postsocialist transformations of Serbia’s social and political system. This should also be understood against a specific historical background: during Yugoslav socialism, war veterans constituted an important category that occupied a rhetorically and materially important place in the distribution of welfare benefits. However, with the dissolution of the former state, their position changed and they could no longer claim the same benefits that older generations of veterans took for granted.

In order to explore the ways in which veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars were or were not recognised as a category of citizens with special rights and privileges after the breakup of former Yugoslavia, I raised the following questions: (1) in what ways did the Serbian state provide for the population of war veterans, (2) what was the role of VAs in this process, (3) how did the interplay between actors and their position within the local political and economic landscape influence veterans’ prospects for social recognition and access to care, and (4) how did war veterans justify their demands and in what ways did they reproduce or transform the official rhetoric that validated or challenged their privileged position?

Thus, this study is an analysis of the predicaments of Serbia’s veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars and of the ways in which they were employed as a discursive tool to differentiate and bestow a particular social group with particular rights to material and symbolic resources. Therefore, the analysis here is two-fold: it at once tracks the practices through which war veterans consolidated and communicated their demands for state and social recognition, and problematises the responses by the Serbian state and society to those demands while,pace Foucault, treating both acts as techniques of government and exercises in governmentality. In the following section I unpack some of the main concepts and theoretical frameworks that will serve as a connecting thread throughout this
dissertation and as the basis for a critical engagement with related research in anthropology.

**Theoretical and conceptual framework: insights from anthropology of the state, studies of welfare provision, and governmentality**

Central to the understanding of war veterans and their claims for recognition is their relationship to the state, both as an idea and a material form, which links this project to the anthropology of the state and studies of welfare provision. The state continues to be one of the core issues of concern for social scientists, national and supranational institutions, as well as individual political actors. In practice, it exists as a complex system of institutional structures and political processes, but it is also an idea, a symbolic construct, and an entity that is socially and culturally mediated (Abrams 1988).

Earlier definitions of state relied on its separation from society and economy (Mitchell 1991:77). However, the attempts to locate those boundaries revealed a ‘limitless terrain’ in which sharp dividing lines remain obscure. By the same token, the focus on the apparent conceptual ambiguity of the state exposed new terrains of inquiry that made it more adaptable and open for ethnographic analysis (Aretxaga 2003:393; Trouillot 2001:126). In this way, it became evident that the challenge of locating and defining state boundaries should not be regarded as an obstacle but as way to understand it and employ it to study political processes in which those boundaries are created and maintained (Mitchell 1991:78). Similarly, Abrams (1988) argues against the treatment of the state as an implicit construct that is somehow separate from a complex of institutions tied together in government, because this prevents a clear understanding about how it is constructed through political practice and from seeing political practice as it is. However, his insistence on the separation of the points in which the state has an objective institutional existence from the processes of reification makes it difficult to understand how the system of power extends beyond the confines of the state (Mitchell 1999:76).

A closer investigation of the changes in the treatment of the state reveals a number of transformations within and outside of academia. In the period after the Second World War, US scholars often replaced the ambiguous concept of the
state with the ‘political system’ (Mitchell 1991:79–80). However, they were again faced with the problem of identifying its boundaries. In the 1970s the state was brought back into the discussion as a system of decision-making. This shift was caused by transformations in the relationship between US politicians and political scientists both of which were increasingly attentive to political developments in other states, as well as insights from other academic disciplines. The focus on the state was driven by the supposed threat of communism and what was perceived as a postwar need for a spread of the ‘civic culture’ and ‘democratic spirit’ of US politics (ibid.). The effects of the Vietnam War and the impact of liberal social movements further stimulated these developments (Steinmetz 1991:11). However, the problem in defining the boundaries between the state and society remained.

A focus on the limits of the state and the extent of its reach implies the existence of a non-state domain. Although as Li argues ‘there is no spatial beyond the state’ (2005:384), the ways in which state policies and regulations are designed and implemented are to a large extent conditioned by supranational organisations (such as, for instance, the World Bank), international flows of trade and capital, as well as the expanding discourse of human rights. These challenges from ‘above’ are often combined with those from ‘below’ through the rise of ethnonationalist and separatist movements, increased migration, and the creation of new demands for entitlements (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001:2).

Similarly, studies of globalisation have pointed to the weakening of the state (see, for example, Hannerz 1996; Ong 1999; Tsing 2000). Events of global importance, such as the formation of the European Union (EU) and the fall of the Berlin Wall, were understood as posing serious threats to state borders and ‘national’ economies (Arexaga 2003:393–394; Trouillot 2001:128). However, even if the state has lost some of its influence to ‘suprastate’ forces, it is still instrumental in the definition of citizenship, access to state benefits, control of violence, as well as mobilisation of nationalist sentiments (Steinmetz 1999:11). For this reason some scholars concerned with the impact of global political and economic transformations advocate a combined focus on how states exercise power in supranational institutions and how forces external to the state condition the internal ‘microspaces’ of everyday life (Alonso 1994:400; Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001:2). Others call for a rethinking of the relationship between the centre and the periphery and propose a renewed focus on the practices at the
margins of the state and how they inform and shape the regulatory processes that constitute the state (Das and Poole 2004). Similarly, others argue for a focus on the ‘redeployment of statecraft’ (Trouillot 2001), or the restructuring of processes that make the state exist.

Anthropologists have traditionally treated the state as an entity with a persistent grip on people’s lives. In his seminal book Seeing Like a State, James Scott (1998) provides a critical analysis of several large-scale projects in which state planners and bureaucrats created development schemes that were intended to improve human living conditions. He argues that projects such as the Soviet collectivization and the Tanzanian forced movement of people into villages were doomed to fail because state bureaucrats did nothing to consult the practical knowledge of people whose lives they were supposed to improve. These kinds of practices, he suggests, are the core feature of ‘high-modernist’ state ideology which he describes as a:

[...] muscle-bound version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws. It originated, of course, in the West, as a by-product of unprecedented progress in science and industry (ibid.:4).

Scott’s argument provides important insights about some of the reasons for the failure of centrally planned social engineering projects. However he is criticized for over-focusing on the grand schemes and for failing to notice the microspaces in which people engage with and ‘navigate’ (Brković 2012:113) through everyday reality, as well as for not recognising how these large development plans may stimulate the production of new forms of knowledge and practices (Li 2005:385). What is more, Scott’s implicit assumption that ‘society’ is somehow separate and opposed to the state and his emphasis on state evasion by ‘ordinary people’ prevents him from considering how people may want to be incorporated in the state (see, for example, Jansen 2014a; Reeves 2011, 2009; Spencer 2007).
On a different but related level Scott’s engagement with scale raises the question about how states are ‘imagined’ (cf. Anderson 1991) as having certain spatial properties. In order to answer this question Ferguson and Gupta (2002) identify what they describe as the principle of verticality and encompassment. Through verticality, they argue, states represent themselves as having legitimacy and control over other institutions, while encompassment refers to the widening series of spatial spheres of influence from the family and community to the system of nation-states (ibid.:982). What makes verticality and encompassment effective is their presence in everyday bureaucratic practices. Their exploration of the organisation and delivery of a maternal welfare service in India shows how verticality and encompassment may be achieved through the production of bureaucratic hierarchies, and, crucially for their analysis, show that it is not just the state institutions that contribute to this, but also a range of supranational organisations. However, although they provide important insights into where people engage in spatialising the state, the question remains how people’s ideas about the state influence their own subjectivities and to what extent they reproduce or transform the shared notion about what constitutes the state. In other words, in what ways does people’s ‘horizontal’ movement through these sites constitute their experience of the state?

In order to bring closer the interdependence of social actors and the state, Herzfeld (1995:2) notes how they both have related interests and employ similar actions to achieve them. For example, people use laws to legitimise their claims, and using its legitimate powers the state ‘converts revolution into conformity, represents ethnic cleansing as national consensus and cultural homogeneity and recasts the sordid terrors of emergence into a seductive mortality’ (ibid.). By bring the interests of social actors and the state closer to one another, Herzfeld makes a convincing argument against the polarity in which the interests of the state are at the top and individual actors at the bottom. Instead, he suggests, both are involved in a complex process of cultural engagement. In order to understand this relationship he advocates for an investigation of the rhetoric of ‘cultural intimacy,’ or how both the state and individual political actors make use of the shared elements of cultural identity. In this way, the interrelationship between social actors and the state becomes one of the crucial ways in which to trace the continuous reinvention of the state, both in terms of its symbolic appeal and
institutional practice. Yet, in order to account for the ways in which social actors such as Serbian war veterans call for the state, I side with researchers who extend their analyses beyond the culture and identification in order to bring closer the ways in which the state is also conceived as ‘the locus of intense emotional investment, as a site of enactment or performance and as an object of hope’ (Reeves 2001; see also Jansen 2014a and Spencer 2010).

Similarly, Aretxaga (2003:395) proposes an investigation of the subjective domain that exists in the relationship between the people and the state, or how the state is constructed, performed, and commemorated and how it becomes a subject in everyday life. This approach mirrors Mitchell’s proposal for the analysis of how a ‘state effect’ is produced:

An alternative approach to the state has to begin with [the] uncertain boundary. In a given area of practice, how is the effect created that certain aspects of what occurs pertain to society, while others stand apart as the state? More importantly, what is the significance of effecting this distinction? (Mitchell 1991:89).

He further argues that the state does not occur only as a subjective construct, but is also brought into existence through the engagement with everyday visible forms, such as the use of legal language, public architecture and military uniforms and adds that state structures should be analysed as collection of effects, or ‘the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist’ (ibid.:94).

Sarah Lund’s study (2001) about the process in which people acquire identity documents in Peru is an example of how state effects inform people’s understanding and embodiment of the state, as well as how the state itself is constructed and reproduced. Lund is particularly interested in people’s movement through and engagement with specific bureaucratic spaces or symbolic points that constitute the language of the state. In order to have their names included in the national electoral registry, people travel through various administrative outposts and public spaces. By traveling to and through these spaces, by queuing up, filing applications, and negotiating with public officials, people actively legitimise the state and typically do this in a non-discursive, embodied way, engaging with the
state organisation of space. At the same time, in order to make its bureaucratic structures visible, the state relies on people’s engagement and movement through these sites (ibid.:21–22).

Similarly, Penelope Harvey (2005) locates the state effect through an exploration of the role of roads in the construction of ideas about the presence and/or absence of the Peruvian state. In her detailed analysis of people and goods that follow the road from Peruvian lowlands to Cuzco, she exposes some of the complex processes in which people struggle to ‘perform the state’ (Harvey 2005:128). She points to the importance of identifying concrete material effects that keep the notion of the state alive. Furthermore, her study raises important questions about how states produce and maintain spaces for governance and how people imagine the state through what they regard as its presence or absence, and shows how this simultaneously allows legitimation and contestation.

While anthropology of the state has a relatively long history, anthropological research about the provision of social care is scarce and most studies that deal with the welfare state and redistribution of resources are grounded in political and economic theory and social policy analysis. At the same time, most non-anthropological literature on welfare provision is concerned with the problem of division of responsibility between the welfare state and the private sector and on comparisons of welfare economics and social spending by governments (Garrett and Mitchell 2001). With this in mind, let me briefly outline some of the ways in which the state distributes welfare resources.

Although there is no precise agreement on the definition of the welfare state and provision, most researchers continue to agree that the state continues to play a major role in the organisation and distribution of social resources, such as income support, health care, education, and housing. Spicker (1988:3) argues that in its general sense ‘welfare’ refers to the physical and material ‘well-being’ of people supported through the provision of social services. However, provision of welfare is not intended only for the benefit of the recipients. Instead, social services have an impact on economic policy and they may become instrumental in achieving social justice or promoting social change. Although the exact position of welfare provision in the state or the market remains one of the central objects of contemporary political debates, there is a broad consensus about the continuous need for the provision of ‘basic needs’ (Vij 2007:2).
The historical development of the welfare state is closely linked to the changing frameworks of economic analysis and political ideology. Esping-Andersen (2003) notes that from its very beginning the course of development of the welfare state has been influenced by competing visions of a ‘Good Society’ that were as much reflections of the need for social improvement of living conditions as they were questions of nation-building. Recently the welfare state has been witnessing another transformation in which the range/scale of public welfare provision that was the hallmark of the post-war welfare state appears to be shrinking. Policy makers usually attribute this change to the rapid integration of global economy and argue that the increase in market competition has made welfare retrenchment inevitable. In other words, the effects of globalisation seem to threaten the existence of the welfare state (Garrett and Mitchell 2001; cf. Gough 2008). Likewise, Mishra (1999) argues that globalisation is jeopardising the capacity of nation states for social protection as state power is being dispersed across different national and supranational organisations such as the NAFTA\(^8\) or the EU. This was caused by the spread of neoliberal market ideologies according to which organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) promote economic policies focused on limited government expenditures, selective social services and private welfare provision. Other researchers have noted that increased dependence on global flows of trade and capital resulted in the ‘hollowing out of the state’ or weakening of the state capacity to tax and spend, which is supposedly marking the end of citizen-based claims for entitlements that were characteristic of Keynesian welfare capitalism (Vij 2007). This however does not mean the end of public welfare provision or the welfare state but points to its ‘rescaling’ and to the continuous expansion of the capitalist developmental logic in accordance with the appearance of new and/or transformed forms of social regulation. This again brings us to the question about the capacity of the welfare state to sustain its systems of welfare provision. Given the centrality of this problem, it is surprising that there is still no major anthropological body of knowledge with explicit focus on welfare provision. Yet, there are several notable exceptions that need to be singled out. Let me briefly outline some of those that I find particularly important for this study.

\(^8\) The North American Free Trade Agreement.
In her seminal ethnography about the effects of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Petryna (2002) explores how the Ukrainian state provided for the growing population of people who were exposed to radiation. In the aftermath of the disaster, the number of ‘sufferers’ grew to 3.5 million persons all of which were entitled for some sort of social protection (ibid.:4). Rather than contracting, the Ukrainian welfare system expanded and the number of categories of welfare recipients increased, which opened up new forms of solidarity and competition, as well as modes of surveillance, regulation and control. Similarly, Brković’s (2014a; 2014b; 2012) work on social protection in Bijeljina, BiH, focuses on the ways in which people learned to navigate their ways through shifting state and non-state domains of social protection and provision. In this way, her informants did not necessarily see the state as separate from civil society, which allowed them to construct and make use of new forms of personalised power relations (Brković 2012:19). In a related manner, Thelen (2007) investigates how the transfer of West German norms and regulations to the town of Rostock effected the organisation and provision of care for a group of retired workers of a formerly Eastern German company. She argues that the effects of complex organisational changes cannot be explained by evoking dichotomous shifts from the public to the private, or from state to non-state modes of provision, but instead through an exploration of various overlapping forms of care, which, in the context of her study brought into focus the influence of socialist models on the emerging forms of social provision in post-unification Germany (ibid.:46). Leutloff-Grandits’ (2009) research about the provision of social care for Croatian returnees in the town of Knin that was organised by a local Catholic charity organisation Caritas exposes some of the ways in which the postwar introduction of new social security networks impacted the lives of the local population. Although the charity campaign was successful in taking on some of the responsibilities for the social protection of the population which felt abandoned by the Croatian state, it also provoked different responses from the settlers and natives, including the local Serbian population, thus creating a different sense of entitlement and recognition (ibid.:56-58).

Therefore, at a basic level, all of these studies are concerned with transformations in the organisation and delivery of welfare provision and the shifts in responsibilities between different state and non-state actors. As such, they
raise a number of questions that require further analysis: How do people, individuals and groups, (re-) position themselves in relation to state power in order to stake their claims for resources? What are the issues that are recognised as being of state concern and which ones are left on the margins or treated as less or not relevant to the state project? What happens when people do not negate the existence of the state, but in fact express the need for its increased presence in their lives? What are the ideas about what constitutes non-state domains and who are the people thought to be occupying those spaces? In what ways does the state provide for its citizens to link them to the body politic? How do people legitimise their claims for entitlements and status recognition?

As I will show ethnographically throughout this study, the experiences of Serbian veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars may provide some answers to these questions and add new insights to the anthropology of the state and studies of welfare provision. Through their demands for state recognition and repeated calls for material and symbolic rewards Serbian war veterans openly challenged the status quo in which the Serbian political establishment ignored their presence due to their immediate links to the unpopular lost wars of the 1990s. In this context, veterans employed a discourse of multiple lacks and losses in order to produce and invest a particular ‘condition of victimhood’ (Didier and Rechtman 2007:5), not necessarily to claim financial compensation for their psychological or other kinds of injury, but to regain and legitimate their sense of entitlement. In this way, through their interactions with both the imagined and the material state, they pointed to a number of important social and political transformations that Serbia has been facing since the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. One of the most visible changes was the apparent devolution of state responsibility for the social protection and provision of resources for war veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars to various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (cf. Ferguson and Gupta 2002) and the emergence of demands for new entitlement hierarchies. In a country that built its legitimacy on its supposed glorious military past, this was not received favorably by large numbers of war veterans who fell short of receiving any government support for their sacrifices in the wars. In this context, they forged new, and at times unlikely, alliances in order to compete for very limited resources from state as well as non-state sources. Their movements between different state and non-state domains reflected the ways in which they perceived
the state as separate from and linked to civil society, which also exposed new forms in the exercise of power and social control (Sharma and Gupta 2006; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Mitchell 2006).

In terms of scale, veterans’ predicaments were affected by the circulation of transnational forces that impacted the course of ‘liberalisation’ and ‘democratisation’ of postwar Serbia, as well as by their participation in different microspaces of (self)governance (Fraser 2003; Jessop 1999; Paley 2001; Sharma and Gupta 2006:21). In fact, as I will argue throughout this thesis, this dispersal of responsibility was crucial to their experience of political subjectivation. Furthermore, out of the situation in which the Serbian state was incapable (and/or unwilling) to perform its redistributive function emerged new forms of conduct in which the state was no longer viewed as governing large numbers of people within its territory. Similarly Greenberg’s (2011) notion of ‘postdisciplinary’ Serbia points to how people reflected about what they perceived as an ‘abnormal’ situation in which they could not cross state borders without a visa. Under these conditions people called for a return to ‘normalcy’ and expressed ‘a desire to be subjects to disciplinary regimes of power – a state that works’ (ibid.:90; cf. Jansen 2014b). At the same time, different state and non-state actors were now effectively using a new collection of transnational discourses, including the discourse on human rights. This dispersal and the ensuing modifications of power and responsibility among a whole range of social actors, from individuals to state and non-state organisations, and involving national and international stakeholders, is central to the understanding of the role of war veterans in social and political transformations in Serbia. Therefore, in order to capture the complexity and the dynamics of these relationships, it is necessary to reposition the analytical lens to capture the spaces and processes that both encompass as well as exist beyond the state, which can be done by engaging and broadening the Foucauldian concept of governmentality.

Michel Foucault introduced the concept of governmentality in the late 1970s, particularly in the series of lectures at the Collège de France in which he proposed a type of genealogy for the study of the modern Western European (nation-) state. He defined governmentality in various ways as the ‘art of government’, the ‘conduct of conduct’, or ‘the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics [of this] complex
power, which has as its target the population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means the apparatuses of security’ (Burchell 1996:19; Foucault 1990:87, 102). Thus, governmentality can be understood as a combination of different modalities of power that emerged in the sixteenth-century France and over the next two centuries developed into a type of ‘political rationality’ that was both transforming the existing forms of rule as well as fashioning itself into the form of modern ‘government’. As a kind of ‘political rationality’, governmentality is an assemblage of forces and practices that share the modes of seeing, thinking, representing and acting upon reality in ways that make that reality disposed to political and other types of intervention (Rose 1996:42). In this way it also has a moral character and aims to improve populations by using different techniques and forms of intervention at different levels of government, through calculations, categorisations, corrections and so on (Li 2007:6). What is more, Foucault identifies these as a range of interrelated processes that govern the conduct of populations by different agencies, institutions, discourses as well as norms and disciplining and self-regulating techniques. In this way, government both transcends the state and conditions different forms of societal and state regulation.

In fact, when it comes to its relationship to the state, governmentality reveals one of its more powerful and seductive qualities that is evoked through the notion of its continuous reinvention as

[…] at once internal and external to the state, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality (Foucault 1991:103).

Here Foucault suggests that government is not merely a tool that is used by state authorities. Instead he traces power as running through and beyond the state effectively delimiting the extent of the process of governmentalisation of the state. In other words he does not propose that power is reducible to the state, but he does regard the state as a historical product of power relations (Lemke 2000:11).
Therefore, the powers and mechanisms of government run across and cut through different domains that are typically viewed as separate, including the state, civil society, family and individual subjects (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:989).

What is more, although government is a modality of power, Foucault argues that it should not be observed only as a negative disciplining and regulating force, but instead as containing important productive elements:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals.’ In fact power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (Foucault 1979:194).

As I already mentioned, with the recent emergence and expansion of the Euro-American neoliberal market models, many social and regulatory functions of the state appear to have been threatened by ‘de-etatisation’ or a process of devolution of its powers. Yet, this does not reflect the imminent disappearance of the state, but instead signals the emergence of new modalities of government in which the operation of the state is in different ways taken over and ‘reinvented’ (Rose 1996:56) by new, seemingly independent, non-governmental organisations (see also, for example, Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Trouillot 2001). The question to pose here is: How and to what extent can the concept of governmentality be employed to understand the predicaments of Serbian war veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars?

**Moving beyond the existing modes of power**

For the purposes of this study, Foucault’s concept of governmentality is analytically promising in the sense that it can be employed to follow different modalities of power as they transverse and cut through multiple domains of government and expose the working of the state through the tracks of its techniques of regulation. Yet, analytically, the governmentality paradigm does not tend to register the role of people’s engagements in the appearance of potentially new forms of power and processes of (non-) subjectivation (Ferguson 1990:18).
For this reason it is necessary to broaden the framework of governmentality to leave open a possibility for the emergence of new forms of knowing and acting. Similarly, Collier (2009:99) notes that governmentality is most useful for ‘drawing insightful distinctions among diagrams of power; for understanding what is general to diverse governmental forms in disparate sites.’ Thus, according to this view, the concept of governmentality is valuable mainly for the analyses of already known forms of power, which prevents us from recognising potential emergence and (re-) combinations of new forms. These shortcomings, as Collier further suggests, could be overcome by a re-reading of Foucault’s later works and by applying what he terms his ‘topological approach’ that is concerned with “patterns of correlation” in which heterogeneous elements – techniques, material forms, institutional structures and technologies of power – are configured, as well as the redeployments through which these patterns are transformed’ (ibid.:78, 80).

Therefore, on the one hand the framework of governmentality allows an exploration of the ways in which Serbian veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars reproduced, transformed and resisted different modalities of power. On the other hand, the question remains how to account for the apparent state disregard for the large numbers of veterans who seemed to have been ‘unregulated,’ ‘undisciplined’ and left in a kind of ‘no recognition zone’ caught between the institutions of the state and the organisations of the civil society with potential access to resources.

In her study about conflicts between a peasant community and private landowners in Mexico, Nujiten (2004) found herself in a similar dilemma. She notes how in the their struggle with endless bureaucratic procedures for land restitution peasants got encouraged by state officials and brokers to accept new possibilities for the solution of their problems, which typically resulted in their getting caught in a web of fear and fantasy. Therefore, in this context, Nujiten argues, the practices of governmentisation produced an endless and bewildering world of phantasy and not a certain governmental rationality and coherence (Nujiten 2004:210). Similarly, Navaro-Yashin (2012) analysed the lifescapes of immobility and confinement of people living in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a non-state that was internationally recognised only by Turkey, which she describes as a kind of ‘no man’s land.’ Central to people’s experience is what she calls a ‘phantasmatic’ entanglement in a ‘make-believe’ space. Consequently, for Navaro-Yashin this ‘make-believe’ is both a social form and an analytical category.
that refers to ‘not only space and territory but also to modes of governance and administration and to material practices’ (ibid.:5). I will argue throughout this thesis that Serbian war veterans occupied similar spaces, in which they both imitated the state and its bureaucratic procedures and rituals, as well as learned how to live ‘off the grid’ while at the same developing their own discourse about victimhood which they employed to compete for the increasingly scarce material and symbolic benefits.

Thus the apparent shortcomings of Foucault’s governmentality could be reconciled by applying insights from anthropological studies that make a combined use of the analyses of the state (material and imagined) and the processes of government. This type of broadened focus may account for the appearance of (political) subjectivities that are both influencing the emergence of recombined modes of power and affected by new forms of knowing and acting. In this way, the expanded framework of governmentality may indeed allow analytical inclusion of subjectivities, such as Serbian war veterans, that appear to have existed between state and non-state domains, in a type of zone of unsolved contradictions in which they replicated the state while being encouraged to accept new forms and modalities of government, which they found difficult or even impossible to relate to. But before I continue weaving a thread of (broadened) governmentality through the rest of this study, let me first sketch the outline of the context and ‘zones’ from which war veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars emerged as new kinds of social and political subject in Serbia. In the section that follows I will take the reader through some of the main events that led to the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia and the escalation of wars.

**Yugoslavia’s downward spiral: a historical overview**

The process of disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia occurred over a long period of time and went through several stages before it ended with the escalation of violence and territorial wars. The events that led to its disintegration cannot be explained as products of ancient Balkan hatreds or Serbian aggression (Bougarel 2004), but as a part of larger social, political and economic changes that were occurring at the time – the end of the Cold War and the process of market-driven, neoliberal ‘democratisation’ of formerly socialist states of eastern Europe. Arguably, the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia could be traced back at least a
decade earlier, to the time of death of its president-for-life Marshal Tito in 1980 and the rise of foreign debt that triggered a wave of reforms and austerity measures and paved the path to the federation’s violent dissolution (Woodward 1995:4).

During the 1980s Yugoslavia was facing a deep and continuous economic and political crisis with high inflation rates, rising foreign debt and unemployment, food and gas shortages, and a series of mass protests. The crisis became closely connected with the rise in regional ethnonationalisms with protests of Albanians in Kosovo9 erupting only a year after Tito’s death. Albanians were protesting against what they regarded as their subordination to Belgrade, while Serbs in Kosovo complained of being ‘terrorized’ by Albanians (Cohen 1995:46). These ethnonational conflicts soon became the blueprint for nationalist claims by all the major ethnic groups across the country. In addition, the economically more developed republics, such as Slovenia and Croatia, started to openly voice their discontent with paying the bill for the less developed province of Kosovo. This, combined with the worsening effects of the economic crisis and growing interethnic tensions in Kosovo, seriously intensified disagreements between the working classes and Yugoslavia’s communist elite. One of the effects was the loss of confidence in the power of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia10 (LCY) to overcome the crisis and force the increasingly autonomous republican and provincial elites to implement decisions made by the federal government. In fact by the mid and late 1980s, the support for the KPJ was in sharp decline across the country, especially among the younger generations (ibid.:49). The change in people’s attitudes toward the KPJ was soon accompanied by a loss of hope in the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) to prevent the looming wars from escalating.11

As mass protests of industrial workers and Kosovo Serbs and Albanians

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9 Kosovo was Serbia’s southernmost region and an autonomous province. According to the Article 4 of the 1974 Constitution of SFRY, Kosovo and Vojvodina (Serbia’s northern region) were defined as ‘autonomous, socialist, self-managed, democratic, socio-political communities’ (Vickers 1998:179). In 1989, the Serbian Parliament revoked their autonomy (Rogel 2003:172) and in 2008 Kosovo declared its independence, which, at the time of writing, Serbia continues to dispute.

10 The League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Savez komunista Jugoslovije) was the major (and only) political party in socialist Yugoslavia. It grew out of the Yugoslav communist revolutionary movement and lasted from 1919 until its dissolution in 1990 (see Lešnik 2005).

11 I shall return to this issue later in this chapter.
continued, in 1987 Slobodan Milošević\textsuperscript{12} entered the scene by winning majority support in the Serbian branch of the KPJ. In a detailed account of the wave of protests of the so-called ‘anti-bureaucratic revolution’ which accelerated the process of political dissolution of the country, Vladislavljević notes how the initial appearance of Milošević was ‘little more than an episode in communist power politics’ (Vladislavljević 2008:52). Yet, only three years later, the Serbian branch of the KPJ transformed into the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), with Milošević as its president. By that time, through a series of tactical manoeuvres, Milošević and the emerging political elites in Serbia managed to mobilise public discontent in support of their populist and nationalist politics. Increasing suppression of Albanian dissent in Kosovo and further reductions to autonomy of both Kosovo and Vojvodina added fuel to fire in the conflict that was spreading between the new Serbian leadership and Yugoslavia’s more developed republics, particularly Slovenia. These disagreements were deepened by the Slovenian push for amendments of the federal constitution that would greatly increase its independence from the central government. What is more, as part of the effort to increase its sovereignty, the Slovene government openly supported conscientious objection to military service in the JNA and demanded that new recruits be allowed to complete their service at home in Slovenia. The confrontations increased even further when in 1989 the Slovenian government prevented a public gathering that was to be held in its capital Ljubljana by Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo. In response, Serbia called for a boycott of all Slovene imports, while Slovenia responded by refusing to pay its share to the federal fund for Kosovo, sending it instead to its own republican budget (Woodward 1995:115).

In January 1990, the KPJ convened for the Fourteenth Extraordinary Congress. However, rather than strengthening the position of the KPJ, the meeting

\textsuperscript{12} Slobodan Milošević was born in 1941 in Požarevac, Serbia. His ascent to power began when he was elected chairman of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia in 1986, and again in 1998. In 1990 he became the president of the Socialist Party of Serbia, formed from the League of Communists of Serbia and the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Serbia. In 1988 he became the president of the then Socialist Republic of Serbia and in 1990 the president of the Republic of Serbia. After serving two terms, he was elected the president of the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, now consisting of Serbia and Montenegro. Following his defeat in the presidential elections in September 2000 he resigned from his post in October 2000 after mass protests. In 2001 the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia in The Hague indicted him for ‘crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, and violations of laws or customs of war’ (ICTY 2001). He died while still on trial on 11 March 2006 (Marlise and Smale 2006).
served as another opportunity for conflict among the republican leaderships. The Slovene delegation introduced a number of motions asking for an ‘asymmetrical federation’ (ibid.) or a confederation of independent units, and demanded the right to constitutional dissociation and preservation of the old republican borders. Representatives from Serbia and Montenegro disagreed with this proposal, argued for a stronger federation and rejected the idea that republican borders could be turned into state borders. What is more, Serbian representatives held the view that the right to secession was constitutionally illegal because it would force Serbs who lived in other parts of Yugoslavia to be separated from what they considered their mother country (Cohen 1995:198). At the same time, the leaderships of BiH and Macedonia made ineffective attempts to promote a middle position (Goati 1997:461). After the Serbian and Montenegrin bloc rejected their demands, Slovene representatives walked out, while representatives from Croatia, BiH, Macedonia and the JNA finally refused to continue the meeting (Ramet 2001:55; Woodward 1995:115). This turned out to be the last time that the LCY convened. It would in fact soon break up and transform into different republican parties that would call themselves socialist or social-democratic, with various left-oriented but often openly nationalist programmes. The effects of these transformations would soon become evident in 1990 during the first free elections since the Second World War. Even though the support for nationalist parties was not overwhelming, they nevertheless took majority of votes in each of the republics: while it took only 42 percent of the popular vote, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won 66 percent of seats in the Croatian National Assembly (Bougare 2004:222), in Serbia SPS took 65 percent of the vote and won 78 percent of the parliament, the League of Communists of Montenegro won 83 of 125 seats and 76 percent of the vote, while in Slovenia the DEMOS coalition of six parties won 55 percent of the vote (Woodward 1991:119–121).

The newly elected parties governments were immediately faced with a challenge of combining their nationalist ideologies with the promotion of ‘democratic’ transformations that would bring them closer to the European Community and the NATO. All of them resorted to securing rights for the majority ethnic nations (narodi) at the expense of ethnic minorities. This process was most visible in the creation of systems of ‘constitutional nationalisms’ or the constitutional privileging of the ethnic majority over minorities living in the same
country, which ran against democratic norms that treat individual citizens as basic constitutional subjects (Hayden 1992:655). The effects of this process could be seen in popular attitudes toward the 1990 debate about constitutional reform, where the support for federal and confederal options mirrored the lack of consensus among the political elites. This was reflected in the results of public opinion surveys conducted in the 1990s which showed that citizens of Slovenia, Croatia and Kosovo favored the confederal option, and those from Serbia proper, Montenegro and Macedonia inclined toward federation, while Serbs living in Croatia, BiH and Vojvodina showed least support for confederation (Cohen 1995:181). On one level the low support for the confederal option by groups (particularly Serbs) who resided outside of the country of their ethnic origin reflected their fear of being turned into repressed minorities. However, more importantly from the 1980s onward the Serbian elites argued for a Yugoslavia in which Serbia and Serbs would no longer be discriminated against, which most others interpreted as an attempt to create a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia. These feelings would soon be widely utilized as a pretext for new nationalist claims and territorial wars.

What is more, the decision by the SFRJ presidency to withdraw the JNA from Slovenia in July 1991 cast a long shadow on the sincerity of advocates of the so-called federal option. For this reason, some scholars argue that the ‘federal option’ served merely as a guise under which two strands of ‘republicanists’ shared the same goal, which was to partition the country, the only difference being that one side advocated for a separation along republican borders and the other along ethnic lines (Goati 1997:464). While this might be true, it is difficult to discern exactly which elites should be held responsible, as not one group is ready to take the blame. Whatever the intentions were, the events that followed led to an unprecedented spread of ethnic violence that soon spiraled out of control and turned into armed rebellions and a series of wars.

One of the main institutions and ‘pillars’\footnote{The other three were Josip Broz Tito, the system of socialist self-management \textit{(socijalističko samoupravljanje)} and the LCY.} of Yugoslav state socialism that would later be held responsible for not preventing its dissolution and in fact for siding with Serbian nationalist elites and contributing to the escalation of wars was its so-called ‘seventh republic’ – the JNA. Let me outline some of its key
features as these had a direct impact on different generations of war veterans, how they viewed themselves and how the social and political-legal apparatus of the Serbian state treated them.

The ‘golden years’ of Yugoslav militarism

Once upon a time in former Yugoslavia, a history teacher asked Perica:

‘Who is the biggest warrior you have ever heard of?’

Perica answered: ‘Josip Broz Tito’.

‘Sit down, that's an A for you!’ said the teacher.

'I'm sorry Rambo, but I have a career to think about…'

Serbian joke (Trifunović 2009: 98)

Together with the Communist Party, the JNA emerged from the Second World War or the National Liberation War (NOR) as a formidable military force. Through its direct links to the victory over fascism and the foundation of a new ‘people’s state,’ the JNA was bestowed with a kind of legitimacy that could be rivaled only by the Soviet Red Army (Bieber 2008:302). What is more, the Partisans’ achievements were the key ingredient in the founding myth of the new socialist state, which served to forge an inextricable link between the people, the Army and the state. According to this myth all Yugoslav peoples joined forces to fight the foreign occupiers and their domestic allies and, after making great sacrifices, came out victorious. Partisans formed the core of the postwar Party, which grew from about 12,000 members in 1941 to 140,000 by the end of the war (Bjelajac 2002:218). The first generation of Partisans (prvoborci) soon came to occupy central positions within the Communist Party and started to group around powerful organisations, such as the League of Associations of Veterans of the National Liberation War (SUBNOR) that enjoyed a privileged social status and access to a range of material benefits, including military pensions, free housing and scholarships (Bougarel 2007:480).

During its initial years the JNA was staffed mainly by ordinary people with no formal military training and as such it had little in common with the

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14 The Communist Party was renamed to the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in 1952 (Bougarel 2007:480).
15 At the time its official name was People’s Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (Narodnooslobodilačka vojska Jugoslavije). The name was changed to Yugoslav People’s Army in 1951.
16 Narodnooslobodilački rat.
prewar Royal Yugoslav army. However, it soon became one of the most important social and political actors. From the beginning, the JNA was closely linked to the Party and in fact served as its extended iron hand. This made it fundamentally political and a powerful symbolic and material force in socialist Yugoslavia. Heroic Partisan victories continued to resonate during (and after) the Titoist era and were employed to cultivate a particular culture of Yugoslav militarism that strongly influenced many social spheres. Its powers permeated Yugoslav society from the ranks of party elites to people’s everyday lives. Military service in the JNA was one of the most important rites of passage, a ‘school of life’ in which boys were turned into ‘real men’ (see Petrović 2009). In this way, JNA became one of the main forces in the process of ‘militarisation of masculinity’ that was strengthened through the mandatory one-year military service and applied to all men 18 years of age and over (Berdak 2013:7).

Similarly, in her study about the narrative genre of soldiers’ stories as told by men who recollected their service in the JNA, Petrović (2011) notes how they had a performative function as representations of masculinity. These narratives typically centred on the themes about male bonding, about the JNA as a ‘school of life,’ and on subversive strategies that the recruits employed in order to make their military service easier. This again served to show that military service was a proof that soldiers had successfully passed the test on their journey to becoming ‘real men.’ These stories were also captured by photographs of JNA soldiers, which they commonly shared with their families and friends. According to Petrović (2009:3), this was one of the ways in which the Yugoslav state made use of multiple social values, narratives and identities to build and maintain the image of the Yugoslav soldier.

But even before reaching the right age to serve in the military, young children and youth were initiated into Tito’s ‘Pioneers’ (pioniri) and ‘Youth’ (omladinci). It was a special day when first grade elementary school children wore their red scarves and blue ‘Tito’ caps (titovke) and gave a solemn ‘Pioneer

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17 However, the conception that military service turns boys into men has recently been challenged by the notion of ‘home-based masculinity’ as shown by Sasso-Levy’s study about blue-collar soldiers in the Israeli military who were more concerned about providing for their families than for the military service and the state (Sasso-Levy 2009).

18 The duration of the service was three years until 1952 when it was shortened to one year (Berdak 2013).
Oath’ saying they would work diligently, be good friends, respect their parents and country, and so on (I still remember it very clearly.) As Erdei argues (2004:163–165), red scarves were not just any type of cloth, instead they were symbols of belonging to a socialist collective – past and future – and a reminder of a proper code of conduct that was supposed to be observed at all times. In this way, attempts were made to socialise children into becoming responsible socialist adults. This resembles other socialist contexts such as, for example, East Germany (GDR) where the state together with the military entered schools with an attempt to create a ‘Socialist Man’ and ‘Socialist Woman’ by turning children between six and fourteen into ‘Young Pioneers’ and ‘Free German Youth.’ The children were encouraged to develop their technical skills and interests in sports that they could later employ in service for the National People’s Army (Nationale Volksarmee – NVA) (Bickford 2001:68). Just like in the GDR, to refuse service in the JNA was legally impossible and to be prevented from serving was regarded as dishonourable.

Many times during my fieldwork I heard veterans’ stories about the celebrations and feasts that their families and friends organised for them before they embarked on a voyage to a military training camp on the other side of the country. Unlike their memories of gruesome realities of the post-Yugoslav wars, the stories about military service in the JNA suggested that many of them felt that those were some of the best times in their lives during which they forged friendships with people of different nations and nationalities from across the former state. This comes as no surprise if we consider that the JNA was one the main instruments in the promulgation of the Titoist ideal of ‘Brotherhood and Unity.’ This state-mandated, multinational ideal consisted of an assemblage of rights and responsibilities and served both as an ideological justification and a cautionary tale and reminder that Yugoslav peoples were so closely related and intermixed that they had to preserve their unity if they wanted to escape the past from repeating itself (Hayden 2013:xiii–iv; Jansen 2005b:54). For many generations of Yugoslav citizens, the (transmitted) memories of the Second World War in which more than 1.7 million people lost their lives (Mijalkovski and Radović 2010:1) were certainly a powerful reminder about the need for the preservation of this concord.

In addition to its symbolic power, the JNA had a great degree of autonomy
with its own education and health system, it was funded directly from the national income, had concessions to trade through the armament industry\textsuperscript{19} and used different means to promote its activities, for example the veteran organisation SUBNOR, as well as its own newspapers and magazines such as \textit{Narodna Armija} (Bieber 2008:304–305). Military expert Miroslav Hadžić notes how this military-industrial complex and logistical independence of the JNA resulted in the creation of ‘a corporate spirit \textit{sui generis} [where] awareness of its exceptional character produced an awareness of the separateness of the army’s (material and political) interests, and, even more importantly, an awareness of the justifiability of affirming its group interests and its right (and duty) to defend them’ (1996:514). Arguably, this exceptionalism ultimately prevented the JNA generals and political cadres from recognising the urgency for reform among their ranks, which aided the break p of socialist Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{20}

When it comes to the subject of protection of the Yugoslav socialist state and society, the JNA was initially in charge of defending the country from outside aggression. This focus later shifted to protection of the system from the inside, which was evident in 1971 during the dismissal of the Croatian branch of the LCY and the subsequent suppression of activities of its liberal/nationalist movement, the so-called MASPOK (\textit{masovni pokret})\textsuperscript{21} (Cohen 1995:81).

The structural organisation of the JNA was strongly affected by the appearance of new intellectual elites whose interests were different from the political and military cadre that came out of the Second World War (Bougarel 2007:480). This resulted in the process of decentralisation of the Federation that started in the mid 1960s and culminated with the introduction of the 1974 Constitution. One of its important additions was the requirement for national and republican ‘proportional representation’ in the JNA. As I already noted, ethnic mixture was an important factor in the promotion and preservation of the legitimacy of the Party and the JNA and was a crucial element of the ideal of Brotherhood and Unity. Similarly, proportional representation was an attempt to

\textsuperscript{19} In 1985 it made a profit of some $2 billion from the export of armaments it produced (Biserko 2012)

\textsuperscript{20} I shall return to this issue several times throughout this text.

\textsuperscript{21} MASPOK, also known as the Croatian Spring, was a movement initiated by the Croatian branch of the LCY that was supported by students and ‘liberal’ political leaders and intelligentsia whose demands ranged from calls for expanded autonomy to exit and independence from Yugoslavia. In response to public protests Tito dismissed the Croatian branch of the LCY and its leaders, including Savka Dabčević-Kučar and Mirko Tripalo (Cipek 2003:81).
ensure that all Yugoslav nations were equally represented in the JNA, particularly among the higher officers’ ranks. This idea was not new and was in fact inspired by the ‘ethnic key’ principle, which had already been in place in other state institutions, particularly in multinational BiH. However, it would soon become evident that this goal would be too difficult to reach, as Serbs, Montenegrins and Yugoslavs still remained overrepresented among the higher officer corps, while Albanians and Muslims remained underrepresented among the higher ranks and overrepresented among the recruits. According to figures offered by Bjelajac (2002:219), in 1985 Serbs, who made up 36 percent of the population in Yugoslavia, represented 57 percent of the officers’ corps and 46 percent of army generals. At the same time, the second largest nation, Croats, made up some 22 percent of the total population and formed 14 percent among the officers’ corps and 19 percent among generals. However, when it comes to the total number of generals, those hailing from the territory of Croatia formed 39 percent, from Montenegro 18 percent, Slovenia six percent and Serbia proper only 14 percent. During the 1990s, these differences became an important source of interethnic tensions inside the JNA and seriously affected its functioning before and during the post-Yugoslav wars. However, according to Bieber (2008:307) these outcomes were not planned, but were caused by a range of social and structural problems and became a real issue only once the process of dissolution had already started.

One more development in the system of JNA demands special attention, as it greatly influenced its functioning during the post-Yugoslav wars, and that is the introduction of a new internal defence system with republican and provincial territorial defence units (TO), which was established in response to the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The organisation of TO was essentially a conscript system that could (at least in theory) provide anywhere between 1.5 to 3 million reservists (Sanz 1991:42; Milićević 2006:266). Together with the JNA, police and civil defence organisations, TO became one of the building blocks of the Yugoslav doctrine of Total National Defence (ONO)\textsuperscript{22} (Bougarel 2007:480). This doctrine, based on the concept of total war, effectively extended the reach of the army and the state-party system that was now stretching across the entire

\footnote{\textit{Opštenarodna odbran}}
civilian population, including people’s workplaces and homes where everybody was expected to participate in military exercises and constantly be on guard against potential foreign attacks and sabotage by domestic enemies (ibid.). However, the introduction of these new ‘guerilla’ units was met with skepticism by the JNA leadership who viewed them as having a potential to transform into republican armed forces that could threaten the central authority of the state (Bieber 2008:304). The federal secretary for national defence Branko Mamula used the escalation of the crisis in Kosovo in the early 1980s as a pretext to push for the abolition of TO units in Kosovo. In 1990, under the orders of the JNA general and Yugoslav Minister of Defence Veljko Kadijević, all other republican TO units were disarmed, except those in Serbia and Montenegro. However, by this point a large number of weapons had already been taken by the rapidly forming local (para-) military units.

The Army’s loss of legitimacy and the escalation of wars

With the looming breakdown of one-party socialism and the end of the Cold War, the foundations upon which the JNA maintained its legitimacy were collapsing. Furthermore, as the economic crisis and ethnonationalist conflicts intensified, JNA intervened more directly in the internal affairs of the federation, which was causing irreversible damage to its image as the protector of Yugoslav nations and state socialism.

Some of the first signals of its fading legitimacy were provoked by Slovenia’s critical civil society and increasingly daring small-press publications. In 1982, a group of Slovenian intellectuals published a series of articles in what became the famous Issue 57 of the New Review. Under the heading Contributions toward a Slovene National Program they criticized the JNA and the LCY and openly discussed the option of separating from Yugoslavia (Biggins 2008:9). One of the articles declared: ‘It is high time the JNA stopped being a taboo topic and behaving as though it is a state within a state, immune to public criticism and control. If it really is a people’s army, as its name implies, then it must be accountable to the people (i.e. it must agree to be publicly criticized and

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23 Nova revija.
controlled)’ (quoted in Biserko 2013:142). The federal government responded with threats that it would shut the journal down, but eventually changed its mind after being faced by strong opposition from the Slovene government and intellectuals. In addition to this, in 1988 another publication, the weekly magazine of the Slovenian Communist Party Youth$^{24}$ criticized the JNA as a ‘retrograde institution.’ The authorities responded by arresting its military correspondent, Janez Janša$^{25}$ and two other people on the grounds they had leaked military secrets (ibid.:145). This caused massive protests that continued until their release.

These social and political changes exposed the core weaknesses of the JNA as it became evident that it would no longer be possible to mobilise the entire Yugoslav society along military lines. What is more, JNA’s leadership became directly involved in an endless series of discussions about the reform of the country's economic and political system, which made it appear as an uncompromising and conservative institution that was resisting all attempts at modernisation. The possibility of the introduction of a new multiparty system threatened JNA's authority because this would most certainly lead to its depoliticisation and the disappearance of the military branch of the LCY, which its leaders wanted active as long as possible (Hadžić 1996:519). Faced with the dissolution of the LCY and the near arrival of the first free elections in Slovenia and Croatia, the JNA leadership chose to fight for the preservation of Yugoslav socialism. In order to do that, they founded their own political party, the League of Communists–Movement for Yugoslavia (LC–MY), which soon came to be known as the ‘generals’ party.’ The founding members of the LC–MY were in fact retired army generals (Woodward 1995:121), while most of the new membership came from the ranks of the military branch of the LCY. However, not everyone joined the party voluntarily. Quoting one of the high-ranking officers, Švarm et. al (2001) note that many members of the JNA were threatened with dismissal if they refused to join the LC–MY. Although it was not directly competing in the Serbian elections, the party's ranks were filled with many close allies of Milošević, including his wife and General Kadijević.

$^{24}$ *Mladina.*

$^{25}$ Janez Janša became one of the founders of the Slovenian Democratic Union that became one of the six coalition parties that formed the government after the first free elections in Slovenia in 1990. He later held various posts in the Slovenian government, including two terms as the prime minister of Slovenia (in 2004–2008 and 2012–2013).
During this time it became obvious that the preservation of socialist Yugoslavia with a strong Serbian influence, as envisioned by the JNA and the Serbian leadership, meant open conflict with Slovenia and Croatia whose leaders showed equal determination to push with their demands for independence. After the elections in Slovenia and Croatia in April 1990, the newly elected governments did nothing to hide their intentions to separate from Yugoslavia, which indeed happened soon after: in July 1990 Slovenia declared its sovereignty and after holding a referendum declared its independence on 25 July 1991, the same day as Croatia. It was not long before the ‘ten-day war’ between the JNA and Slovene troops broke out. By October 1991, the JNA left Slovenian territory and by December the new Slovene Constitution was declared. The following year, Slovenia was accepted into the UN. The war in Slovenia, and the subsequent retreat of the JNA sent a powerful signal that the collapse of Yugoslavia was imminent (Goati 1997:456).

In Croatia, the war started after the electoral victory of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the subsequent rebellion of a part of the Serbian population in the Knin area of northern Dalmatia in August 1990. With the covert aid of Milošević and the JNA the large Serbian minority population (11.6 percent of the total population) formed the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK), which seceded from Croatia in March 1991 (Milivojević 1995:69). The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) started on 6 April 1992, the day when the EU recognised BiH as an independent state and ended on 14 December 1995, the day of the signing of the Dayton Agreement, which officially divided the country into two separate political entities, the Bosniak-Croat Federation and the Republika Srpska (Bougarel 2004:23).

**Veterans of ‘armed actions’ and ‘military manoeuvres’**

The post-Yugoslav wars spanned the entire decade of the 1990s and left over 200,000 people killed and more than 3 million displaced from their homes (Gagnon 2004:1). At the time of my fieldwork there was still no consensus about the reasons for their escalation, the ways in which they were fought, or their

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26 For the results see page 14.
27 Hrvatska demokratska zajednica.
objectives and outcomes. Likewise, there was no agreement about the definition of the wars and whether they should be treated as ‘civil wars’ (waged within one state) or as ‘wars of aggression’ (in which one state attacked another). However, what was characteristic to all of them was the fragmentation of Yugoslavia into several new nation-states. This process is central to the understanding of the dynamics of the conflict and its aftermath (Bougarel 2004:25). Equally important is the postwar social and political treatment of war veterans. Each of the new states now had their own population of citizens who in had various ways joined the wars (as conscripts, volunteers, professional soldiers, and so on) who where seeking rewards for their sacrifices. However, Serbia was the only state that lost all of its wars and whose large population of war veterans was not recognised in any special material or symbolic way. This was one of the central problems that my interlocutors had to deal with and one of the main characteristics of the Serbian war veterans that I will refer to and problematise throughout this thesis.

Serbia’s involvement in the post-Yugoslav wars spanned a period of ten years and included the wars in Slovenia in 1991, Croatia from 1991 to 1995, BiH from 1992 to 1995, and the NATO bombing and the Kosovo war in 1999. However, with the exception of the Kosovo war, none of these wars were ever officially declared nor named ‘wars.’ Instead they were referred to as ‘military manoeuvres’ or ‘armed actions and operations.’ Avoiding to acknowledge that Serbia was in fact waging wars used to be one of the key elements of Milošević’s politics of ‘clean hands’ that regularly transferred the responsibility onto Yugoslavia and the JNA (Backović et al. 1998). This allowed the regime to continue fighting without an official declaration of wars and therefore without responsibility for their outcomes. At the same time, the State Security Service (SDB) directly financed various paramilitary units, including the Tigers, the Scorpions, and the Unit for Special Operations (JSO)\(^\text{28}\) (Gow 2004:106).

However, the category of ‘paramilitaries’ is problematic for at least two reasons. First, in the legal sense, most armed forces that took part in the post-Yugoslav wars were at least partially or temporarily irregular. For example, most armed groups that fought in Croatia, BiH and Kosovo were ‘irregular’ before

\(^\text{28}\) Jedinica za specijalne operacije. At different times this unit was also known as Frenkijeve, the Red Berets, and the Unit for Antiterrorist Operations. The unit was a section of the SDB of the Serbian Ministry of Interior. For a detailed account of these paramilitary units see Vasić and Švrm 2001.
these states were recognised internationally (Schlichte 2005:16). Second, paramilitary units were mainly composed of volunteers, but it is very difficult to discern how exactly these individuals became volunteers. For example, a closer investigation of the population of volunteers reveals that many of them were members of local TO units. These units were normally staffed by local populations who often had no other option but to take up arms. What is more, when they started to receive call-up letters many people thought that they were being mobilised for military exercises and discovered that they were in fact sent to war when it was already too late. It is also important to note that none of these wars took place in Serbia proper, except for the NATO bombing in 1999. What is more, at the time the wars broke out in Croatia and BiH, most non-Serbs already stopped serving in the JNA. This also means that the JNA was rapidly becoming a Serbian army and people who were mobilised were aware of this.

To make the situation even more complicated, at the beginning of the war the Yugoslav Ministry of Defence (MoD) regularly stamped reservists’ military cards as if they were being sent for a military exercise.29 Later, when the situation changed and the JNA officially withdrew from Croatia and BiH, these same individuals received new stamps in their documents which now showed that they were in fact volunteers. Hence it appears that many volunteers did not ‘volunteer’ to join paramilitary units and in reality most did not serve in paramilitary units, or at least not in those that were known to the public. Instead they were usually mobilised as reservists and members of TO units, often in the regions in which they lived, and their status was changed into volunteers only when the JNA officially withdrew its forces from the territories outside of Serbia.

The myth of the great Serbian warrior: draft dodging and desertion

Another important aspect for the understanding of the Serbian postwar context is the way in which people responded to mobilisation. At the outbreak of the wars in Slovenia, Croatia and later in BiH, the JNA started mobilising persons who had served in the military and were members of the reserve forces. Some responded to the call, while many decided to dodge the service or escape the military after they had already joined the reserves. Some of those who did not receive call-up letters

29 See interview with Nada Sekulić in Radović 2011.
decided to volunteer for the service in the JNA or one of the paramilitary units that were active in Croatia and/or BiH.

In fact, as I will show, contrary to the nationalist myth about the fierce Serbian warrior who is always ready to take up arms to defend his country, the first wave of mobilisations was not received enthusiastically. A story shared by a veteran I spoke to in Rakovica, Vasa,\(^30\) shows some of the ways in which people dealt with the situation. Although Vasa was not a professional soldier, he was active in the military reserves throughout the 1990s. He spent all his time in military service in Belgrade, first as a communications officer and in 1999 as an officer in a military police unit. At the beginning of the war in 1991, his son was called up for regular military service and sent to a military police unit in Sežana, Slovenia. As the situation was worsening across the former Yugoslavia and Vasa began to realise how unpopular the mobilisation was and how dangerous the service in JNA was becoming, he started to make plans how to get his son out of Slovenia. He ‘pulled’ some of his connections in the military and got him transferred to Mostar, BiH. However, soon the situation in Mostar got even more serious than in Slovenia and he got him transferred again. This time he had him sent to Split, Croatia. However, the same happened there as earlier in Slovenia and BiH, so he had him transferred again, this time to Montenegro where he ended up staying until the end of his service. Vasa was happy that his son was out of the war zone, but he noted how that was not the best solution either as 15 soldiers from his son’s Montenegrin unit died in battlefields in Croatia. Luckily, his son was not one of them. But the story did not end there and it got an ironic twist in 1999 when Vasa was mobilised by the military police to deliver call-up letters in Belgrade for the war in Kosovo. He remembered this time as one of the worst periods in his life. He said: ‘People were hiding and running away from me […], they threatened to throw boiling water at me if I showed up in front of their building.’ Although he could understand why people were afraid, he insisted that he did what he had to do, just like his son. ‘As a responsible parent and citizen I thought that it was his duty to do it,’ he said. This turned out to be one of the many ways in which people rationalised their choice to fight in the war. Vasa’s story, then, does not exactly resemble the popular image of a fierce Serbian

\(^{30}\) Vasa, male, about 60 years of age.
warrior, but is an account of strategising and balancing between one’s duties as a citizen who was legally required to respond to mobilisation and common sense which said that in the given circumstances, going to war was not the best solution.

In a detailed account about the ‘mobilisation crisis’ of 1991, Backović et al. (1998) list numerous and often dramatic examples of the ways in which people protested against the wars and refused to join military service or opted for desertion after they were mobilised by the JNA. It is important to note that the crisis was particularly strong in Serbia and this was partly possible because the wars were being fought outside of its territory. In 1991 only 50 percent of the reservists in Serbia and a mere 15 percent in Belgrade responded to the ‘partial mobilisation’ by the JNA. In July 1991 about 300 angry parents stormed into the Serbian Parliament shouting ‘betrayal’ and protesting against their children being sent to war. A reservist from Kragujevac, Serbia was quoted saying: ‘We didn’t even say goodbye to our children and tomorrow we ought to die because of some lunatics who are using us to advance their own goals’ (ibid.). A mobile reserve battalion from Valjevo stopped on their way to the war zone and made complaints about not being properly trained, about their equipment being too old and – about the communist red stars on their caps! At about the same time a group of mothers travelled across the country trying to pull out their sons from military barracks. As the situation was rapidly spinning out of control the antiwar protest continued to grow: on 24 July 1991 several thousands people protested in Belgrade in front of the Federal Parliament; in Sarajevo about 100,000 people gathered in a peace protest and a concert; a group of women from Vršac, Serbia, started a hunger strike against the mobilisation of reservists. During this time, the war in Croatia had already escalated and by August it claimed the lives of over 300 persons (Woodward 1995:173). At the same time the state-controlled media in Serbia launched a campaign against ‘abstract pacifism’ while the JNA slowly transformed into a Serbian army. 31 Although antiwar and antiregime protests carried on in 1991, 1992 and 1993, with protesters often clashing with the police and on one occasion with the military (Jansen 2001:36), they were gradually

31 JNA changed its official name several times. In May 1992 it was transformed into the Yugoslav Army, in February 2003 to the Army of Serbia and Montenegro, and finally in June 2006 to the Army of Serbia.
overshadowed by the increasingly gruesome reality of the effects of wars in Croatia and BiH.

By 1995 Serbia had already been seriously affected by its engagement in three undeclared wars, it had enormous war expenditures and had lost most of its traditional Yugoslav markets. In addition, in May 1992 the UN imposed economic sanctions that blocked all international trade, financial transfers, as well as all cultural, scientific and sports participation (Babić and Jokić 2010). At the same time, the hyperinflation of 1992–94 skyrocketed to its peak of 313 million percent, making it the second highest and second longest ever recorded (Petrović et al. 1999:336).\(^{32}\) Under these conditions the state regulatory agencies largely lost their roles, the informal and black market trade that was controlled by the political and criminal milieus thrived, while the majority of the population faced increasing unemployment and poverty (Schlichte 2005:11). What is more, in 1996 Serbia had 524,000 registered refugees, which made it one of the five countries that UNHCR listed as having a ‘protracted refugee situation’ (OSCE 2011:1).\(^{33}\)

**The postwar fight for state support and social recognition**

The lack of agreement on the basic questions about the wars was one of the central issues for many people I spoke to during my fieldwork. The ways in which some of these problems were dealt with reflected a complex social and political reality in which Serbian war veterans made attempts to consolidate their status as a group of citizens with special rights and privileges. The absence of a clear legal framework for welfare coverage and for dealing with the unpopular lost wars created a sense of disappointment for many Serbian veterans which makes their experiences similar to other postconflict contexts, such as, for example, Russian veterans of the war in Chechnya where participation in war became a currency in search for compensation or at least recognition by the state (Oushakine 2012:205).

Although there were no official data about the exact number of war veterans, and despite the high rates of draft dodging and desertion, according to some estimates anywhere between 400,000 and 700,000 persons (mostly men)

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\(^{32}\) The highest ever recorded was the Hungarian hyperinflation of 1945–46 and the longest recorded the Russian hyperinflation of 1920, which lasted 24 months (ibid.).

\(^{33}\) The other four were Afghanistan, Eastern Sudan, Bangladesh and Tanzania. UNHCR defines ‘protracted refugee situation’ as one in which a person’s life may not be in danger, but their basic rights and needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile (ibid., n.1).
from Serbia and Montenegro were mobilised to fight in one or more wars in the region and up to 30 percent suffered from different forms of war-related trauma, such as PTSD (Beara et al. 2004:47; Beara and Miljanović 2006:19; Špirić 2008:13, n. 1). Many of these individuals were unemployed and had no means to support themselves and their families. When this number is extended to include members of veterans’ families and refugees from Croatia and BiH, the number of people with experience of war in Serbia is exponentially higher.

The kind of veteran politics where people were called to fulfil their duty as citizens to wage their country’s wars only to find out that they had to fight for the exercise of their citizenship rights for social protection after the war is not common only to Serbia. In fact, many other countries and wars produced their own masses of veterans who needed to assert their rights for social protection upon their return from conflict. Moreover, wars have always been and remain a permanent social phenomenon. Only during the decade of the 1990s more than sixty variously defined armed conflicts occurred within and between different states and some of these continue to this day. With this in mind, the discussion about the predicaments of Serbian war veterans may prove to be an important addition to studies that examine social and political transformations in postconflict societies.

**Structure of the thesis: rundown of chapters**

In the first chapter, I describe my primary field sites and position myself in relation to my interlocutors and my choice of research methods. I introduce my fieldwork sites and juxtapose some of their main features in order to capture some of the complexities of a multisided ethnography. I conclude with a discussion about my multiple identities and argue that they were neither entirely ‘native’ nor ‘foreign’ to my research subject.

In the second chapter I return to the investigation of war veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars and outline some of main ambiguities in their relationship to the Serbian state and the population of ‘old’ veterans from the Second World. I sketch out some of the most important features of veteran policy in Serbia and the range of available welfare benefits.

In the third chapter, I engage in an exploration of the ways in which veterans’ narratives about the lack of social care, dignity, and recognition reflect
some of the broader social issues that existed in the changing political-economic context of postwar Serbia. I argue that in the process of political subjectivation, veterans communicated a particular discourse of victimhood, which they used to secure their place in hierarchy of the competing political identities.

In the fourth chapter, I map out the complex organisational landscape of VAs and introduce the themes of competition, shifting alliances and strategic decision-making and how those were employed in an effort to access limited state and non-state resources. I also analyse some of the tensions that existed between different VAs and how those reflected changing social and political conditions in Serbia.

In the fifth chapter, I analyse the relationship between the so-called ‘First’ and the ‘Other Serbia’ and the resultant gap between war veterans and members of antinationalist/antiwar, civil society. I outline a sequence of events in which those ‘two Serbias’ made attempts to engage in a collaborative dialogue about the living conditions of war veterans, and different underprivileged groups in Serbian society.

Finally, in conclusion, I revisit the main themes and analytical points from each of the chapters to argue that the movement of veterans across different state and non-state domains and zones of ambiguity opened up a possibility for a type of governmentality that was not rooted in the single logic of discipline and coherent bureaucratic categories. At the same time, this precipitated an emergence of a new type of political subjectivity in Serbia’s changing social and political landscape.
Chapter One

Locating the field site(s) and placing the researcher

A commitment to mobile positioning and to passionate detachment is dependent on the impossibility of entertaining innocent ‘identity politics’ and epistemologies as strategies for seeing from the standpoints of the subjugated in order to see well.

Donna Haraway (1988)

For anthropologists to function at all, whether as ‘writers’ or ‘authors,’ they must give up at least part of the understandings about themselves, their society, and the world in which they were brought up.

Alexandra Bakalaki (2007)

In the pages that follow I describe my position in the field as a researcher who was neither entirely ‘native’ nor ‘outsider’ in relation to my interlocutors and the topics I investigated. I begin with an outline of my personal ties to the region and the research subject and reflect on the ways in which these influenced some of my epistemological and methodological choices. Next I follow with a description of my main field sites and an overview of my research methods and conclude with an analysis of the anthropological literature that pertains to my experiences.

Prior to starting my work on this project, as part of my Master’s programme, I investigated the introduction of the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) into the context of Croatian psychiatry. I was interested especially in how PTSD emerged as a socially and medically recognisable form of emotional suffering and an instrument in postconflict governmentality (Dokić 2009a; 2009b). As often happens with such endeavours, my thesis answered some questions but also opened many others, one of which was the extent of social and political recognition for those who had lost the wars – Serbian war veterans. What intrigued me the most was the relative invisibility of war veterans in Serbia in comparison to the veneration of their counterparts in Croatia. In fact, although they campaigned for state and social recognition, often by taking their concerns to
the streets, Serbian veterans seemed to have been losing these battles and I wanted to investigate their predicaments further.

I carried out fieldwork in Serbia from June 2010 until December 2011. However, my ‘immersion’ to the field started much earlier as I was born and raised not too far from some of my research sites and actively participated in the war in Croatia (as an underage civilian) and in Serbia (as an underage refugee). In the mid 1990s I had the lucky privilege to join the UN and OSCE peace missions in Eastern Croatia, and in 1999 I immigrated to Canada and lived there for a decade. However, I should point out that I do not regard my experiences of growing up in socialist Croatia and Yugoslavia as a tool to build an exclusive ‘insider’ status. I also do not reflect on it for the sake of being ‘self-reflexive,’ nor do I argue against researchers working from within and inside their familiar contexts. In other words I am not evoking my ties to the region as a way to make ‘genealogical claims’ (Robertson 2002:788), but to approach the issue of my positioning and to explain my informed choice of context, ethnographic subject, and the specific sites and methods of inquiry. With this in mind, I side with Harraway who argues that ‘passionate detachment requires more than acknowledged and self-critical partiality’ (1988:585).

But, before I outline some of the main concerns about the problematic relationship between the dichotomous conceptual categories of native/insider and foreigner/outsider and how these relate to this project and the production of anthropological knowledge in general let me first position myself in relation to my interlocutors and introduce my primary field sites and research methods.

**Searching for field sites and methods of inquiry**

Upon my arrival in Serbia in June 2010, I first made use of a network of acquaintances, many of whom had friends or relatives who had participated in the

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34 I was granted a visa to enter Canada as a ‘Convention refugee’ because of my Serbian ethnicity and because I lived in a region that was occupied by Serbs during the war and later re-integrated into Croatia in 1998. At the time many persons of Serbian ethnicity were leaving the area because of fear of persecution by Croats returning to the region after the war. That being said, many people of other ethnicities, Croats included, were also leaving because the prospects for regular employment and ‘normal’ life were perceived as very low. Thus, my belonging to a rebel ethnic minority and the fact that as a member of the UN and OSCE peace missions I was potentially suspect to people from both sides of the conflict made me score high under the Canada immigration point system.
post-Yugoslav wars. My intention was to talk to people who were at some point
mobilised or volunteered for the wars but did not necessarily consider themselves
veterans. At the same time I was contacting veterans’ associations (VAs) as well as
different civil society organisations across the country, many of which were
labelled as belonging to the ‘other,’ liberal, activist, and antiwar Serbia that was
commonly perceived as standing in stark opposition to war veterans and the
values they represented. Although at first it was difficult to find any organisations
that would respond to my emails or phone calls, I eventually came across the
website of a VA in Rakovica, which contained a ‘statute’ stating that the VA’s
main objective was to contribute to the social and economic welfare of war
veterans and their families and to ‘promote patriotism and other values and
principles of contemporary society, particularly peace, freedom and equality [...]’
and to fight against racial, religious and nationalist intolerance’ (UBR90). This
short outline of objectives was different to all the others that I had encountered
until then, especially in what appeared to me as a promiscuous pairing of
patriotism with a selection of liberal values (Comaroff and Commaroff 1999).
More importantly, it seemed that by extending its call to a wide audience, the VA
was in fact searching for potential partners. It was not too long before I was
invited by its president Mile Milošević to, as he put it, listen to their ‘live words’
(žive reči). By using this phrase, he indicated that he in fact understood some of the
core principles of ethnographic fieldwork, which saved me from having to dwell
on providing long explanations about what ‘participant observation’ meant and
how important it was to anthropological inquiry.

However, this sense of shared understanding was not what I experienced
in some of the other sites I worked in, particularly the one where I had hoped to
spend much more time, but where my attempts at ‘deep immersion’ proved to be a
futile exercise – the Association of Families of Killed and Missing Soldiers
(UPPB). Soon after I started my work in Rakovica, I received an invitation to
visit UPPB in its seat in the House of the Army of Serbia (Dom Armije Srbije) in
central Belgrade. This was also one of the central locations for several offices of

35 I deal with so-called ‘Other’ or ‘Second Serbia’ in more detail in Chapter 5.
36 Throughout this thesis, I use real names only for those persons who agreed to have
them published. In all other cases I replaced people’s real names with pseudonyms and took other
precautions to preserve their anonymity.
37 Udruženje porodica palač boraca rata od 1990 godine.
the Serbian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the place of work for many high-ranking officers of the Serbian Army. Although UPPB was not directly related to (living) war veterans, it worked with families of killed and missing soldiers and as such it was an important social and political actor among the organisations that acted as brokers in the provision of welfare for people who were directly affected by the post-Yugoslav wars. Their importance was even greater when considering their close links to some of the elite military and political circles in Serbia, such as the JNA high-officers’ corps, and various government ministries, including the MoD and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MoLSP). However, from the very beginning it was obvious that my access would be restricted only to people and information that my interlocutors deemed as safe and acceptable.

As I already mentioned, UPPB was located in one of the central headquarters of the Serbian Army, and the procedure I had to go through every time I entered the building – reporting to the duty officer, leaving my passport, waiting for him to announce my arrival – reflected an enormous military-bureaucratic apparatus, high concern with security and, as I was about to find out, the amount of ‘red tape’ that I would have to deal with in this setting. The offices of UPPB were located on the second floor and consisted of a narrow hallway and two small rooms one of which was occupied by two ‘secretaries’ and one by the association’s president Sava Paunović. The rooms were small, but with high ceilings and almost all of the walls lined in polished wood. All of this gave the place an aura of grandiosity and importance that I had not experienced in the other organisations I visited.

Before he became involved with UPPB, Sava worked in a foundry factory in Belgrade where he eventually earned his retirement. In 1991, his younger son died in combat in Vukovar, Croatia, while his older son sustained injuries for which he was later granted the status of disabled war veteran. Ten years later, dissatisfied with the work of VAs and with the help from some high-ranked officers of the JNA, Sava founded UPPB. During his many years of NGO work he had developed a sense of disregard for VAs. In fact, he often repeated that most

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38 Ministarstvo rada i socijalne politike.
39 Sava Paunović was also the president of the Association of all Ethnic Groups of Roma (Udrženje svih etničkih grupa Roma), as well as one of the members of a board for the allocation of free housing for the families of killed and missing persons. He personally never regarded the latter as a conflict of interest with his position as the president of UPPB.
VAs cared only for their own interests and that they used the families of killed and missing soldiers only to promote their own agendas. At the time of my fieldwork UPPB had about 6,000 members across the country and was financed through the state budget and private donations.

From the very first day I arrived in UPPB, Sava made it clear what he thought about my research topic, or to be more precise, about war veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars. ‘They are a bunch of thieves and criminals,’ he said and added that if I wanted his help I would need to change my focus and write about families of killed and missing soldiers, who were the ‘real victims’ of the wars. I was of course not going to do that, and I told him this while also making my case for why it was important that I learned about the predicaments of different social groups and how they dealt with the postwar social and political realities and transformations in Serbia’s welfare system. That seemed to satisfy him, at least at the beginning, and I continued with my visits several times a week for the next two months. However, as time was passing, I realized that I would not be able to develop the type of intimate relationship that I needed in order to access some important information, for example, about the allocation and distribution of funding, the degree to which UPPB had influence over decisions about the distribution of the few available free apartments for the families of killed and missing soldiers, and so forth. In addition, Sava was increasingly concerned about my continued visits to other sites, including the VA in Rakovica, and he wanted to know if and what exactly I was telling them about what I had learned at UPPB. On one occasion, he even reprimanded me for using the Latin alphabet instead of the official Serbian Cyrillic and started to check what I was jotting down in my notebook. He was not pleased with me using the term ‘war,’ and suggested that instead I use ‘armed conflicts since 17 August 1990’ and ‘defense war of 1999’. After all, he noted, these were the labels recognised by the state, and since I was inside the House of the Army of Serbia, I should be using the appropriate terms.

That being said, I was less concerned with Sava’s keen interest in my note-taking than with his demands that he should be the one to determine whom I should talk to and interview. One day, he created a random sample of ‘profiles’ of people that he thought I needed to include in my writing. Some of the people he was, to use his expression, ‘willing to give me,’ were for example: a mother of a soldier who died in combat in Croatia; a widow with one child; a widow with two
children; a widow with three children; a mother whose only child died in Kosovo; a mother who lost her son and her husband; parents who lost one child and whose second child was war-disabled; and so on. Although I ended up talking to some people that responded to Sava’s ‘offerings,’ I began to realize that it would not be possible to continue this ‘barter’ for much longer.

As I continued with my trips to UPPB, the VA in Rakovica, and other sites, and as people learned about me going back and forth between different places, I started hearing different stories about favouritism, corruption, and fierce competition for state resources, as well as outright accusations of intimidation and harassment. For example, one woman, mother of a soldier who died in combat in Croatia, whom I met in an organisation for war-disabled persons in Novi Sad, the capital of Serbia’s autonomous province of Vojvodina, claimed that she was not given priority for a state-sponsored apartment because she would not give in to sexual advances of a powerful figure who was one of those deciding on the matter. At that point I realized that my fieldwork had entered into a phase in which I was getting caught in a web of power relations, competition, strategic decision-making and conflict. I was no longer witnessing and observing only interactions, but also the influence of different actors’ ‘ambiguous roles with overlapping competencies’ and how these provided access to various resources (Thelen et al. 2006:4).

Over time, I gradually decreased the number of my visits to UPPB, but I continued to consult them on a number of issues that were relevant for my project, namely the organisation of the provision of welfare benefits for various categories of civilian victims of wars. However, the intensity of power relations between different stakeholders in what was turning into an increasingly large and complex network of VAs and other organisations never ceased to influence my position in the field and the ways I had to organize my methods of inquiry. Later into the fieldwork, as my network of contacts had expanded further, I visited several other organisations, including the Association of War and Peacetime Disabled Veterans of Serbia (UMRVIS) in Belgrade, the Association of Veterans of the War of 1999 (UVR99) in Niš, southern Serbia, and a Protestant charitable NGO ‘Love  

40 Udruženje ratnih i mirnodopskih vojnih invalida Srbije.  
41 Udruženje veterana rata 1999-te.
Thy Neighbour” in Niš. I also talked to several representatives of VAs across the country that sometimes did not have permanent offices. In addition to persons grouped around VAs, I also had conversations with individual veterans across Serbia who were not members of any organisations, including persons in places like Novi Sad, Zrenjanin, Majdanpek and Vranje. During the second half of my fieldwork, I entered the Centre for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD), an NGO in Belgrade that together with the VA from Rakovica, the Centre for War Trauma from Novi Sad and several other organisations developed a series of workshops and public dialogues between war veterans and various civil society groups and members of cultural and political elites. This eventually grew into a large, nationwide project that continued to live after my departure from fieldwork.

However, the primary field site where I spent most of my time was the VA in Rakovica, whose veterans ‘adopted’ me as their voluntary assistant, associate, and honorary member. I became known here by the nickname of ‘Doktor,’ somewhat precociously anticipating my academic achievement. This was also the place where I was granted the opportunity to immerse myself into learning through engagement with many issues pertaining to veteran politics and to put that knowledge at work in other sites across the country.

Rakovica: town of former workers and veterans of undeclared wars

Rakovica is one of the municipalities at the outskirts of Belgrade that was known for its industrial past and for being one of the shining examples of the successes of workers’ self-management in socialist Yugoslavia. Some of its industrial giants were the largest exporters of metal products and heavy machinery in the former state, such as the engine factory ‘IMR’, the agricultural equipment factory ‘May 21’43, the tire factory ‘Rekord’, the foundry ‘IMP’, and the oxygen and acetylene factory ‘Tehnogas’. However, most of those factories had been closed during the privatisation process of the 1990s and early 2000s, or had drastically reduced their industrial output and numbers of employees. Most of the production halls that in

42 *Ljubi bližnjega svoga.*
43 *Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju.*
44 Tehnogas was also known as one of the hotbeds of Belgrade’s political cadre. This was the factory where Slobodan Milošević served as a deputy director from 1969 to 1973 and chairman from 1973 to 1978, after which he started his political career as the president of the City Committee of the League of Communists of Belgrade (Milošević 2006).
the past housed around 17,000 workers (Talović 2010) were at the time of my fieldwork essentially empty. The only factories that were still (at least formally) in operation were the May 21st and the IMR. However, both had practically turned into artisan workshops.

In addition to breaking records in industrial production in former Yugoslavia, workers from Rakovica played a very important role during mass protests in the fall of 1988 when Serbia’s political elites mobilised the support of the working classes. Vladisavljević notes how in October 1988, around 5,000 workers from Rakovica gathered in protest in front of the Federal Assembly in Belgrade demanding a pay rise, state subsidies for their ailing factories and resignation of the federal government and the leaders of trade unions (2008:155). During the protest they refused to talk to anyone but Milošević. After he finally appeared, he gave a short populist speech and, as usual, promised to get rid of bureaucrats and have all the workers’ demands (and more) met. Famously, he finished off with: ‘Now, everyone back to your work!’ (ibid.:156). In reference to these events, I would often hear sarcastic remarks how the protesters went to face Milošević as workers and returned as ‘Serbs’ and ‘warriors.’ The veterans I talked to typically denied this, saying that all they wanted was a pay rise.

However, the reality was that during the early 1990s Rakovica changed from a town of disillusioned workers to a town of warriors as large numbers of people were mobilized by the JNA and different paramilitary units and sent to fight in the wars in Croatia, BiH, and later Kosovo. Many veterans from Rakovica told me that they were encouraged to report for military service while they were still working in some of the above factories. What is more, they were given assurances by their management that they would be able to return to the same jobs. However, those promises were usually not kept and upon their return they often found themselves without work and labelled as ‘redundant’ (tehnoški višak) and ‘losers of transition’ (gubitnici tranzicije). Therefore, war veterans from Rakovica and former workers of Rakovica’s destroyed factories are often the same people.

In 1993, while the wars were still raging in Croatia and BiH, the VA in Rakovica was founded under the name of the Association of Fighters of the Wars
of the 1990s.\textsuperscript{45} Although at the time it was not linked to SUBNOR, unlike some other associations (see Chapter 4), its organisational structure loosely resembled those of the associations of veterans of the Second World War. In fact, initially the VA was founded as a municipal branch within a network of organisations of the veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars. This network was modelled on that of SUBNOR, which before the wars also had VAs grouped at the federal, republican, city and municipal levels across the former state.

Therefore, in the past the VA in Rakovica was directly linked to other cognate organisations, but, as I was repeatedly told, its members grew increasingly disenchanted with the pressure from local politicians to vote for their parties in return for funding. Eventually this resulted in conflict over the use of old offices that they shared with members of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and its later offshoot, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), after which they decided to form a ‘non political’ VA. However, although over time the VA in Rakovica became ‘independent,’ it retained some of the basic organisational principles of the previous organisation. For example, it had a ‘council’ composed of several members of the VA who were supposed to meet every time they needed to reach an important decision. It also developed analogous bureaucratic procedures, such as membership requirements, and, although on a different scale, provided a very similar range of services for the veterans and their families.

The VA was located in the centre of Rakovica, not too far from the abandoned factories I mentioned above, in a building that they shared with the local SNS organisation, tucked between the municipal office of SUBNOR, the Red Cross, and an Orthodox church.\textsuperscript{46} Therefore, although it was centrally located, as one of the veterans noticed, it was Rakovica’s best-kept secret, since it was not visible from the main street.

In 2009 the VA's name was officially changed to ‘Serbian War Veterans’.\textsuperscript{47} The president, Mile Milošević, himself a volunteer and veteran of the wars in Croatia and Kosovo, explained that the change was an attempt to reflect the organisational and social transformations that largely had to do with the introduction of the new ‘international’ term ‘veteran’ and with what was often

\textsuperscript{45} Udruženje boraca rata od 1990-te.
\textsuperscript{46} Srpska napredna stranka. At time of my fieldwork SNS was the main opposition party in the Serbian Parliament.
\textsuperscript{47} Srpski ratni veterani.
evoked as the increasing need for the unification of the fragmented population of war veterans across Serbia. In fact, throughout my stay in Rakovica Mile argued that the latter – the unification of all veterans and VAs under one central organisation – was his major goal. Therefore, the introduction of the new name was not incidental, but was a deliberate attempt to create a VA that would appeal to all Serbian war veterans of all the post-Yugoslav wars, as well as those of the Second World War.

Before the name change, the VA extended a call through its website, which I mentioned above, for cooperation with similar national and international organisations. This was another visionary way of ‘internationalising’ the association and its objectives and bringing it, at least formally, closer to the list of values that were seen as important to NGOs that existed outside the VA network (more on this in Chapter 5). Still, veterans from Rakovica were always ready to defend their patriotism and nationalist sentiment. This was often expressed through their open support for individuals who they celebrated as heroes, even when some of them were accused of committing war crimes by the international community, as was the case with general Ratko Mladić. One such situation, in which I played an active role, may help to illustrate how this worked in practice.

At some point, during my first days at the VA, Mile gave me one of his business cards. I was surprised to see that, in addition to a symbol that I had already noticed being used by other VAs – a shield with two crossed swords – it also contained a miniature picture of Ratko Mladić. I immediately asked why it was important for Mile to have this picture there and if he thought that some people would be offended if they saw it. His answer was predictable: he could understand that this could be insulting for some people, but for him, as for many of his fellow veterans, Mladić was a hero and a symbol of injustice inflicted upon many Serbian veterans who fought to protect their people and who were now labelled as war criminals. However, I was not satisfied with his answer and his business cards soon became one of the reference points to which we kept returning whenever we discussed our different views on nationalism, patriotism, and individual responsibility for wars (which happened quite often). Several

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48 Ratko Mladić started his career as an officer in the JNA and later rose to the ranks of general and the chief of staff in the Army of the Republika Srpska. He was accused and arrested on 25 May 2011 for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide and was sent to trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, the Netherlands.
months later, after I introduced the idea of developing a collaborative project with some of the NGOs whose members were well known for their antiwar activism, I made a point how Mile's business cards may turn into a serious issue if their paths would indeed cross. Not too long after that, faced with a possibility of working on an important project with those NGOs that I mentioned, which would potentially increase the visibility of his VA and secure some of the much-needed funding, Mile agreed to invite them for a meeting. I immediately raised the issue of business cards and again asked what he thought those people would think if they saw them. This time he was not interested in discussion, but pulled out several stacks of business cards from his desk and threw them into a garbage bin. The next time we met he showed me a new set of business cards without the picture of Mladić. However, after Mladić’s arrest in May of 2011, he again had his picture ready, this time on a wall, on a Serbian flag and calendar. He also placed a large sticker in the back room which read 'safe house for general Ratko Mladić' and told me that Mladić's son came to visit him at the VA to inquire about some contacts that could help him with his father's defense. In some ways this turn of events was not surprising as the VA was known to have kept close relations to far-right organisations such as ‘SNP Naši 1389’ and ‘Obraz’. However, this also showed that the VA was keeping its roots in the old nationalist ground at the same time as it was opening up beyond the VA sector. This would prove to be one of the key markers of veteran politics of the VA in Rakovica throughout my fieldwork.

In terms of the VAs relationship to local politicians, which I briefly mentioned above, since its foundation it faced many challenges, especially when in 2000 they had to vacate their old premises after they lost the support from the municipality. This was the year of the first democratic elections after Milošević, when the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) won the majority of votes. After this, the VA was left without a meeting space and for the next several years it existed only formally. However, with the arrival of a new leadership, its

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49 SNP Naši 1389 was a nationalist movement founded in 2004. Its primary goal was the unification of all ‘Serbian lands’ into one Serbian state (SNP Naši 1389 2011).

50 Obraz (Otačastveni pokret Obraz) was a far-right, clerofascist organisation whose activities were described as being aimed at ‘violent destruction of the constitutional order, guaranteed human and minority rights or causing racial, national and religious hatred’ (B92 2012). The organisation was banned in June 2012.

51 I shall explore this issue in more detail in Chapter 4.
members managed to strike a new deal with the local municipality, which allowed them to build a new house at a nearby plot of land. Although they did not sign any legal documents, they shook hands on an informal deal according to which the veterans could occupy and use the land to build a new house as long as they used their own sources of funding for the construction. Over the next several years, the veterans built a new house by themselves. They paid for the construction materials with money they collected through donations and the annual membership fees. They solved the problem with utilities by illegally tapping into the municipal power and water grid. The veterans I spoke to told me that the local authorities knew about this, but decided to turn a blind eye until the VA found a steadier source of funding. To my insistence that this could become a problem in the future they responded that no one would ever dare to force them out of there, especially after they built the house and the memorial site that carried the names of 50 veterans from Rakovica who died in the post-Yugoslav wars. In fact they were busy to use up every inch of the small plot around the house so that none of their neighbours could claim it for themselves. They cleared the area around the house and built a small flower garden and a gate. Ujka (Serbian for ‘uncle’), an elderly veteran known for his many jokes, found it fitting to describe the situation with a proverb: ‘The first to get to the girl – gets a girl. The last to get to the girl – gets a wife.’

With the rejuvenated leadership and the construction of the new house, the VA’s membership base expanded and at the time of my fieldwork it numbered more than 9,000 persons from across Serbia, out of which 200 were disabled war veterans. In fact, this large membership was frequently prized as the VA’s greatest value and Mile often proudly showed his visitors the many shelves stacked with countless file folders that adorned the walls of his office. The red folders contained the membership files of ‘regular’, non-disabled veterans, the blue ones were reserved for disabled war veterans, and the yellow ones for honorary members, or the ‘friends of the house,’ as he used to call us. Each membership file contained a wide range of information, including the member’s personal identification number, information about disability (including when and where the person was injured), whether he or she was a volunteer, and so on. This

52 (Ko prvi devojci – njegova devojka. Ko poslednji devojci – njegova žena.)
information was seen as important, because many persons often signed up with more than one VA. Although Mile was aware of this problem, he argued that his VA was different and legitimate precisely because it had all this personal information. What is more, every year this information was updated through the issuing of new membership cards, which, he argued, meant that his membership was ‘alive.’ In fact, the annual renewal of membership cards, with which I had the pleasure to assist, was a daunting task that Mile and his assistants took very seriously. Non-disabled war veterans paid a membership fee of 200 dinars,\(^{53}\) while disabled veterans and families of killed soldiers received it for free of charge. The renewal was important because this was the main source of funding for the VA, but also because it required that most members come to the office and talk to Mile or some of the staff. For Mile this was an occasion to talk to the members of the VA who did not come to the office too frequently and for the members this was an opportunity to check what was happening at the VA and possibly talk to some of the veterans and ask for help if they needed it. If one of the members could not make it to the office because of their disability or some other problem, Mile would often send someone to pay them a visit. For me this was also a chance to talk to some of the veterans and their families in their homes.

Other than through membership fees, the VA was also financed through the sale of summer travel packages. Every year in February or March Mile and his assistants would search for affordable deals from some of the tour operators. During the time of my stay in Rakovica, they went to the annual tourism fair in Belgrade and purchased a large number of reservations for a seaside town in Montenegro. After this they organised a massive advertising campaign, they gave out leaflets, printed posters and made telephone calls to their members. For a while, the office looked and sounded like a travel agency and the reservations sold out quickly. People often paid through instalments without having to sign any contracts and I was told that over the years for many of them, going for a holiday with veterans from Rakovica had become a sort of family tradition.

Veterans in Rakovica also organized various events throughout the year, including the annual commemoration of the NATO bombings of a nearby military outpost at Straževica, where two officers died in 1999, and the celebration of St.

\(^{53}\) About £1.5.
Vitus Day, the patron saint of the VA held every October (see Chapter 3). Although they were active throughout the year with collecting and distributing humanitarian aid among their members, this was particularly important during Christmas and at the beginning of the school year in September. In addition to these activities, the VA supported two clubs that were run by some of their members: the *guslar* association 'Milan Tepić'\(^{54}\) and the chess club ‘Combatant’ (Borac). Although I never had the pleasure to hear the sound of *gusle* at the VA, almost every day I could see someone playing chess. The chess club was another source of pride for the VA, as it won many local and national tournaments and some of its members were in fact recognised chess masters. Many of their prizes were displayed in one of the rooms in the VA.

When it comes to my life at the VA, I would typically come in every day early in the morning and stay until late in the afternoon or longer if there was something special happening that day. In the morning I would normally drop in to see Mile and Maca, who was the administrative assistant, or as veterans would have it, the VA ‘secretary.’\(^{55}\) In the second part of my fieldwork Maca left for another job and was replaced by two new secretaries, so the tradition of women taking care of all administrative matters in the VA continued. However, I must say that out of the three of them I got to know Maca the most. She was in her early forties and had a remarkable knowledge of laws and regulations pertaining to veterans’ affairs. Even more importantly, veterans trusted her and frequently told her about their problems, sometimes even about private matters that concerned their households, which allowed me to learn about the intimate spheres of veterans’ lives and observe how their predicaments were dealt with. To my questions about Maca’s earnings at the VA, Mile kept repeating that she was a volunteer, but I know for a fact that she was receiving a small wage.

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\(^{54}\) The *gusle* is a traditional one-stringed musical instrument that was widely used across South East Europe. Milan Tepić was a major of the JNA who died during the war in Croatia in 1991. He was the last person to be declared a ‘National Hero of Yugoslavia’ and the only JNA officer who was declared a hero during the post-Yugoslav wars (Sikavica 1997). After Tepić nobody was awarded that status again, which officially makes him the last Serbian Hero of Yugoslavia.

\(^{55}\) In fact ‘sekretarica’ was the usual, through increasingly unofficial, job title for an administrative assistant, a position that was typically reserved for women.
Research methods: from archives to the messiness of everyday life experience

As the above examples of my everyday life at the VA in Rakovica show, I had to make use of a range of methods that would capture an array of experiences and constantly shifting dynamics among different stakeholders. My initial choice of methods for this research followed Holy and Stuchlik (2006:162) who note that there are at least two broad categories of information available: the verbal statements or ‘what people say’ and the observed behaviour, or ‘what people do.’ Keeping in mind their methodological offerings, I conducted archival research, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews (Spradley 1979). Later into my fieldwork, I actively participated, and at times moderated, in a series of dialogues between different groups of war veterans and civil society organisations outside of the network of VAs. Therefore, although all the methods I used were qualitative, the nature of my project required a strategy that would allow for the investigation of a broad set of questions about a range of processes that shaped the social reality in Serbia since the dissolution of the former state. In this regard, my research was a kind of ‘multi-sited’ ethnography defined by constant movement through time and space and different sites of inquiry that were not always bound to a particular place. This mode of fieldwork required tracing flows of ‘cultural forms across and within multiple sites of activity that destabilize the distinction, for example, between lifeworld and system, by which much ethnography has been conceived’ (Marcus 1995:96). In fact, sometimes it appeared as if the project had taken a life of its own with new participants and topics developing from the fieldwork itself.

The techniques of recording my everyday observations and interactions depended largely on the setting and the events in which I participated. Most of the time I used a small notebook where I could quickly jot down pieces of information if the situation permitted it. I would later transfer those notes onto my laptop computer. Here the notes ranged from recordings of everyday interactions between different people I worked with, including those I grew to know well and those who chanced upon my research, to descriptions of places through which I moved, and my reflections about particular people, events and ideas. This also included all information from inside and outside of my primary field sites, which I
thought had some relevance for the project. From time to time I also kept a personal diary where I recorded my thoughts that often had no immediate analytical value, but that later helped me to recall some of the situations and how those ‘felt’ in the moment. These notes also added a note of complexity to my encounters in the field and served as memory triggers. Although I recorded a large number of interviews and also used video recordings of workshops in which I took part in Rakovica and CZKD, many times I recorded conversations by hand, as this was often what my interlocutors preferred.

**On multiple roles and shifting identities**

With the partial move beyond the confines of Euro-American academia (Godina 2003), anthropology witnessed an emergence of ‘native anthropology’ and ‘anthropology at home,’ which soon became important conceptual categories that brought to the fore issues of positionality, reflexivity and different representations of contemporary alterities. With the increase in interconnections between researchers of ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ experiential and epistemological backgrounds, anthropology entered another phase of re-evaluation of its disciplinary identity and the underlying power relations (see Ryang 1997:41–44). In a broad sense, the term ‘native anthropologist’ came to denote those researchers who were in the past relegated to the world of exotic ‘others’ – the traditional objects of anthropological gaze. However, as cultural and geographical distances began to shorten and the researched increasingly became the researchers, ‘anthropology at home’ became a legitimate form of disciplinary inquiry (Peirano 1998). Native anthropologists or ‘insiders’ were now those who wrote from within and inside their own ‘cultures,’ with which they supposedly had an ‘intimate affinity’ (Narayan 1993:671). However, with the image of monolithic ‘culture’ eroding and the emergence of calls for its abandonment (Abu-Lughod 2006), the dichotomy of insider/native versus outsider/non-native started to lose its ground (Bakalaki 1997:502). Some researchers were now asking: ‘How native is a “native” anthropologist?’ (Narayan 1993).

This question once again linked the issue of positionality with anthropologists’ responsibility to multiple audiences. With this in mind, Bakalaki (1997:503) notes at least two options that are left to native anthropologists: to
negate their nativeness in order to become ‘real’ anthropologists, or to embrace it as a tool to question anthropological identity. However, she also recognises that neither of those positions can fully account for their responsibility to various audiences, including academia, the communities they study, and, more importantly, their relations to other (native) anthropologists and colleagues who can question their self-positioning. This confirms my view that nativeness should not be used as an identity label and an end in itself, nor as a tool to build an authorial status. Yet its ambivalence may be useful for teasing out important insights about the construction of anthropological knowledge, as well to point to the influence of power relations in which this and similar categories were constructed.

**More than foreigner, less than native: positioning and location-building**

To a large extent, my experiences of growing up in the region made my entry into the field free of ‘culture shocks,’ as I did not have to learn the language and struggle with settling in. However, after arriving to Serbia I realized that my ‘insider’ position presented me with both advantages and difficulties. Sometimes the part of my identity that was perceived as Serbian – my last name, Dokić – and the fact that I had lived in the so-called Republic of Serbian Krajina\(^5^6\) that many of my interlocutors had ‘defended’ during the war, made it relatively easy for me to enter different veterans’ associations (VAs) and get conversations started. At other times my Croatian and, to a lesser degree, Canadian identity would make some people suspicious about my intentions. In fact, I can remember several instances when I was cautioned about the way I spoke and wrote, because, as I was told by some of my interlocutors, the language I used sounded too Croatian and needed to be amended.\(^5^7\) Thus, although I would like to be able to say, like

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\(^5^6\) The Republic of Serbian Krajina, of which I too was a citizen, was a self-proclaimed state that existed within the territory of Croatia from 1991 to 1995. It was never recognised internationally and it was later re-incorporated into Croatia.

\(^5^7\) In fact, in Croatia, I have been reminded about the way I spoke as well. Some of my friends told me that the language I used sounded like some archaic version of Serbo-Croatian that was, during the time I spent living in Canada, replaced by the ‘new Croatian.’ I thought that was much more a reflection of the changes in my friends’ self-identification than of transformations in the Croatian language. Then again, languages live and change, sometimes quite dramatically,
some of my colleagues who worked in similar settings, that I do not necessarily feel that I belong to any particular nation (see Brković 2012), the situation required that I take up a position and choose a (national) group to ‘belong’ to, otherwise I would be ascribed one with or without my consent. The reality of lifescapes of which I was a part was such that I was moving through contexts in which nationalism was often one of the main axes on which many conversations developed, if not explicitly then in implicit, ‘banal’ ways (Biling 1995) through common jokes, and sometimes seemingly accidental and superficial interactions that Ledeneva (2011) observed in 1990s Russia and called ‘open secrets and knowing smiles.’

When it comes to personal ties to a particular context, although they do not necessarily guarantee easy access to people and information (Simić 2010), especially when dealing with the sensitive issues that I was often facing during my fieldwork, in many ways this helped me to establish rapport with my interlocutors. I was reminded about my privileged position after hearing a story about a graduate student of anthropology from a university in the US who had a very different experience with veterans at a VA where I also worked. Although he was greeted with a warm welcome and veterans allowed him to stay for as long as he wanted, they were not always completely honest with their answers and they exaggerated their nationalist views in a way they never did in front of me. As they were exchanging their goodbyes at his departure, the veterans thanked him for his interest, but also expressed their doubt that he would ever be able to understand them because he was, alas, American. Although he spent his time at the same VA like me, and took part in some of the same practices I did (and, as I was told, was offered the same šljivovica), veterans did not refrain from telling him that for them he would always be the Other. This reaffirms van de Port’s observation about the domain of knowledge that his (Serbian) interlocutors regarded as ‘impenetrable by “Westerners”, [because] it takes a Serb to know a Serb’ (1999:7).

My role as a foreigner and an insider often reminded me of the multiple roles of anthropologists working within their own ‘cultures’ and how these relate especially in young nation states, such as Croatia of the 1990s when its political and cultural elites felt the need to emphasize their linguistic independence.

58 For a similar form of communication used by the Soviet intelligentsia and described as ‘half-words,’ see Boym 1995.
to representations of different experiential realities. As an individual who may claim to relate to both the insiders and the outsiders, my experiences resemble those of Abu-Lughod’s (2006:466) feminists and ‘halfies’ who are responsible to various audiences and who contain and challenge the anthropological separation between the self and the other. However, to this I would add that my role was much more than just ‘dual’ and that the ways in which I was positioned were always slightly different in different contexts and affected much more by everyday power relations than my ties to a particular ethnic or other group. In other words, my identity was shifting in different situations, sometimes because that was my own choice and at other times because I had no choice but to observe how I was being assigned certain identities. In this regard I agree with Narayan who recognises that the ‘halfie’ category does not always account for the multiplicity of identifications and argues that anthropologists should accept the apparent contradictions of their shifting roles and, more importantly, make them apparent in their analyses (1993:671–72).

One example of this tension was the conflict between my antinationalist views and my participation in daily practices and rituals that were by definition nationalist and in various ways expressions of violence. Here I must point out that although in principle I agree with scholars such as Jackson who writes that violence is a ‘negation of humanity [that is] ultimately harmful to both individuals and society at large, no matter what its underlying rationale’ (2004:3), I also think that it is necessary to engage in a deeper exploration of the human condition that is often defined by a selection of bad options that people are ‘free’ to chose from. Here is what I mean by this. If I was to take a categorical stand ‘against’ violence, I would deny the fact that throughout my fieldwork I was constantly haunted with question such as ‘what, if anything, would I have done differently if I was in their shoes?’, ‘what would have happened if I was only four years older at the time the war started and I had to respond to the calls for arms?’, ‘would I have stayed to fight or tried to run away?’ The answer is painfully easy: being fully aware of my and my family’s circumstances at the time, my only option would have been to stay and take up arms. Therefore, refusing to admit that people often do not have options to choose from, or are presented only with bad ones, does not allow for an

59 Abu-Lughod defines ‘halfies’ as ‘people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education or parentage’ (2006:466).
understanding of the messiness of everyday life experience. This is not to say that I approve of individual acts of violence. In fact, I am certain that one of the important ways to come to terms with the past, such as in the post-Yugoslav case, is to condemn acts of violence and to hold individuals who committed them responsible for their actions. Still, to pass judgment from a safe distance would at best seem hypocritical, but also ultimately dangerous because it would open up a possibility to label entire populations as either perpetrators or victims.

That being said, at the same time as I was establishing my position as a critic of the language of violence, I was implicitly engaging in everyday life in places that were sometimes adorned with posters of war criminals and other symbols of war that represented an important part of my interlocutors' identity. Therefore, on the one hand I was refusing to listen to the language of hate and violence, yet on the other hand I was willingly spending my time with persons for whom nationalist discourses, sometimes imbued with language of violence, were an integral part of their routine daily interactions.

Nevertheless, the fact that we occasionally disagreed on certain issues, such as for example Serbian nationalism, did not mean that we did not share the same sense of ‘cultural intimacy’ about many other things (Herzfeld 1997). We spoke the same language and laughed at the same jokes, we shared memories of many past events that had a direct impact on all our lives, we had similar experiences of dealing with the same state system (at least in relation to the former state), and so on. However, all of these frames of reference were shared only up to a point, as we also belonged to different generations, we had lived in different states after the wars, we had different levels of education and, as I already mentioned, we often had quite different political views. Therefore, even though to a certain extent I shared some understandings with my interlocutors about the contexts in which I worked, which sometimes made it relatively easy for me to access certain domains of knowledge, my identity was constantly shifting in relation to different topics and persons while my constant search for the strange in the familiar always kept us at a relative (and relatively safe) distance.
Chapter TWO

Veterans without legitimacy: Serbia’s legacy of unsolved contradictions

Veteran is another name for absolute exclusion and invisibility […] as long as veterans’ status remains unrecognised, the state will be able to pretend there were no wars.

Branimir Stojanović – Trša (2011)60

In this chapter I examine how Serbian state agencies and veterans themselves defined the category of ‘veteran’ and what this can tell us about this country’s veteran politics during the past two decades. Related to this is the question how veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars were recognised in comparison to veterans of the Second World War and what kinds of welfare benefits they were entitled to. I begin with a story about a trip to a commemorative site for an important battle of Second World War, which I will use to explain the ambiguities that existed in the relationship between Serbian political elites and veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars. Next, I outline several studies about other states and wars and their own respective populations of war veterans in order to set the stage for a Foucauldinan analysis of the development of veteran policy in Serbia.

Old glories and selective memories: commemorating the Syrmian front

In April 2011 I was invited by veterans from Rakovica to join them on a trip to the memorial site for the Allied soldiers who died at the Syrmian front during the Second World War, in Yugoslav and Serbian context officially termed National Liberation War (NOR).61 The trip was organised by the municipal office of the League of Associations of Veterans of the National Liberation War (SUBNOR).

60 Branimir Stojanović – Trša was a psychoanalyst, activist and program administrator at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination (Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju – CZKD) in Belgrade. Quote taken from the public dialogue ‘Who owns the war(s)?’ held in November 2011 (see Chapter 5).
61 Narodnooslobodilački rat.
This was the 66th anniversary of the Battle of the Syrmian front that had a special place in the collective memory of socialist Yugoslavia, as it marked the end of the NOR in Serbia. In the early morning of the 12th of April we boarded a bus in front of the office of SUBNOR in Rakovica, located only steps away from the VA for the veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars. I soon learned that this was not the first time that the ‘old’ veterans invited the ‘young’ veterans to join them on a trip of this sort. In fact, members of SUBNOR were known for organising many trips to memorial sites and places of important battles. This time six veterans from the VA in Rakovica and myself joined them for the trip.

The passengers on the bus were mostly elderly men and women. Several men were dressed in Partisan uniforms and some were wearing pins and medals they earned in the NOR. As soon as we started the trip, they began singing old Partisan songs and someone was already passing plum brandy (rakija) around. It seemed that many of the people on the bus already knew each other and that this was not the first time they were travelling together. At one point, a man, possibly in his seventies, walked up to the bus driver and asked for the microphone and started to recite some of his poems. He was musing about the glory of Serbian warriors who died in the Battle of Kosovo, the sacrifice that the Serbian people made during the many centuries of occupation by the Ottomans and more recently the Albanian ‘occupation’ of Kosovo, and the need to save Serbia from disintegration. He continued with a lament about the disappearing Cyrillic alphabet and ended with an appeal to the Serbian expatriates to return to their fatherland to fight the ‘white plague’ (bela kuga) and bring back life to the deserted Serbian countryside. As he carried on with his performance, the audience seemed to be losing interest and the murmur was soon replaced with a cacophony of loud voices. Still, at the end he was greeted with loud applause.

Next in line, also for a recital, was an elderly man, possibly in his seventies, dressed in an olive-green uniform and wearing a partisan cap with a communist red star. He told us that he was from Lajkovac, a small town in west-

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62 *Proboj Sremskog fronta.*

63 The ‘old’ veterans of the NOR were usually referred to as ‘borci’ (literally, ‘fighters’). However, for the sake of clarity I use the term ‘veteran’ except in instances where I think it is important to emphasize different uses of the two terms.

64 The rhetoric of ‘white plague’ (i.e. demographic decline) has been used as part of the pronatalist nationalist agenda to promote the ‘fight’ against the extinction of the nation through an increase in birthrates (see Jansen and Helms 2009). Not every increase in birthrates was welcomed however, but only the increase in births of one’s own nation – in the above case, Serbian.
central Serbia, and that he would share a poem that he wrote in 1991 at the outbreak of the wars. The title of the poem was ‘The Breakup of SFRY’. He began by recalling the last congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) and how ‘party spies’ and ‘communist chameleons’ destroyed everything that people fought for. He teased out some laughs with the line: ‘Comrade Rista used to be a communist and now Rista believes in Christ’ and continued reflecting on the aftermath of the recent wars and the demise of Yugoslav Brotherhood and Unity. He ended with a call for the return of the partisans to restore the old communist order and the glory of socialist Yugoslavia. Everyone seemed amused by the poem.

What struck me most was the way in which the contents of the two poems seemed to contradict each other. The first was laden with popular nationalist imagery including the centuries old Serbian struggle for national self-determination that started during the medieval occupation by the Ottomans and continued with the separatism of Kosovo Albanians, through to the challenges of the alleged disappearance of the Serbian tradition and the very Serbian nation. This could be read as an implicit approval to the post-Yugoslav wars and their veterans. The second poem seemed to condemn the latter by criticising yesterday’s communists who changed their allegiance and betrayed the Yugoslav principle of Brotherhood and Unity by choosing to fight for the advancement of their nationalist ideals. This contradiction reflected the ambiguity of the role of the ‘old’ veterans in Serbia who were seen as main promoters of the communist ideals on which socialist Yugoslavia was built as well as supporters of the nationalist politics of the 1990s that effectively helped to dismantle that same Yugoslav state they fought for during the NOR.

However, regardless of their ideological convictions, it seemed that everyone agreed that the veterans of the Second World War had every right to be proud and to assert their view that they fought for the right cause. What is more, two decades after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the violent wars of the 1990s they managed to keep their VAs running and their presence visible. Although their population was ageing and they no longer occupied centre stage in public life as they used to in the former state, they were still recognised as the living carriers

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65 Raspad SFRJ.
66 Drug je Rista bio komunista, a sad Rista veruje u Hrista.
of the nation’s antifascist tradition. Even after the revival of nationalism in the 1990s and the re-appearance of nationalist groups such as the Chetnik movement\(^{67}\) (četnici) had diluted the idealised picture of the communist era, the image of partisans as true anti-fascist fighters was successfully kept alive. In fact, even when their population was dwindling, they remained relatively active in public life in Serbia, especially when compared to largely invisible veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

Not long after the recitals we were approaching the memorial site via the motorway that is still known as the ‘Highway of Brotherhood and Unity’ (although its official name is A3 Motorway). The memorial is right next to the motorway on the banks of the River Bosut near to the Croatian border and the town of Šid. The complex was the last one of its kind that was built in Yugoslavia. At the entrance I could see several people selling old communist insignia and medals and pins, most of them with the image of President Tito. Near the entrance I saw an unexpected addition to the site – a new Orthodox church was being erected. Some people were taking pictures in front of it. As we approached the memorial I began to realize the vast size of the complex. It consisted of three large parts: ‘the Meeting Point’ (Sabiralište), ‘the Alley of Honor’ (Aleja časti) and the museum. The meeting point was a circle framed with red brick walls carrying the names of military units that took part in the military operations. The circle was cut with a path that led to the Alley of Honor that was lined with numerous small red brick walls that were perpendicular to the path that led to the museum. Someone told me that the walls symbolized the enemy defense lines. The walls were engraved with the names of soldiers who died in the battle and included the names of Yugoslav Partisans, soldiers of the Red Army, the Bulgarian People’s Army and an Italian Partisan brigade.

As we approached the site I could see that it was already full of people, mostly older men and women. The ceremony was about to begin back at the meeting point. I soon learned that the event was organized and sponsored by the Committee for the Fostering of Tradition of Serbian Liberation Wars of the Government of Serbia,\(^{68}\) the Ministry of Defence (MoD), SUBNOR, and the Municipality of Šid. Representatives of all of these organisations and offices,

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\(^{67}\) I shall return to Chetniks later in this chapter.

\(^{68}\) Odbor pri Vladi Srbije za negovanje tradicije srpskih oslobodilačkih ratova.
including some members of the Government of Vojvodina, were present for the occasion. After some of them placed flowers at the centre of the meeting point, the official programme started. The first in line to hold a speech was Nataša Cvjetković, President of the Municipality of Šid. She talked about the need for building a society based on ‘true values’ that the generations before had fought for: ‘wisdom, true patriotism, love for the homeland’. To this she added:

With knowledge, perseverance, and firm dedication to these values, we can enter the European family of friendly nations where we would like to build our future in the spirit of mutual understanding, humanism and tolerance, rule of law and non-violence […] this will be the fulfillment of our democratic idea for a modern, European Serbia.

As Cvjetković continued with her long list of values for a European Serbia, the voices in the crowd were getting louder. It seemed that people’s attention was waning. Soon she gave the floor to Miodrag Zečević, President of SUBNOR, who gave a short speech in which he thanked everyone for coming to the memorial for this important anniversary and introduced the next speaker, the First Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior, Ivica Dačić.69 He started his address: ‘Ladies and gentlemen – or I guess I am not wrong to notice that there is more of you “comrades” here…’ The audience welcomed his comment with applause and approving laughs. He said that he was proud that the government was showing respect for this place and that this was a reflection of Serbia’s relationship to the past, the present and the future. He continued to elaborate on this point by saying that any government that would choose to revise history and cooperate with traitors and occupiers only to justify political convictions of some of its members and political parties would do irreparable damage to the past of this country. Dačić was referring to the law that, although it was opposed by his party (SPS), was passed in 2004 and that treated both Chetniks and Partisans as equal antifascist movements that fought against occupation in the Second World War. He reminded the audience about the great

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69 He was also the president of the Serbian Socialist Party (SPS) and, from 2012–2014, the prime minister of Serbia.
sacrifices that the Serbian people made in their fight against fascism with which they showed the young generations how to defend the freedom and honor of their homeland. He added that Serbia confirmed that she deserves her place alongside other European nations:

…This is why it is clear that stories about national reconciliation (nacionalno pomirenje) cannot include a justification for all those who cooperated with the occupiers and the fascists. [Applause.] […] I am certain that Serbia’s place is in the EU. But this EU is based on principles of freedom, peace, justice and respect for human rights and, of course, antifascism. And we are not even allowed to celebrate the 9 May here so that we would not provoke conflicts between the Partisans and the Chetniks! Serbia should be proud because our people always valued freedom and never waged wars of conquest […] How can we fight against extremism and pro-fascist movements if we don’t foster our antifascist tradition?! And this is why I think that I will not make a mistake if, in accordance to European values I salute you with your old cry: ‘Death to Fascism!’

The crowd responded in one voice with the second part of the old slogan: ‘Freedom to the People!’ The programme continued with the reading of poems about the Second World War and the singing of old partisan songs. The visitors were taking pictures and walking around the ‘trenches’ and toward the museum. I later found my hosts in a café close to the entrance to the site. One of them told me that he was happy to have been invited to the ceremony, but that he was also disappointed that they could not return the invitation to the old veterans. The reason for this was that the young veterans still did not have any memorial sites of this kind. What is more, he added, in Serbia there were no official heroes from the wars of the 1990s. He reminded me that it was very likely that many of the men who were present at the site that day were also veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars. He was probably right, but there was no mention of them in the programme,

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70 Victory Day is the day of the capitulation of Nazi Germany to the Soviet forces.
or in any of the speeches. In fact, the only link that the speakers made were those between the glorious sacrifices that Serbia made in the Second World War and her inevitable (future) place in the family of European nations. The post-Yugoslav wars were never mentioned.

The above vignette is only one example how some representatives of the Serbian state – in this case members of the SPS – chose to emphasize their special bond with the veterans of the Second World War. The degree of social recognition is even greater when juxtaposed against the invisibility of the war veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars. In their speeches the representatives of SUBNOR, the local politicians and government officials talked about their fight for ‘true’ values and stressed how these reflected Serbia’s continued effort to strive for democratic ideals. The message was that veterans of the NOR fought for the same ideals that the government was fighting for: a modern, democratic and European Serbia. In fact, the Minister of Interior linked Serbia’s antifascist tradition with the abstract (European) principles of freedom, peace, and so on, which he then sealed off with the old and well-known communist salute ‘Death to Fascism!’ It would almost appear as if the communist revolution and its project of modernisation and antifascism materialised again. However in the process of making universal claims, the minister failed to mention the concrete – the fact that many of the veterans who were present at the site were also veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars. What is more, and what added a sense of irony to the situation, was the fact that this minister had also served in one of the governments of Slobodan Milošević, the person who was credited as one of the main orchestrators of those wars, the effects of which continued to place a serious strain on Serbia’s social and political transformations, including her efforts to join the EU.

**Winners and losers of the Second World War**

Let me now draw an outline of the main features of Chetniks and Partisans and how the ideas about them were used by Serbian nationalist political elites during the 1990s to construct ambiguous and contradictory messages about the need to preserve Yugoslavia (built on the ideals of multiculturalism and Brotherhood and Unity) *and* to advance the solution of the so-called Serbian ‘national question,’ seen as rooted in a Serbian disunity (Naumović 2005). This pairing of unlikely
discourses was one of the central features of Serbian nationalist politics of the early to mid 1990s (Jansen 2005a) during which the SPS regime of Slobodan Milošević sought to position itself as the guardian of Yugoslav traditions and legitimacy, while also openly sending warmongering calls about the need to bring all Serbs into one unified nation-state, which for many was a pretext for a territorial war and the establishment of the so-called Greater Serbia. This had a major influence on the perceptions of veterans as inseparable from the nationalist politics of the regime of the 1990s.

Although in the past the name ‘chetnik’ had been used to refer to Serbian guerilla units that opposed the Ottoman rule and later to similar Bosnian Serb units in the First World War, the term became widely used only after Draža Mihailović, a colonel of the royal Yugoslav Army who was fortunate to escape capture during the Nazi invasion in April 1941, appropriated the name for the members of his Ravna Gora Movement,71 which later became known as the Serbian Army in the Fatherland 72 (Lampe 2000:205–206). Mihailović immediately started to promote his Chetniks as a resistance movement that eventually earned him the recognition as a war minister of the Yugoslav government in exile. However, the Allies soon started to doubt their decision to back them up after being faced with increasing evidence that Chetniks had in fact collaborated with Italian and German forces and committed atrocities against non-Serb populations, particularly in Bosnia, as well as advanced the idea of an ethnically pure and enlarged Serbian state which would include almost two thirds of a revamped Yugoslavia (ibid.:206, 213; Denich 1994:375). As the war progressed the popular and foreign support for Mihailović’s Chetnik movement waned. At the war’s end Mihailović was captured by Tito’s Partisans and in 1945 executed for high treason while his Chetnik movement was banned (Ramet 2002).

In the end it was the Yugoslav Communists and their Partisan guerilla forces that came out victorious from the Second World War. From the beginning they fought on four sides, against the Germans, the Italians, the Croatian Ustaše,73

71 Ṛavno goreški pokret.
72 Srpska vojska u otadžbini.
73 Ustaše were members of the armed forces of the fascist Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH) that existed from 1941–1945 and promoted the idea of a racially pure Croatia and carried out massacres against Serbs, Jews, and Roma (Cohen1995:21). Although independent in name, in reality NDH was a Nazi puppet state that consisted of an
and the Chetniks, which eventually earned them the recognition from the British government and the Allies who in 1944 discontinued their support to Mihailović (Lampe 2000:226). What is more, the communists won not only in battle, but also by successfully employing their tactical advantage over other forces and through a discourse of social revolution that promised a new state that would be based on principles of equality and federalism. This satisfied many in the major ethnic groups, as well as minorities, some of which were until then unrecognised (Cohen 1995:23). The following quote of a speech by Tito speaks about the broad and inclusive appeal of that promise:

The term National Liberation Struggle would be a mere phrase and even a deception if it were not invested with both an all-Yugoslav and national meaning for each people individually... The liberation and emancipation of the Croatians, Slovenes, Serbs, Albanians, Moslems, etc... Therein also lies the essence of the National Liberation War. (ibid.).

Thus, following the Second World War, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) and its Partisan units emerged as victorious and successfully advanced the idea of their equal contribution to the international struggle against fascism, which allowed them to compare themselves to some of the strongest nations in the world. In reality this was far from truth, as the sphere of influence of the KPJ was limited by a compromise between Stalin and Churchill that positioned the country both in the Eastern and the Western sphere of influence. However, this constraint would soon be removed after Tito’s split with Stalin in 1948, which eventually strengthened Yugoslavia’s legitimacy with the West even more, as it was now recognised as both socialist and independent from the USSR (Woodward 1995:24–25).

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enlarged territory including most of contemporary Croatia (excluding large parts of its coast which was granted to Italy), the entire BiH and a large part of Serbia.
Political fusion of unlikely discourses

Ideas about Yugoslav legitimacy would survive long enough to be appropriated and recombined by the Serbian nationalist elites in their seemingly ambiguous and contradictory state-building project in which they advocated the preservation of peace and unity of the former country, while at the same time stirring up interethnic tensions and engaging in wars that ultimately led to its violent dissolution. During this time many developments took place that only a few years earlier would have been regarded as unthinkable. At the outbreak of the post-Yugoslav wars the Chetnik movement (banned in socialist Yugoslavia) was revived and several Serbian paramilitary units identifying with Chetniks and monarchism reemerged, such as the White Eagles formed by the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and the Serbian Guard supported by the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO). The members of these new paramilitary units had dubious backgrounds, wore strange uniforms and fought in wars that did not resemble the images of glorious battles of the Second World War (Bougarel 1999:158-159; also see Čolović 2007). And if that was not enough, they also engaged in committing atrocities and even attracted the so-called ‘weekend warriors’ from a generation of people with meager prospects for education or livelihood who would go for short-term shooting sprees in war zones in Bosnia and Croatia (Woodward 1995:249).

This is not to say that that everybody blindly followed Milošević’s autocratic regime (Simić 2000), nor that most people who responded to calls for mobilisation should be labelled as criminals. Yet, although most veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars had not been members of paramilitary units, these images resonated with the general public at home and abroad and greatly influenced the ways in which they were perceived after the war. When placed in the geopolitical context of Europe, their legitimacy was not at all comparable to that of the veterans from the Second World War. On the contrary, they were viewed as having waged a series of unjust, gruesome wars that were directly opposed to the ideals of freedom, tolerance, and multiculturalism – the basic principles that were also espoused by ‘Europe’ and the ‘West.’ This turned them into multiple losers, both in relation to the official ideals of their own ‘democratising’ and ‘Europeanising’ state (Mikuš 2011) and to the values of the ‘international community.’ Yet, as I will show, Serbian veterans fought against such
interpretations and in the process drew attention to the unsolved contradictions in which Serbian state officialdom continued its ambiguous discourse on the wars by denying its direct involvement and therefore its potential responsibility for their outcome. This is most evident in the creation of a top-down veterans’ policy that did not acknowledge the existence of large numbers of people that were mobilised for the wars and in veterans’ continuous attempts to change that situation. In the following section, I will first offer a stylised account of veterans’ policies worldwide to serve as a backdrop for my exposition of its development in Serbia.

**Other states and wars: permutations in veterans’ politics**

[T]he governed are, variously, members of a flock to be nurtured or culled, juridical subjects whose conduct is to be limited by law, individuals to be disciplined, or, indeed, people to be freed.

(Rose et al. 2009:3)

The term ‘veteran’ comes from the Latin adjective *veteranus* that was used to describe old, experienced soldiers, former Roman legionaries, who spent a certain number of years in the military before being discharged from service (Merriam Webster). According to Begić et al. (2007), at the time when this term was first coined, which is the expansion of the Roman Republic, mandatory conscription pertained only to men who could purchase their own military equipment. Although their government did provide some financial support for their most basic needs during the wars, the main compensation was in the form of permission to loot the conquered territories. Therefore, the issue of social status and compensation for participation in wars was one of the defining features of veterans’ experience. After returning from wars veterans were granted land and properties, often in the newly founded cities in the colonies. However, it was only after the introduction of professional armies with soldiers obliged to spend much longer time in military service that veterans became a recognisable class of citizens. This was also the time when they no longer needed to purchase their own equipment and when the institution of veterans’ provision became one of the central political problems that had a major influence on later developments in the Roman law (ibid.:12–16).
During the following centuries the term ‘veteran’ found its way outside of the military and in addition to ex-service personnel it started to denote any person with long-term experience in a certain profession. Similarly, a range of different terms started being used to refer to persons who returned from military service. Kostner and Bowles (2004:3) list several examples from different postconflict settings that use a number of variations and some country-specific terms: in Zimbabwe a ‘war veteran’ is any person with military training who participated in the ‘liberation struggle’; in Mozambique a ‘veteran of the national liberation struggle’ is any person who actively participated in the Portuguese Colonial War; in the countries of Central America, several terms are used interchangeably to refer to those who have fought in irregular forces, such as ‘demobilised,’ ‘reincorporated,’ and ‘ex-fighter,’ while the status ‘retired’ denotes service in regular forces; in Chad, the term ‘retraité’ refers to soldiers who retired from service because of disability or old-age retirement, and ‘délégué’ for those who were discharged through a program of demobilisation. The list continues, but what is important to note here is that all these terms reflect different historical and socio-political contexts, as well as legal classification systems. I will return to the issue of regulation and classification later in this chapter, but let me now take a detour to some of the more known postwar settings and their populations of war veterans.

**United Kingdom**

The experiences of British war veterans were conditioned by this country’s liberal welfare regime and a history of having a professional army that developed long before the appearance of a modern state in which it was possible to demand ‘citizenship rights’ (Dandeker et al. 2006:164). Before the development of the post-Second World War welfare state, the British did not have a state-supported system of welfare provision for either war veterans or civilians. Instead assistance was channeled through various officers’ and regimental associations and civilian philanthropic organisations with the latter taking most of the burden for the care of the disabled. Cohen (2001:5) notes that this ‘led veterans to believe that their fellow citizens had honored their sacrifices and […] brought about a reconciliation between disabled veterans and those for whom they had suffered.’
This, combined with the usual deployment for overseas service, created a paradoxical relationship in which the British state at the same time revered war veterans as national heroes and left them to search for assistance and protection from non-state organisations. In contrast, in Germany after the First World War, the state monopolised welfare and recognition of veterans’ status not allowing for civil society to enter the field (ibid.:11), while in other contexts, such as, for example, the US after the Second World War, the responsibility for care was shared between the state and private sector.

When it comes to classification of UK veterans, Dandeker et. al (2006) identify two broad types of definitions of veterans: an inclusive one and an exclusive one. The inclusive definition is ‘based on receiving a day’s military pay’ (whether or not one has met the training requirements or served on deployment or seen action),’ and the exclusive one ‘requires personnel to have undertaken some kind of active service’ (ibid.:162–163). Thus, the inclusive definition treats all ex-service personnel as veterans who should receive the same benefits provided by a civilian welfare system, while the exclusive one grants them a special status and creates a hierarchy in which the allocation of resources is determined by their service experience.

Dandeker et al. (2006:163–164) further suggest that any investigation about veterans’ policy needs to consider the history of warfare in a particular country and the ways in which civilians were involved, the national pattern of civil-military relations and how it influenced historical experiences of war, and the structure of the armed forces and how it affected public perception about veterans. Next, they describe how the UK government, even after a long history of ‘cultural neglect’ for their ex-service personnel, opted for the most inclusive definition that treats veterans as all persons who have served more than one day (including their dependents) (ibid.:165). Some of the reasons for the introduction of this definition, although it was counterintuitive for the wider public who considered veterans to be those who served in the two World Wars, was the negative media coverage of veteran homelessness, lobbying of powerful charity groups, and concerns about the risks associated with transition to civilian life.

74 This includes about 13 million people, or 20 percent of the total population (ibid.).
United States

Like Britain, the US also has a long history of wars and large numbers of war veterans. The first time that the social and political position of war veterans came to public attention was in 1932, during the time of the Great Depression, when the so-called ‘Bonus Army’, a group of about 15,000 war veterans from the First World War marched together to demand their rights for welfare protection (Fairweather 2008:2). At the time, the government issued them with certificates which they would be able to cash only after 1945, which soldiers declined and brought to public attention in a protest march across the country to Washington D.C. However, the government responded by sending the US Army, police and cavalry to disperse the protesters. In the end the Bonus Army’s march failed and the certificates were paid as scheduled in 1945. However, although veterans’ demands were not fulfilled, the protest won public sympathy and eventually had a major impact on the later issuing of the ‘GI Bill of Rights’ which was passed in 1944 to help the soldiers returning from the Second World War and ultimately added to US postwar prosperity and the creation of the American middle class (ibid.:3).

The contemporary welfare system for US veterans is organised through the massive Department of Veterans’ Affairs. The distinction is made between combat and non-combat veterans, but both groups are eligible for the same health and disability benefits. An important feature of Veterans Affairs is that it does not provide any benefits or health services to veterans’ families with the exception of benefits for killed and missing soldiers and a small increase in disability benefits for veterans with dependents. Eligibility for health care is based on the length of active duty (usually 24 months of continuous active service), financial need and whether the veteran has a condition that occurred during service (ibid.:4). When it comes to monetary benefits, not all veterans are eligible and they are typically divided into a pension that is based on age and length of service and a disability compensation that is based on the recognised level of disability. Those who cannot work can receive up to $2,500 per month per single veteran with no dependents, while a veteran with a 50 percent disability will receive about $750 a month (ibid.).
From USSR to Russia

The history of Soviet veterans of the Second World War\(^75\) presents another important case of veteran politics. During the Second World War the Red Army suffered massive losses: it had approximately 34.5 million regular soldiers, 7.8 million of whom died and 3 million returned with permanent disabilities (Danilova 2010:900). Although former soldiers were celebrated during a brief period after the war, they were soon sent to work on the reconstruction of the country (Edele 2008:11). Even after Stalin’s death in 1953, most Soviet leaders were reluctant to grant them any special privileges and representation in their own organisations. Instead the Soviet state made attempts to ‘unmake veterans as a social group as fast as possible’ (ibid.).

Under conditions in which the welfare system was monopolised by the Soviet state and private philanthropic organisations banned, the official disregard of veterans seriously blocked their efforts for public engagement. The first VA was founded in 1956, albeit merely as an extension of the state propaganda machine and it would turn into a major veterans’ organisation only after the revival of the state support of the Great Patriotic War under Leonid Brezhnev (Edele 2006:112). Yet, it must be noted that even though the general experience of Soviet veterans in the period until the 1960s was that of neglect by the state and society, they nevertheless, to different degrees of success, exerted pressure on their leaders and participated in public life, even when that was possible only through the writing of protests letters (Danilova 2010:901).

The institutionalisation of veterans’ status during the 1960s led to the expansion of the range of privileges that reached the other end of the extreme during Gorbachev’s time as the Secretary General in the mid 1980s (Edele 2008:11).\(^76\) During this time some of the benefits included health provisions, housing, transportation and tax incentives, nursing care for the disabled including free automobiles with free service and gasoline, free telephone installations, entitlement to purchase groceries at special stores and have them delivered free, and priority on waiting lists for getting an apartment or building a house (Danilova 2007:3). This was the time when the Soviet state finally established a

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\(^{75}\) The Russian term is the ‘Great Patriotic War’.

\(^{76}\) I explore these in more detail in Chapter 3.
form of social contract in which it provided for the veterans in exchange for their loyalty.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the collapse of this reciprocal contract and the introduction of capitalist market economy, the system of funding for VAs went through a series of turbulent changes. Large responsibilities were now given only to a few VAs that were afforded tax cuts with the obligation to care for their members. In fact, these were intended as tax privileges for the most vulnerable categories of injured and disabled ex-fighters (Oushakine 2009:166). However most of them were now struggling, as the payments were not issued regularly. Eventually, competition and corruption among VAs led to the cancellation of benefits and the entire system plunged into a deep crisis. Finally, in the beginning of the 2000s new changes were introduced so that the state remained responsible the veterans of the Second World War while the ex-fighters of the Soviet-Afghan war were for the first time granted the status of ‘veterans of combat operations’ and included in the system of veterans’ welfare (Danilova 2007:7).

**Israel**

Another important state in terms of its long history of armed conflicts is Israel. In fact, the Israeli state is one of the most militarised in the world and has the most developed welfare system for its war veterans. Since its foundation the State of Israel identified the care for veterans, especially for those injured in wars, as one of its central concerns. The first social welfare legislation was introduced after the end of the Israeli War for Independence in 1949, which contained the Invalids Law that was intended for the protection of war veterans (Tal-Katz et al. 2011:234). Over the years, as the number of Israeli military engagements and injured veterans grew, so did the range and the scope of welfare benefits. These included monetary grants, a range of rehabilitation services, and preferential access to public sector employment, as well as higher disability pensions from those for disabled civilian citizens. In 2009, Israel had 99,000 disabled veterans and the funds allocated for them comprised 19 percent of the state defence budget (ibid.:233).
In addition to material benefits, service in the Israeli military has a strong symbolic value and is often used as a point of access to social recognition and special citizenship rights. However, these rights are typically reserved only for the Israeli Jewish majority who are legally required to serve in the military. Kanaaneh (2009) writes about the experiences of Palestinian veterans of the Israeli army, only a few thousand of whom volunteer for military service, because their fellow Israeli Palestinians often label them traitors. Furthermore, they are frequently prevented from entering elite military corps and are sent to all-Arab units that are usually perceived as dangerous by the Israeli soldiers. Kanaaneh further notes that military service has become one of the most important rites of passage in the performance of citizenship in Israel where people often make references to the so-called: “‘holy quartet’ [of] Jewishness, military, masculinity and collective membership’ (ibid.:5). Therefore, although military service in Israeli army offers many benefits, it is often seen as an exclusionary right reserved for the Jewish majority while Palestinian Arabs are treated with suspicion.

**Croatia**

After the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, in addition to the destruction caused by the war, people in Croatia experienced a period of rapid privatisation of formerly public enterprises, that was followed by a massive loss of jobs, shrinking of state support, and an overall decrease in social protection. Regardless of this, veterans of the Croatian Homeland War, also known as ‘Defenders’ (Branitelji), were given an extensive set of material and symbolic rewards.

In former Yugoslavia, Croatia did not have its own separate military force and when the war broke out in 1991, the first unit was formed from the ranks of the police as the Croatian National Guard (ZNG), which later that year transformed into the Croatian Army (HV). At the same time, several paramilitary units were founded, such as the unarmed People’s Defence (NZ) and the Croatian Defence Force (HOS), which was funded by the nationalist right-wing Croatian Party of Rights (Begić et. al 2007:17). By definition, Defenders were those

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77 Homeland War (Domovinski rat) is the official name for the post-Yugoslav war in Croatia. In addition to Defenders of the Homeland War, Croatia also recognises Partisans of the Second World War and members of the Croatian Home Guard (Domobrani) of the fascist Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH), which lasted from 1941–1945.
persons who served in one of the above units for a duration of five months in the period from 5 August 1990 to 15 January 1992 and who spent 100 days in active service, or 30 days if the person was not obliged to spend mandatory service in the reserves (ibid:18). Although the exact number of Croatian Defenders was a source of dispute due to frequent (de)mobilisations during the war, the official number is 489,407 persons, out of which 272,782 joined the forces before the international recognition of Croatia as an independent state (ibid.).

However, disputes about the size of the veteran population and continuous changes in the laws and regulations concerning their welfare coverage, led to fierce debates and protests, as well as corruption within the system of social protection, particularly in connection with the increasing number of PTSD diagnoses (Dokić 2009b). That corruption was indeed a serious problem was proven by the actions of Croatian police who in 2008 raided psychiatric units at two major clinical centers and arrested six psychiatrists charged with selling PTSD diagnoses. At the time over 10,000 PTSD claims had been brought under police investigation due to suspicion that they were sold by psychiatrists who charged up to €8,000 for a diagnosis (Babić 2008; Rajić and Kuzmić 2008). The process involved the falsification of medical records, approval of forged diagnoses and psychiatric reports, and in some cases, the same psychiatrist provided expert opinion on the disability claim that he or she had initially approved. On the basis of their ‘disabled’ status, veterans could claim various benefits, ranging anywhere from government pensions, free education, and various tax breaks, to reduced interest rates for mortgage loans and complimentary shares from the Croatian privatisation fund. This seriously damaged the image of Croatian war veterans, as well as of psychiatrists.

**The top-down approach of veterans’ policy in Serbia**

As we can already see in this last case any consideration of war veterans and their predicaments needs to account for the laws and regulations that relate to the organisation of systems of welfare provision, as well as the creation of particular veteran subjectivities in different social and political-economic contexts. However, before I continue with the analysis of veterans’ subjectivities (which is the main focus of the following chapter) let me first turn to a Foucauldian analysis.
of the ways in which the population of veterans was regulated and coded as a particular category within the Serbian legal and welfare apparatus.

At the time of my fieldwork Serbia was a country with a recent history of direct engagement in several undeclared and lost wars, and one with the largest population of refugees and displaced persons in the region (Radović 2006) and a large number of people who were accused or convicted of war crimes by the ICTY. What is more, the political elites and the society in general had yet to face the full effects of the wars as there were no official records about the numbers of killed and missing persons, there was no public consensus about the extent of Serbia’s legal responsibility in the wars, or a tangible solution for the legal status of Kosovo, de facto a separate state at least since it declared its independence from Serbia in 2008.

In addition to all these ‘lacks’, two decades after the wars there was still no agreement about the precise definition of a ‘veteran’ or about the size of the veteran population of the post-Yugoslav wars. Although the term was formally introduced with the 2006 Constitution,78 it was often used interchangeably with the old term ‘fighters’ (borci) that was traditionally reserved for the ex-fighters of the Second World War. One of the reasons for this was that in socialist Yugoslavia the term veteran did not exist. The non-existence of veterans without combat experience reflected a situation in which a large number79 of people who had directly participated in the Second World War remained active in the JNA after the war (Žunec 2006:22).

The question to pose here is: how did under these conditions the Serbian state apparatus consolidate its bureaucratic powers in order to categorise and regulate its population of veterans as members of a special status group and for what purposes? As I will show, its extensive, exclusionary, and, at times perplexing legal framework was designed as a ‘technique of government’ that was intended to ‘improve’ only a part of its citizen-subjects that returned from the post-Yugoslav wars. To the extent that Serbian state allowed some and prevented

78 The term ‘veteran’ is mentioned only once in the Article 60 on social protection (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2006:20).
79 According to Žunec (2006:22), JNA ended the Second World War with 800,000 veterans and by 1945 over 150,000 of its officers and non-commissioned staff were veterans. The number of soldiers who were not veterans of the Second World War was growing very slowly so that until 1968 veterans formed the majority of the officers’ core of the JNA and held almost all of the commanding posts. From 1955 to 1965 veterans of the NOR formed over 96 percent of the total number of the retired military personnel.
others from being recognised as veterans, it created its own ‘régime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true’ (Foucault 1980:131). This kind of production of truth occurs at the interface of what Foucault theorised as the power/knowledge nexus that is circulated by and transmitted through different state apparatuses, institutions and agencies, as well as bodies of individual subjects. Therefore, power/knowledge cannot be localised only in the relations between the state and its citizens, but in ‘the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge [as effects of] implications of power–knowledge and their historical transformations’ (Foucault 1995:27–28; 1982).

In Serbia, veterans’ policy was to a large extent shaped by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Department of Fighter and Invalid Protection (Sektor za boračko-invalidsku zaštitu)\(^{80}\) of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MoLSP), as well as several state-supported VAs, such as the Association of War and Peacetime Diasabled War Veterans (URMIVS). Some of these organisations and state agencies used the term ‘fighter’ (borac) in their title, while others used the term ‘veteran’. At the same time, the staff, including legal experts, used both of those terms interchangeably in everyday situations. Still, the international term ‘veteran’ was gaining wider purchase, especially among the VAs that sought to create a distinction between the ex-fighters of the Second World War and the veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars. What is more, by adopting the new term much faster than the regulatory state agencies, veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars showed capacity for internal self-regulation and political subjectivation. In this way, the term ‘veteran' became one of the products, as well as instrument in the 'art of government' that determines what should and what should not be included in the state's domain and considered under its jurisdicstion (Foucault 2004:145).

If we go back to the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, it is clear that there existed an exclusive link between the Serbian state and the ex-fighters of the Second World War, while those who fought in the post-Yugoslav wars remained on the margins of the official political discourse. Still, when asked about the

\(^{80}\) In this instance I opted for a literal translation of the name of this office in order to highlight their use of the term 'fighter' although the official English translation revealingly reads 'Department of Veterans’ Affairs’ (without the mention of ‘invalids’).
difference between the categories of ex-fighters from the Second World War and veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars, a legal expert from the MoLSP replied:

A war veteran is a veteran in the same way that a former fighter [of the Second World War] is a veteran. Also there is no difference between a war veteran from those armed actions (oružane akcije) of the 1990s and the Kosovo war of 1999. However, the [old] term ‘fighter’ is still codified in our laws. The last law was passed in 1998\(^1\) and was expanded several times after that. The latest addition was the 2004 introduction of social protection for Chetniks. However, since then we haven’t really synchronised the terms [veteran and fighter] with the Constitution. Still, we don’t really have any problems with using either of the two terms.

According to this view, the two terms were not conflicting although ‘veteran’ was coded in the Serbian Constitution, while ‘fighter’ was used in the laws on the social protection of military disabled persons. Instead both terms referred to the same category of welfare recipients and as such they served the same purpose. Therefore, in the normative sense, the term ‘veteran’ becomes exclusionary when fused with the phrase ‘welfare recipient’, as in this form it does not describe most persons who participated in the post-Yugoslav wars. In fact, only those who suffered injuries and had a validated disability status were in the care of the MoLSP. The same rule applied to Partisans, as only those with injuries sustained in the war or peacetime military service qualified for disability benefits.

Željko Vasiljević, the president of the Association of War Disabled Veterans of Serbia,\(^2\) was one of the people who supported the introduction of the term veteran. However, when prompted why the new term was necessary when in practical sense it was not different from the old one, he admitted that he was not exactly sure:

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\(^1\) The Law on Basic Rights of Fighters, Military Disabled Persons and Families of Killed Fighters (Zakon o osnovnim pravima boraca, vojnih invalida i porodica palih boraca).

\(^2\) Udruženje ratnih vojnih invalida Srbije.
That is not exactly clear, not even to me although I was one of the people who thought that it was a good idea [to introduce the term ‘veteran’]. I thought that by changing the term we would somehow create a different status [for veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars]. But, even before that, during the time of Vojislav Koštunica, there were some attempts to rehabilitate veterans, or I should say to influence people to stop thinking negatively about veterans. If you asked people about us they would say that we are thieves, rapists, murderers, and so on [...] We had to introduce the new term to change the public perception about us, as this also impacted on the work of political parties that depended on people’s support.

Vasiljević is one of the persons who, on behalf a large number of people, advocated for the introduction of the new term, without being fully aware of its meaning, or the potential consequences of his and others people’s intentions. The logic of this practice is summed up in Foucault’s phrase, “People know what they do, they frequently know why they do what they do, but what they don’t know is what what they do does” (Foucault quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:187).

This shows how power relations are imbued with calculations, planning and strategic decision-making. Yet once achieved the results of these practices take on a life of their own which may or may not have been intended, or indeed understood.

The legal definition of a fighter is coded in the article 2 of the 1998 ‘Law on the Basic Rights of Fighters, Military Disabled Persons and Families of Killed Fighters’ (from hereon the Law) (Mrvić-Petrović 2003:81). The Law defines fighters as:

Yugoslav citizens who participated in the liberation wars (oslobodilački ratovi) in 1912–1918 as members of the Serbian and Montenegrin army, in the antifascist struggle (antifašistička borba) of the Second World War, as members of the army of the Kingdom

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83 At time of my fieldwork Vojislav Koštunica was the president of the conservative Democratic Party of Serbia (Demokratska stranka Srbije – DSS). He also served as the President of Serbia in 2000–2003 and as Prime Minister in 2004–2008.

84 *Zakon o osnovnim pravima boraca, vojnih invalida i porodica palih boraca.*
of Yugoslavia in the war from 6 to 17 April 1941 and as members of the Allied forces and in the People’s Liberation War of the Second World War in the partisan units [...] that is the units of the Yugoslav Army, from 17 April 1941 to 15 May 1945 (ibid.:82).

The text of the Law continues to mention that equal to fighters of the Second World War are:

[F]ighters who performed military duties […] in the armed actions after 17 August 1990 for the protection of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. A fighter is also a Yugoslav citizen who performed military duties or other duties connected to participating in the armed actions at times of peace against Albanian terrorism and separatism, as are those who performed those duties at the time of the NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (March–June 1999) (ibid.:82, my emphasis).

This part of the Law refers to those persons who served in the armed forces of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and later of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. It is important to note here that no ‘membership’ of army was listed as necessary, which, as I will show later in the text, was not how the Law was regularly implemented in practice. What is more, those persons who participated in the wars but were not injured while in service were not in the care of the MoLSP. Instead, they could validate their veteran status with the MoD. However, this was not possible for large numbers of people whose service was not officially recognised by the Serbian state. For example, only those Serbian citizens who served in the armed forces from 17 August 1990 until 14 December 1995 and who were in possession of valid military documentation (military ID card with official stamps of the Serbian Ministry of Defense) were considered war

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85 The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formed by Serbia and Montenegro after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. It existed in 1992–2003, when it was reconstituted as the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. In 2006 the State Union ended when first Montenegro and then Serbia declared independence.

86 The date of the signing of the Dayton Agreement that ended the war in BiH.
veterans. This ran against the demands of veterans who felt that they should be granted special privileges, both material and symbolic, regardless whether they suffered injuries or not.

For these reasons, everybody I talked to, including the ‘old’ and the ‘young’ veterans, agreed that a new law was needed to account for the changes in the structure of the population of war veterans as well as the new social and political circumstances in Serbia after the wars. This new law would speak of both veterans and fighters. In fact, a draft was proposed several times, but the Serbian Parliament never approved it. According to one high-ranking official of the MoLSP who wanted to stay anonymous, the problem was political and it was brought to a stalemate in 2004 with the addition of the members of the Chetnik Movement to the draft. He argued that the draft never got the majority of votes that it needed in order to be accepted in the parliament. The reason for this, he said, was that members of some political parties, such as SPS, kept fighting against the inclusion of Chetniks into the welfare system. Another problem was the formation of a working team that would be in charge of the verification process of veterans’ statuses, as members of SUBNOR refused to work alongside Chetniks. The new law would have brought important changes to the veterans’ policy so that a veteran would be defined as a person who spent a minimum of 45 consecutive days in a combat zone, which was a clause that was lacking in the existing Law. This political standoff, he argued, was the main reason why the MoLSP did not have the exact information about the size of the population of veterans in Serbia, or about its composition and needs. Another important issue was that there was no central register of veterans. The only information that the MoLSP had at its disposal was the number of the injured and disabled veterans, which accounted for only a small portion of the veteran population.

Outside of the MoLSP not everyone thought that all ex-fighters were the same, even when they used the terms fighter and veteran interchangeably. One of my interlocutors, Zoran Alimpić, at the time the President of the Assembly of the City of Belgrade,\(^{87}\) described this difference by stating the following:

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\(^{87}\) He was also one of the high-ranking members of the Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka – DS), acting mayor of Belgrade from September 2007 to July 2008, and member of the Municipal Assembly of Ćukarica (a municipality in Belgrade) in two terms in 1997–2004. DS was founded in 1990. It was one of the main opposition parties to the Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička partija Srbije – SPS) during the 1990s and it became part of the Democratic
Veterans [of the post-Yugoslav wars] are a socially weak (socijalno slaba) group in the same way as any other. Disabled persons are something else. Veterans were in war, they came back, and now they are the same as everybody else. Let’s be realistic, fifteen years have already passed and those wars must be forgotten. Veterans can’t be defined only by their war experience for the rest of their lives – although, ex-fighters of the Second World War were defined by the fact that they were ex-fighters. The problem is that all of them now expect the same kind of treatment, but they shouldn’t because these [latest] wars are a different story. Partisans started a revolution and were active in politics after they returned from the war; they were the communist avantgarde that changed everything. Many were still in their early twenties when they became ministers and presidents, so they could afford to keep repeating that they were ex-fighters. Today veterans can’t say that they won the war and this war did not end in some political change [...] There is a kind of realisation that is pressing down on all of us – including those who participated in the wars, as well as us who didn’t and those who make decisions about these things – we are all hearing some kind of noise in the background, some kind of understanding that this war was lost.

Alimpić’s comments show that it is not only the state regulatory agencies that determine the conduct of its subjects, but instead that a variety of stakeholders may govern in different sites according to their own logic and for their own purposes (Rose et al. 2009:3). Furthermore, his story contains some of the central themes that reflect the ways in which war veterans were perceived in Serbia. Although Alimpić was member of the liberal-democratic political elites who distanced themselves from the regime of the 1990s and wanted to avoid any responsibility for the wars and veterans, many other people I spoke to who did not take part in the wars shared his views. In his monologue, he effectively brought

Opposition (Demokratska opozicija Srbije - DOS) and the coalition government in 2000. At the time of my fieldwork, the president of DS, Boris Tadić, was also the president of Serbia.
together the themes of dispossession, inequality, and loss of legitimacy. He argued that veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars were a ‘socially weak group in the same way as any other,’ but were also different from disabled persons and ex-fighters of the Second World War. He points to the inequalities that existed both between and within different populations of war veterans, as well as between different groups of citizens who were entitled to different kind of rights and privileges. According to him war veterans should not expect any sort of compensation, symbolic or material, since, unlike the ex-fighters of the Second World War who created their own socialist state, they lost the wars. Furthermore, he argues that everybody was affected by the lost wars; even those who did not participate in them felt the effects of the loss in their everyday lives.

Some of these themes were observed by Oushakine in Russia where different groups, including veterans of the Chechen and Afghan wars, and mothers who lost their sons, gathered around a shared notion of trauma in what he calls the ‘post-Soviet communities of loss’ (Oushakine 2009:12). He notes that personal and collective loss became an ‘integrative principle’ and that ‘traumatic experience became generative’ and produced different forms of ‘patriotisms of despair’ (ibid.:207). However, where Oushakine sees the trope of loss as bringing different groups together, I found that in Serbia it was often used to separate war veterans from the rest of the population. In fact, non-veteran groups used ‘loss’ to distance themselves from the responsibility for the wars, while many veterans used it to express their lost sense of dignity, at least insofar as they made a link between their sacrifices and the Serbian state. However, more often than evoking loss, veterans would talk about their experience of multiple ‘lacks’ – particularly the lack of (social) care for their sacrifices – and would contrast those with what they saw as the recognition of civilian victims of the wars. I shall address these issues in more detail in Chapter 3.

**Serbia’s system of social protection and its legal basis**

The origins of the Serbian system of social protection can be traced back to socialist Yugoslavia. Although services were of varying degrees of quality, they were made available for everybody who was employed in the public/social sector so that, for instance, workers were entitled to a range of benefits such as universal
childcare allowance, social assistance, and educational benefits (Arandarenko and Golicin 2007:167; Vuković 2007:126). Although unemployment rate was always high, government regularly intervened to keep the prices of food, utilities and energy low. However, those who were unemployed were in many ways discouraged from applying for assistance and when they did the amounts they would receive were often very low (see Woodward 1995b:196). Those self-employed in the residual private sector also had a limited access to welfare benefits.

At the time of my fieldwork, the basic organisational structure of the system of social protection was not that different from the one of the 1990s, but there were also some important differences that reflected broader social and political-economic changes. According to Bošnjak and Stubbs (2007:156), Serbia had a decentralised welfare system with 132 Centres for Social Work (CSW) and 167 municipalities, Although CSWs were owned and financed by the central government the municipalities ran the costs of their operation and funded some of the social benefits. Therefore, although social welfare was the responsibility of the MoLSP, the responsibility for many social benefits was in fact shared with local municipalities. Important additions to this network were different NGOs that could in principle also share the responsibility for the provision of social services. However, as many VAs have attested, this system was not entirely developed. Still, specialized NGOs often showed more understanding for the needs of users than CSWs, which were typically overburdened with bureaucratic and other kinds of responsibilities (Vuković 2007:129).

The situation was made even more difficult with continuously high unemployment rates (Bajec et al. 2008:7-8). Because of this complex landscape of shared responsibilities and overlapping competencies, the system was often ineffective and there was a high discrepancy between the formally available entitlements for benefits and their actual delivery. Hence, it is not at all surprising that many of the veterans shared concerns about the promises made by the representatives of their VAs and the government. Although, as I mentioned, the responsibility for the affairs of social protection was shared between the government and local municipalities, veterans still recognised the MoLSP as the

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88 In 2007 employment in Serbia was amounting to 51 percent, while the unemployment was at 18.8 percent (Bajec et al. 2008:7-8).
highest authority that had the power to decide about the delivery of their benefits. Although veterans would most likely give it another name, this capillary dispersal of powers (cf. Foucault 1990) from different government agencies through local politicians at municipal levels and to representatives of VAs was in fact recognised as a form of government. What is more, the mandate of the MoLSP was to implement the Law on Social Protection, which many veterans argued needed to be changed.

As I have noted earlier in this chapter, the 1998 Law was invariably regarded as out of date because it was not designed to account for the large part of the veteran population that did not suffer from war-related injuries and did not include those persons who were in combat during the period that was not officially recognised as war time. Yet this same Law continued to be used by the MoLSP and other state agencies that were in charge of the provision of welfare benefits. During my time at Association for War and Peacetime Military Disabled Veterans (URMVIS), I had the opportunity to discuss these matters with people who took part in the drafting of a new law and who allowed me to access some of their publications, which pertained to the legal history of social protection that began with the foundation of the first Serbian state in the 19th century.

Thus, the legal protection for military disabled persons and their families started with the Law of 1893 and since then the system was continuously expanded and changed from its initial focus on delivering ‘aid’ toward ‘state protection and assistance’ and finally to its present ‘rights-based’ character (Orlović 2004:15). For the population of war-disabled veterans, the most relevant were the laws from 1981 and 1998. With the Yugoslav federal law of 1981 some of the responsibilities for the organisation and provision of social protection for military disabled persons were transferred to republic and provincial levels. Federal legislation now covered the ‘basic rights’ and republics and provinces were in charge of regulating and providing additional coverage. The so-called federal basic rights referred to provisions in the form of compensation, insurance and national recognition, and the republican and provincial laws were essentially securing provisions for both veteran and civilian military disabled persons. In 1982 the law was revised and a *lex specialis* for military disabled persons was

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89 Law on the Foundation of Invalid Fund for Feeble and In-Service Crippled Soldiers (Zakon o ustanovljenju invalidskog fonda za iznemogle i u službi osakačene vojnik.)
replaced with ‘basic protection’ (ibid.:23-24), which some of the veterans I talked to regarded as a damage to the symbolic value of their special social status. Another change that was introduced at this time was a new way of determining the amount of disability compensation. Instead of using a pre-fixed amount, the compensation was now calculated using a coefficient that was tied to the average income in a given period. This meant that the pay would now be adjusted to oscillations in the socialist market system.

The law of 1981 was revised numerous times but it remained in effect in Serbia even after the dissolution of Yugoslavia until a new law was passed in 1998. (Mrvić-Petrović et al. 2003:70–73). This one was not much different from the old one as it was still tied to the average income while the responsibility for the delivery of social protection was shared between the central government and municipalities. However, although the normative aspect of social protection for military disabled persons appeared to be inclusive and wide in its scope and coverage, in practice payments were often not made on time and were often significantly lower than the amounts set by the law, while some benefits were only partially covered (for example some health protection benefits) or not covered at all (ibid.:81). This caused widespread discontent among the population of war veterans, which they often voiced through critiques of a state that did not care for their sacrifices.

It follows that, on the one hand, veterans felt that because of their sacrifices they should have been afforded with rights and benefits that were different and greater than those for the civilian population. On the other hand, it appears that, from their perspective, the range of available state resources and benefits was never enough to fully compensate for their war experiences and sacrifices. According to Žunec (2006), this situation renders all systems of state care for veterans as perpetual social problems that will continue to exist as long as there are wars.  

**National recognition – the key to veterans’ exclusivity**

One of the people who had influence on the creation of veterans’ policy was

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90 I discuss this issue in Chapter 3.
Nebojša Orlović, the president of URMVIS. During one of our meetings, he offered his explanations about the range of available benefits and reflected on some of the problems related to the creation of a new law. 

Orlović said that the Constitution already contained a clause that made a distinction between the social protection for war veterans and civilians. This difference was contained in the element of ‘national recognition’ (nacionalno priznanje), which, although not codified in the law, was not only symbolic, but also a type of material benefit (materijalna naknada). The amount of compensation for war-disabled veterans was typically higher from the one for civilian disabled persons and was calculated on the basis of a war-related event in which a person sustained injuries. So, according to Orlović, a veteran with a 100 percent disability would receive between 150,000–200,000 dinars\(^{91}\) per month, while the average income in Serbia at the time was approximately 37,000 dinars.\(^ {92}\) 

Disabled veterans were also entitled for the so-called ‘veterans’ supplement’ (borački dodatak) which amounted to a 30 percent increase on their income if it was lower than the national average or if they were temporarily unemployed. In addition to this, they were entitled to a range of other benefits including personal disability allowance, personal care supplement, orthopedic supplement, health insurance, unemployment insurance, free spa treatments, free or discounted transportation, food and lodging allowance for travel outside of their place of residence, and even a motor travel vehicle.

When it comes to personal disability allowance (lična invalidnina), military disabled persons were grouped according to the level of their military disability that was based on the percentage of bodily injury. There were ten groups of military disability, which ranged from the first group reserved for persons with a 100 percent disability and a need for a personal care aid to the tenth group for persons with a 20 percent disability. The monthly allowance for each of the ten groups was determined on the basis of the average national income increased by 80 percent. Thus, for example, a person in the tenth group with a 100 percent disability would receive the maximum amount of 80 percent increase on the average national income, while a person in the tenth group with a 20 percent disability would receive a six percent increase. Allowances for personal care aid

\(^{91}\) £1,100–£1,450.
\(^{92}\) £270.
or orthopedic supplements were calculated in a similar way.\footnote{Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia nos. 24/98 and 29/98.}

The only social benefit that was granted to non-disabled veterans was in the form of social insurance for the time spent in the war or military service. However, as a veteran from the VA in Rakovica explained it, although in theory the record for the length of service could easily be obtained, getting the actual increase on one’s pension was practically impossible, because the MoD typically did not pay in contributions for veterans’ social insurance. Therefore, as he ironically noticed, ‘at counter five you get a certificate that counter six does not recognise’ (Milošević, interview by Treister and Zlatić 2013).

**Conclusion**

Although all the examples of veterans’ policies that I outlined in this chapter may work well to describe the top-down development approach from the point of view of state agencies that determine who qualifies for welfare benefits, they do not fully address the important role of different VAs and interest groups with various stakes in this process. Furthermore, none of them explore the experiences of individuals who consider themselves veterans but who are for various reasons prevented from accessing welfare benefits.

Yet, as I have argued, this element of contradiction and ambiguity is one of the defining elements of Serbia’s postwar social and political system, and its veteran policy as most persons who participated in the wars and who considered themselves veterans could not qualify for service-related welfare benefits. In fact the only persons who were legally entitled to any form of service-related compensation were those who suffered from injuries inflicted in the wars on the basis of which they were granted a medicolegally validated disability status. As I will show in the following chapters, many veterans explained this situation as a deliberate political measure orchestrated by all the governments that had been in power in Serbia since the dissolution of the former socialist state.

Therefore, the focus on the practices of state institutions and VAs needs to be combined with an analysis of the ways in which these practices are at the same time influencing and being influenced by particular subjectivities they produce.
Chapter THREE

Social care and states of injury: litanies of multiple lacks and irreparable losses

To say you were a [Serbian] war veteran would be the same as if an impotent male decided to parade down a street to show his impotence.

Vladimir Béara94 (2010)

In this chapter I discuss discourses about multiple ‘lacks’ and ‘losses’ that were frequently evoked by Serbian war veterans to explain their position in the changing social and political-economic context in which they were living. These had an impact on how veterans thought about themselves and others in Serbian postwar society and how they acted in different state and non-state domains. I begin with a vignette from a protest of disabled war veterans in Belgrade and use the insights from the event to point out some of their central claims for the distribution of social benefits. Next, I follow veterans’ claims and grievances to address some of the broader social issues that influenced their views about the general lack of social care95 and recognition for their sacrifices.

A protest in front of the Palace of Serbia

I learned about the protest of disabled war veterans from a digital billboard at one of the central squares in Belgrade. The message was brief: ‘On the 7th of November 2010 at 11 am disabled war veterans will protest in front of the Palace of Serbia.’ The line was followed by news about some football match. There was no mention about the organisers or what exactly the protest was about.

The next day I arrived at the site half an hour before the official beginning

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94 Vladimir Béara was a psychologist and program counselor at the War Trauma Centre in Novi Sad. Quote is from an interview conducted by the author in November 2010.

95 Although in other contexts ‘social care’ would be the appropriate term to talk about services for people who are in need due to their illness, disability, unemployment, and so on, here I use it in a broader sense to encompass a range of social and organisational responses that share the aim to preserve people’s sense of well-being. I use the term ‘social protection’ to refer to the system of social protection in Serbia, which is in fact a direct translation of the term ‘socijalna zaštitita.’
of the protest. The Palace of Serbia is one of the most recognisable modernist landmarks in Belgrade. It used to be the main seat of the Federal Executive Council of Yugoslavia, and in fact many people still referred to it by the Council’s acronym, ‘SIV’. Although two decades had passed since the dissolution of the former state it remained a challenge to again fill its long corridors and all its conference rooms. Still, several government offices including the office of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy that was in charge of social protection for disabled war veterans were using the building.

I approached the building from one of the main boulevards in the post-Second World War, modernist borough of New Belgrade, crossing over a large green expanse, and made my way toward the long fountain in front of what I thought was the main entrance. To my surprise the vast white-stone plateau was completely deserted; there was no one in sight. It took me a while to walk around the building and there I finally found a security guard who told me that the protest would be held at the eastern entrance. On my way I noticed a group of five or six people standing in a nearby park. It turned out they were war veterans who were waiting for others to arrive on buses from Novi Sad and several other smaller towns in Vojvodina. Some of them heard about the protest from their friends and others from their local VAs and since they were already in the city they decided to show their support. They were quick to inquire about my reasons for being there. I told them that I was a student trying to learn about social protection for war veterans in Serbia. They expressed satisfaction that someone finally showed some interest in the issue.

Some minutes later I could see several cars move into the parking lot behind us and soon the buses started to arrive. One bus came from Indija, another from Ruma, and at least two from Novi Sad – all towns in Vojvodina. As people started to gather they quickly spread across the plateau between the building and the park. Most were men in their late forties or mid fifties, but there were also many women of similar age. I could see only three Serbian flags and no one was carrying any protest signs or banners. The only people in full military dress were a man in his late forties wearing a one-piece camouflage uniform with several medals pinned to his chest and a man in his late fifties wearing a similar uniform.

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96 *Savezno izvršno veće.*
and an officer’s field cap that reminded me of the one worn by the Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladić. Several people wore camouflage jackets but these seemed to me more like regular everyday clothes, or even work jackets rather than pieces of military uniform. Quite a few wore the olive-coloured ‘Vietnam jacket’ (vijetnamka). 97 Most of the women grouped together and almost all of them were wearing black.

At around 11 am there were about two hundred people scattered around the plateau and the park. They were talking loudly in a cheerful, chatty way. One man, Jovan, was interested to hear about my work. He was fifty years old and lived in Serbia since 1995. After he got wounded somewhere in Western Croatia he was transported to a military hospital in Belgrade and it took him several years to recover. After some time he moved to Novi Sad and finally settled in Indija. He told me that he had been a farmer before the war and that he still could not fully understand how all this had happened to him. He used to have a good life, he said, a good joint business with his brother, and now he was a ‘former fighter (bivši borac) who had to beg for pity (da moli za milostinju) like this.’ But then he also made it clear that he did not want to complain since, unlike many of his friends, he did manage to get some state support after all. Although he received free health treatment in Serbia, it took him over ten years to get any disability compensation. He said that he was one of the lucky ones who were brave at the right time and risked a lawsuit against the state for not paying them their disability allowance. Some years ago he finally received his settlement – a one-time payment of 300,000 Serbian dinars. 98 He was lucky he said, because soon after that too many people were filing lawsuits and there was not enough money for everyone. What bothered him the most however was the loss of the sense of purpose in his life. He told me that during the sanctions 99 he had ‘a clear path’ (jasan pravac). Every day he would travel across the border to Bosnia and Herzegovina to purchase cheap fuel and would return to Serbia the same day to sell it. Along the way he would

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97 The vijetnamka was first popularized during the anti-war protests of US veterans from the Vietnam War. In Yugoslavia it became one of the symbols of post-1968 ‘alternativa’ and was later appropriated by rock and roll fans. People still think of it in relation to the Vietnam War (although it was never used there), and it still remains one of the most recognisable clothing items in former Yugoslavia.

98 Equivalent of about £2,300.

99 The UN sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro were imposed in May 1992, suspended after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in September 1995, and officially lifted in October 1996.
buy some boxes of cigarettes and sell those too. He made some money like this every day. It was not easy to live then just like it was not easy now, he told me, but back then he felt that everything was bustling with life. The times were hard, but people socialized much more. Nowadays, he said, no one wanted to go out for a drink anymore and when they did, they each paid their own bill. ‘The West is coming to us’ (zapad nam stiže), he quipped. As he continued to share his personal experiences from the war in Croatia, I saw several security guards telling people to move from the plateau onto the sidewalk and the park.

I heard some men saying that their representatives, the presidents of the Association of Disabled War Veterans from Belgrade and from Novi Sad went inside the building for a coffee and a chat with the minister. Some people who were using crutches were complaining that they would not be able to stand much longer. Someone suggested that they park some cars closer to the crowd so that people could sit inside them. After talking to several other men and women I realised that none of them lived in Belgrade. I started asking why that was the case; why were there no veterans from Belgrade at the protest? An older man remarked: ‘They know what they’re doing; they are taking [our rights] away bit by bit (oduzimaju nam malo po malo) so that people don’t notice it too much. That’s the reason why people are not coming out. And then there is all this politics between the VAs […] some people are probably boycotting the protest because of that too’.

I was trying to find someone who could tell me what exactly the protest was about and what the main demands were, but I could not get a clear answer. Instead people would usually start sharing stories about their personal experiences from the war and the kinds of benefits they were receiving, or thought they were entitled to and should be receiving after the war. The men I talked to were generally not happy with their disability allowance and the women were complaining they were not compensated enough for losing their male family members. One man in his mid fifties told me that he was barely making ends meet, but that he was reluctant to complain. Referring to the general population, he said: ‘These poor people (narod) are somehow securing the money that I need to survive and this is why I am quiet… I am hungry and silently watching hungry people around me.’

As time passed I noticed that some reporters showed up. An hour or so
into the protest everyone started to look a bit tense. It seemed they had not expected they would have to wait for this long. They started making jokes about the talks inside the building and why this coffee chat was taking so long. Some people were sitting on the grass in the park. Others were sitting in the cars they moved closer to the plateau. Someone showed up with a bag of pastries and started handing those around. One more hour passed before the ‘delegation’ came out from the building. Most people rushed to the entrance to hear what they had agreed on. The cameras were recording.

Željko Vasiljević, the president of the Association of Disabled War Veterans of Serbia (URVIS), was the first to come out and talk to the crowd and the reporters. He said that all their demands had been granted. The meeting was a total success! He said that the minister promised there would be no reduction in the amount of money to be paid to war veterans and that the range of benefits would be extended. ‘There is enough money for all of you, so the provision of benefits will be preserved and the speed of delivery accelerated,’ he said. He proceeded to talk about the four main points they had discussed with the minister. The first problem was the ten-month delay in payments for disability allowances. 1,500 disabled war veterans were still waiting for these payments to be issued. The minister promised to pay out some 200,000 dinars to all those who were waiting for their allowances. The second demand was to accelerate the process in which disabled war veterans could claim tax returns on imported vehicles. These refunds were 18 months late, he said, and the minister promised to solve this problem too. The third point they discussed was the right for free spa treatment. He said that although according to the law disabled war veterans had the right to free spa treatments, not a single veteran had been for any treatments since the relevant law had been passed in 1998. However, it was not clear if this was because nobody requested a spa treatment or because requests were not approved. The last point they discussed was the state budget for 2011. The minister promised to ensure that some 14 billion dinars were secured for the needs of the veteran population. Vasiljević ended by thanking the minister for his understanding and support, but he also expressed concern because of the low

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100 Udruženje ratnih vojnih invalida Srbije
101 About £1,500.
102 About £7.5 million.
number of people who came for the protest: ‘There are 30,000 users of this system and I see only a couple of hundred of you are here today. You should tell your friends to take these protests seriously!’ A man standing behind me remarked that the president should be careful about what he was saying. After all, the man said, maybe he was the reason why veterans from Belgrade decided not to come to the protest. Another man added that all this sounded fine, but that all these promises had already been made in the past and that none of them had been kept. ‘I will believe it once I have the money in my pocket,’ he said.

The protest of disabled war veterans points to a number of important and interrelated issues that frequently emerged throughout my fieldwork. As the title of this chapter suggests, veterans were staking their claims for social care and protection through narratives about their own vulnerability as individuals and as a social group. In a sense they were constructing their identity around the notion of victimhood. They would commonly say that they were *also* victims (*zrtve*) in occasions when they found it important to contrast what they regarded as their marginal social and political position, in relation to, for instance, civilian victims of the post-Yugoslav wars, or LGBT groups, which were increasingly visible in the staking of their claims in Serbia. Veterans’ narratives about multiple lacks and losses resemble a speech genre that Ries (1997:83) observed in Russia during perestroika and described as ‘litanies of suffering.’ It signified a range of values where ‘suffering engendered distinction, sacrifice created status, and loss produced gain’ (ibid.). Yet, unlike Ries who regarded litanies as a tool that people used to distance themselves from the political processes, Serbian veterans in fact used them to create a sense of distinction from other groups with similar claims to victimhood. In a related way, in her analysis of the gendered character of the late modern state, Brown (2006) argues how ‘injury’ became a sense of identity, which was increasingly employed in the attempts to portray different (status) groups as victims in need of state protection. Yet, as legal and disciplinary powers proceed to procure rights on the basis of politicised identities, the ‘oppositional projects’ (ibid.:xii) of its subjects start to resemble the powers of the state which they purportedly oppose.

As I will show, Serbian war veterans engaged in similar practices in relation to the powers of their state. Although it could be argued that a common denominator for all of their ‘injuries’ was the lack of social care, equally
important were the multiple losses that impacted their sense of ‘normality’, ‘direction’ and dignity. I discuss each of these in the pages that follow.

**The uses of everyday ‘abnormality’**

The perspective in which people explained their troubles as caused primarily by political suffering in which their rights as citizens were not recognised by the state, links the experiences of war veterans in Serbia to postsocialist and other contexts that have witnessed similar challenges and rapid social and political-economic transformations. Perhaps the most obvious lines of comparison can be drawn with insights from Petryna’s (2003) study about the biopolitical citizenship project of post-Chernobyl Ukraine. Petryna shows how in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster a large number of people who were affected by radiation not only learned how to deal with new forms of illness, but also to ‘navigate’ through a rapidly changing welfare apparatus and to negotiate their rights to health services and state and social support which they could claim in terms of their biologically damaged bodies (for ‘navigation’ in BiH see Brković 2012). However, although parts of Petryna’s ethnography resemble the experiences of war veterans in Serbia, and her conceptual tools may be applied to the context I am describing, her analysis does not expose some important aspects of the messiness of everyday life experiences that I am hoping to get at in this study. What is more, people’s movement through different sites is often imbued with intense emotional investment in relation to the state, which becomes both a site of performance and an object of hope (Reeves 2001; see also Jansen 2014a, Spencer 2010). Let me take this point further.

Petryna’s analysis rests on the use of the concepts of ‘biopolitics’ and ‘biopower’ to make sense of the relationships among biological, political and social processes in post-Chernobyl Ukraine. By applying a Foucauldian perspective, she is interested in transformations at the level of ‘the human body as the object of discipline and surveillance, and that of the population as the object of regulation, control and welfare’ (Petryna 2003:13). Foucault developed the concept of biopower in his analysis of the processes of centralisation of regulatory powers that were occurring at the same time as new concerns for the health and welfare of populations in the modernising states of the eighteenth century Western
Europe (Foucault 1990[1978]:139-141). However, although these concepts have proved valuable in the analyses of governmental technologies through which states organise public health and regulate populations, in my view they often fail to account for a range of complexities of everyday life experiences. One particular aspect of this, which Petryna hints at but does not explore in its own right, is the way in which the condition of apparent chaos in state institutions, and everyday existential uncertainties and feelings of despair, are instrumentalised as ‘abnormal’ by users of the system and kept this way in order to be used as tools in the claims for distribution and status recognition. Here I propose an expanded focus that would account for the possibility of political subjectivation that may allow for the emergence of new forms of power and a recombination of existing modalities of government.

With this in mind, I do not think of ‘normalisation’ only in the Foucauldian sense as a form of discipline and an instrument in the production of docile bodies, but also how in this process the ‘abnormal’ becomes at once individualising. I also do not think of the process of normalisation only in the sense of adapting to extreme conditions through ‘routinisation’ as described by Jansen (2014b) in which people attempt to ‘normalise the abnormal.’ Instead, my use of normalisation falls in between those two conceptions and contains elements of both while also allowing for a possibility of the ‘abnormal’ becoming a form of justification for the claims to state resources as well as invested in redefining the relations of (status) recognition. In other words, in the context of postwar and postsocialist Serbia, calling for the state and social benefits is not only about getting them, but is also about performativity, about not being able to get these objects of desire and living in a kind of no-benefits zone. In short, normalisation in this sense is about Foucauldian individuation and (often unintended) political subjectivation, but also about keeping the status quo and the state of living in a kind of suspension of disbelief. In this regard, it is important to note that VAs struggled over their respective positions within a victimhood hierarchy, which were defined according to the levels of abnormality that they endured as individuals and groups and on which they would base their claims for resources and status recognition.
Disorientations in the unrewarding present

Although at the end of the protest one of the negotiators exclaimed that the meeting was a success and that all veterans’ demands would be fulfilled, there was a sense of a bittersweet ending. Part of the disappointment was surely caused by veterans from Belgrade not joining their comrades from Vojvodina. According to some of the protesters, some of the local VAs and veterans may have decided to boycott the event because the president of a VA from Belgrade, Željko Vasiljević, who talked to the minister, was not recognised as deserving to act as the negotiator. As I later learned, Vasiljević had been arrested in 2010 under suspicion of falsifying signatures and personal information of a large number of persons, members of a national VA. He allegedly used this information to increase the membership size of the political party that he himself founded – the Movement of the Veterans of Serbia (Pokret veterana Srbije). Although the protest was organised as a struggle for the redistribution of social benefits for all war veterans and disabled war persons in Serbia, the fact that a relatively small number of them actually showed up for the event pointed to deeper problems within the veteran population, some of which had to do with shifting political alliances, competition and conflict. However, what struck me the most was the sense that those veterans who were present in the protest were not satisfied with its outcome even though their delegates proclaimed the meeting a success. Assuming that everybody who was present was entitled to receive benefits, there is no doubt that they were pleased to hear about the positive outcome of the meeting. Yet they were also sceptical about the promises made by the minister and the negotiators. As the man quipped at the end, they would only believe the promises once they were paid out and they had the money in their pockets. However, as I will show not everything was only about material benefits, but also about solidarity and hope for ‘normal’ life.

As I noted earlier, the building in front of which the protest took place, the SIV, is one of the most recognisable landmarks in Belgrade. As the Federal Executive Council, it was the seat of representatives and presidents from all the republics of socialist Yugoslavia. The sheer enormity of its construction still caused nostalgic amazement at what seemed to be a (fading) reflection of power of the former socialist state. I overheard some veterans commenting on the worn
out façades and saying how comrade Tito would not be amused to find it in its present condition. I could not help but think what a gathering of this sort would have looked like in the former state and if there would be a need for veterans to protest at all back then? Perhaps my ‘what if’ speculation does not lend itself to any sort of meaningful analysis, but I am sure that at least some of the people who were inspecting the building for the marks of change thought along the same lines. If they did think about the past, a brief look around the plateau would remind them of a different kind of reality in the present. In fact, to my knowledge, veterans of the Second World War never had to organise in similar protests in former Yugoslavia. What is more, the people gathered in front of the building looked nothing like the old veterans of the former socialist state. Very few of them wore any visible markers that would distinguish them as veterans. To me they seemed more like a group of workers who might have been laid off and were looking for some solution of last resort from their government, and were doing that in a quiet and almost subdued manner as if they thought that raising their voices would not really solve anything. As we saw, there were only a few flags and only some people wore clothes that resembled military uniforms. There were no banners or protest signs of any kind. The security guards that were initially alert when the buses started to arrive were practically invisible during the protest and even the media showed up only just before the ‘coffee chat’ with the minister had ended. This was not a loud protest of war veterans of the sort that occurred in the past in BiH and Croatia.

If we return to the story shared by Jovan, one of the first persons I spoke to who was compensated for his injuries after a long legal battle, it appears that not everyone joined the protest only to gain material rewards. He would also benefit from the positive outcome of the negotiations, there is no doubt about that, but the themes in his story were not only about the claims for resources. He was much more concerned about the loss of the sense of purpose in his life and about the loss of camaraderie with other veterans. He complained about them not socialising as they used to and he located the reasons for this in what he alluded to as the Westernisation of Serbia.

This resembles Paley’s (2001) study of people’s reflections about the past in post-dictatorship, ‘democratising’ Chile. She notes how people remembered the dictatorship as a period when opposition was viewed with respect and when
political goals were clear, in contrast to the loneliness of later times that lacked purpose after ‘democracy brought isolation, individualism, and no small degree of boredom’ (Paley 2001:88). Therefore, like Paley’s interlocutors Jovan remembered the past with a degree of nostalgia and perceived the present as a time of alienation that he associated with the arrival of Western values. However, not everybody shared Jovan’s judgment. Greenberg (2011) notes how for some people – in her study predominantly young activists – the abolition of the visa regime in 2009 revived a sense of getting back on the ‘road to normal.’ Yet, although there were discrepancies in the ideas about normalcy among different groups of people, which points to the inequalities that influenced the ways people positioned themselves within the larger geopolitical context (ibid.:92), the connecting thread to everybody’s aspirations was the desire for dignity and having a ‘place in the world’ (Jansen 2009a:14). Let me attend to this point in more detail.

An important aspect of Jovan’s story concerns the ways in which he remembered his life before and after the war. Although he did not use this word himself, I would interpret his description of life before the war as a portrayal of a ‘normal’ state of being that was punctuated by the war, which conditioned a sort of ‘abnormality,’ which was then again ‘normalised’ in the period just after the war and during the sanctions in the late 1990s. In contrast to this view, for many people this period was by no means ‘normal’ in Serbia as it was the time, to use Živković’s evocative words, of ‘bewilderment mixed with fatigue from cumulative crises’ (2011:12). Nevertheless, for Jovan this was the time when he had a sense of direction in his life, and when he was productive as he could earn money on a relatively regular basis. In some important ways his narrative contains elements similar to those observed by other researchers in former Yugoslavia. Jansen (2009a, 2014a, 2014b) found numerous instances in which ‘normal’ appeared in references to the past and as an object of yearning and expression of hope for a better future. In his study about the ways in which people in Dobrinja, a neighbourhood of Sarajevo reflected on their past lives in Yugoslavia, the war in BiH, and their future on the path to ‘Europe.’ Central to Jansen’s (2014b) analysis are his interlocutors’ narratives that rested on the idea of linear movement that was never fast enough. The reason for this ‘not moving well enough’ were the obstacles which they regularly faced, such as, for example, state bureaucracy,
which impacted on their hopes for a better future (ibid.:74–75).

Jovan’s relationship to the past and references to the normality of his pre-war life follow the same trajectory: he had a normal life before the war, the war is what disrupted this ‘normality’ and although his life was ‘routinised’ for a brief period after the war when he had a ‘clear path’, that also was eventually disrupted. In the end all this had changed, there was no clear direction for him anymore as a former fighter who had to beg for pity. Still, although his story seems to communicate a certain degree of despair and disorientation, the fact is that he did come for the protest even though he felt better off than many of his fellow veterans.

**Can there ever be enough recognition for irreparable losses?**

If we go back to the outcome of the protest, numerous other questions come to the fore: if the protesters were not entirely pleased with the ‘successful’ result of the negotiations, what then were their actual goals and what other kinds of implicit claims might they have had beyond those for the redistribution of social benefits? How important is their social status over material rewards and what sorts of claims for recognition might they have? And finally, to put it rhetorically, if the distribution of social benefits would not be the problem anymore, would they still feel a need to protest? Judging by the responses from people in the protest, one possible answer would be that whatever compensation veterans received they would always treat their loss as ultimately irreparable and uncompensatable.

Similar answer to this question was hinted at in an interview I later had with Željko Vasiljević, the president of the Association of Disabled war Veterans, (RVIS) who was one of the veterans’ representatives at the protest in front of SIV. Reflecting on the ways in which the employees of some state agencies perceived war veterans, Vasiljević said the following:

When you go to search for help from some municipal veterans’ affairs office you come across people who simply hate you. I don’t know why that is the case, but they really hate you. Maybe this is because they think that our disability payments are much higher than what they are paid. So that clerk, employed by the state, who is
supposed to be helping you, to inform you about your rights, feels this intense dislike toward you because you have more money than she does. She doesn’t stop to think about what you have been going through and why you are now entitled to receive this money […] We reached a stage where the state and the society do not care for us. This is not caused only by the economic crisis, but also by the political parties who keep blaming us for those wars. They want to break away from the politics of Slobodan Milošević and they still regard us as his soldiers.

Many people I talked to in Serbia would argue that veterans cannot be understood without considering their close links to the regime of Slobodan Milošević. In fact, many would also add that because of this link they should not have been granted with any privileges at all. When it comes to veterans’ own views about the regime of the 1990s, they say that life was never easy for them, including during the time when Milošević was in power. Yet back then they still commanded some sort of respect. This is also reflected in Vasiljević’s point about the present lack of care. What is more, he is suggesting that politicians were laying blame for the wars on veterans in order to clear themselves of any potential connections to Milošević. Similarly, many veterans I spoke to would also stress that they were not the ‘puppets’ of the regime and that they chose to fight for their country not because Milošević ordered them, but because they wanted to defend their people. Although this link with the nationalist state-building project was not something that was well received by the critics of the regime of the 1990s and antiwar activists, veterans used it as the basis for their claims for social protection and recognition. Here it is important to stress that most people were not antiwar activists or critics of the Milošević regime, instead they were acting in a particular context full of ambiguities in which distancing oneself from the official nationalist politics implied acknowledgment of Serbia’s role in the wars. This is something that politicians and most ‘ordinary’ people were not prepared to do. Therefore, even those individuals who received generous disability allowances would often not be proud of that as they were still ‘Sloba’s veterans.’

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103 I shall discuss this issue in more detail in chapter 5.
104 Sloba is a nickname for Slobodan Milošević.
question is to what extent would this be different if Serbia had not lost all of its wars.

The apparent absence of a viable solution for veterans’ claims may be related to many other aspects of social and political life in Serbia. In fact, throughout my fieldwork people often evoked metaphors about fictive wars, fictive accession to the EU, and fictive government offices and businesses in Kosovo, which was de facto independent, but also treated as part of the Serbian state. Likewise, war veterans talked about fictive laws and fictive government aid that was distributed by phantom VAs. Therefore it is this ‘phantasmatic’ quality of everyday life in Serbia that seemed to be one of the defining features of the experiences of being a war veteran in Serbia and which allowed for a particular kind of political subjectivation. Similar to this is the context of immobility and confinement of Northern Cyprus, a non-state internationally recognised only by Turkey, which Navaro-Yashin (2003:121) describes using the metaphor of ‘no man’s land’. She writes:

‘The political’ here, as arguably in other contexts, never shows itself in the holistic form in which it is often captured by political anthropologies. It rather appears in phantasmatic form, between absence and presence (in this case of the ‘state’), or in the recurring imaginaries and fantasies of ‘statehood’ (ibid.).

Serbian war veterans also moved between different state and not state domains and through zones of ambiguity and unsolved contradictions, which sometimes resembled an ‘endless and bewildering world of phantasy’ (Nujiten 2004:10), while at other times opened a possibility for a kind of governmentality that was not bound by the logic of discipline and coherence. One of the unsolved contradictions was a system that did not recognise a large number of people with direct experience of war as veterans because their service fell outside of the officially endorsed period of conflict.
Veterans without a war

As a proud Serb, I would have preferred that they had all heroically died and remained remembered as heroes who had successfully defended the territories.

Željko Ražnatović Arkan

Given the nature of post-Yugoslav wars, in which few official records survived, as well as the particular post-war social and political conditions in which the Serbian state does not officially recognise its direct involvement in many of the armed conflicts (most of which occurred in Croatia and BiH), large numbers of persons who were directly involved in the wars have no legal grounds on which to seek a war-related disability status. Their injury falls outside of the period that is officially recognised as the time of conflict and, as a result, many veterans do not qualify for any form of compensation or war-related welfare benefits.

As I noted in the previous chapter only those persons who were in possession of valid military IDs that were endorsed by the MoD for the officially recognised period of armed conflict, could be recognised as veterans and, in case they suffered service-related injuries, as military disabled veterans. Matters were further complicated in 2000 when the period was shortened and the official beginning of the war in BiH was marked on 19 May 1992. Until 2000, persons with war-time residence in the Republic of Serbian Krajina or Republika Srpska could qualify for military pensions or war-related disability in Serbia as long as they held Serbian citizenship. Those persons who participated in the Kosovo War in 1998 and 1999 form another large and in many ways distinct group of war veterans. The most visible marker of difference is that, unlike the veterans who fought elsewhere, they could qualify for a one-time payment in the form of daily allowances. However, this was not dealt with in a systematic manner and many people did not receive any compensation at all, which finally culminated in large protests in 2007 and 2008 in several cities across Serbia and

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105 Arkan was a criminal wanted outside Serbia for assassinations and drug trafficking. In Serbia he was a paramilitary gang leader, president of the far-right Party of Serbian Unity (Stranka srpskog jedinstva) and commander of the Serbian Voluntary Guard (Srpska dobrovoljačka garda), also known as the Tigers. The unit was supported by the State Security Services of the Serbian Ministry of Interior and was one of the extended arms of Milošević’s regime outside of Serbia (Vasić and Švarm 2001:46; Woodward 1995a:254). In this quote Arkan is referring to Serbs exiled from Western Slavonia, Croatia (Radović 2006:22).

106 The date when the JNA officially withdrew from BiH.

107 Parts of Croatia that were controlled by Serbs.
caused further distancing and fragmentation within the population of war veterans.

However, in some cases even those who took part in the war during the officially recognised period could not get their veteran status recognised by the Serbian state apparatus. One such example is the case of Ljudevit Kolar – Kole, a retired forensic from Novi Sad, Serbia. I met Kole during the public dialogues that were organized by the VA in Rakovica, the Centre for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD) in Belgrade, and the War Trauma Centre (WTC) from Novi Sad. Kole had many years of experience participating in workshops organized by WTC during which he frequently shared the story of his ‘war journey.’ He also repeated this story during some of our many informal meetings and even presented me with a copy of a short film that he had made himself about his time spent in the battlegrounds in and around Vukovar, Croatia. In addition to this, I later learned that he also gave interviews to several newspapers and even some TV stations. This exposure to different NGOs and the media earned him, and some of the other veterans with links to WTC, the nickname ‘gentleman veteran’ (gospodin veteran) during the public dialogues at CZKD. However, although this ‘title’ was meant to point out his difference in relation to a large number of veterans who had no opportunities to invest their war experiences to earn social recognition, his story is still a powerful example of the ways in which war veterans, even when perceived as building their cultural capital with relative success, remained unrecognised by the institutions of the Serbian state. The following is a composite of his stories, which he shared during some of our conversations, in his film and the dialogues at CZKD.

**Kole – disabled worker (invalid rada) of the battle for Vukovar**

In 1991 Kole was employed as a medic at a police unit in Novi Sad. His war journey started after the Serbian national television (RTS) aired a news report about 41 dead children found in a kindergarten in Vukovar, Croatia. Together with two of his colleagues his police unit sent him to the site to identify the bodies. However, after arriving they discovered that the story was a hoax. Still,

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108 I analyse these meetings in detail in Chapter 5.
they were ordered by the local armed forces to wait for a few days before going back to Serbia, as there was other work to be done. In the end, those few days extended into more than forty at a time of the heaviest battles in the city. Kole recalled going through piles of corpses at a local football stadium and cemetery. He said that he was not experienced in this type of work. Back in Novi Sad, together with his team he would examine an average of eighty bodies per year, but in Vukovar they were dealing with this same number every day. To make things worse, there was no electricity or drinking water. ‘We didn’t even have beer, so we survived drinking wine,’ he added. At the end he was left with what he called a ‘souvenir’ from Vukovar – he was infected with an adenovirus that is spread via cough and faecal routes. He told me that he was a pacifist and that if he had been forced to take up weapons he would have escaped the service. ‘This was another way in which they screwed me over,’ he said.

Upon his return to Novi Sad Kole continued to drink alcohol until at some point he finally ‘flipped out’ (odlepio). He remembered how at the time no one spoke about war trauma and it took him over a year to find a psychiatrist who was willing to help him. Soon after that he was diagnosed with work-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He then spent the next 10 years fighting to ‘charge for what happened to him’ (da naplati šta mu se desilo) but without any success. In 1998 he finally retired, but was never granted the status of a war veteran. The Ministry of the Interior (MUP) issued a document stating that there were no official records of him ever going to Vukovar and for this reason he had no legal basis on which to claim his veteran status. The fact that he had numerous witnesses, as well as video recordings of himself working in Vukovar, did nothing to help him in his plight. Over the years he developed a sarcastic way of talking about his problem and started to introduce himself as an ‘invalid rada iz Vukovara’ (work disabled person from Vukovar), instead of ‘invalid rata’ (disabled war person). During one of our conversations he presented his view about what he saw as the main problem of war veterans in Serbia: ‘In Serbia veterans don’t exist, except for those from the Kosovo war, because Serbia did not wage wars in Croatia and Bosnia […] If you don’t have a war, you don’t have war veterans.’
Dragan – disabled veteran of the war in BiH and Kosovo

In contrast to Kole’s experience, the following story is about a veteran whose participation in the war and disability status was officially recognised. However, he also felt that his sacrifices were not fairly rewarded by the Serbian state.

Dragan was a disabled war veteran who I met in one of the bars close to his apartment building in Rakovica. Veterans from the VA in Rakovica told me that his health condition had worsened over the past several years and that it was too hard for him to come to their office to have his membership extended so I offered to pay him a visit. He was a man in his late fifties and was using crutches to move around. Although we met in his neighbourhood and in a café where he seemed to know most of the people, at first he was a bit suspicious about my intentions and it took us a while to get the conversation started. After I filled out his new membership card and told him about my research he seemed a bit more at ease. Still, he asked me not to record our conversation. One of the first remarks that he made was that in Serbia one had to be ashamed to be a veteran. ‘Here everybody despises us. They consider us to be killers and thieves. They call us “dogs of war” (psi rata). Those who were active during 5 October¹⁰⁹ are more respected than former fighters,’ he said. What is more, he added, there is a great difference between the veterans of the Second World War and the war veterans of the 1990s: ‘They had many benefits and we don’t have anything,’ he said. However, some time later into our conversation it turned that was not the case for him, as his disability allowance was very high when compared to the average Serbian income.

Dragan spent most of his life in BiH, in a town that later became a part of Republika Srpska, and in 2001 he moved to Rakovica. He told me that he spent a total of 57 months of active service as a volunteer in BiH and later in Kosovo and that it was only after he moved to Rakovica that his health condition started to deteriorate. Because of this, he was forced to use catheters. He told me me that he was receiving veteran disability allowance and using services of a care aid; all this was worth about 140,000 dinars.¹¹⁰ After sharing this information, he immediately

¹⁰⁹ A series of mass protests in Belgrade and across Serbia in 2000 that resulted in the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević.
¹¹⁰ About £980. At the time the average monthly income in Serbia was about £270.
quipped, as if trying to justify the amount: ‘[…] but I would prefer that I was healthy and that I didn’t need any of that help.’

Dragan said that war veterans in Republika Srpska faced similar problems. He claimed that although he held dual citizenship he never received any benefits outside Serbia. However, he did make some enquiries about his entitlements for war related disability benefits in Republika Srpska, only to be told that he could not receive anything because he was wounded as a volunteer in Kosovo. One member of the Serbian Democratic Party\(^ {111}\) told him: ‘You fought for Sloba, now let him pay you.’ This was the main reason why he decided to move to Serbia. He told me however that he knew about several veterans receiving benefits both in Serbia and in Republika Srpska and that many had bought their disability status. He said that there was a veteran with a 1\(^{st} \) category disability who was playing football in his neighbourhood every day. This was the reason why disability revisions were necessary, he said.

Another problem that he experienced concerned getting his name included on a ‘priority list’ for apartments for disabled persons in Belgrade. Although he felt that he satisfied all the criteria to be placed on this list, his application was rejected. He was told that he did not qualify because his income was too high. He was never granted a new apartment, but eventually he did succeed in buying an apartment in Rakovica that he had initially moved into illegally. Dragan kept repeating that the way the state treated war veterans needed to be changed and improved: ‘After all we gave our lives for the state, so we should be recognised for that and not left to care for ourselves like this. Even validating our health cards is complicated and who knows, maybe one day we will lose our health insurance.’

**Zoran – disabled captain of the Serbian Army**

Many other veterans I spoke to shared similar views, including Zoran, a captain of the Serbian Army (VS)\(^ {112}\) and disabled war veteran. Zoran was from Voždovac, an urban neighbourhood and a municipality in Belgrade. He was 45 years of age

\(^ {111}\) Serbian Democratic Party (*Srpska demokratska stranka* – SDS) was a party in BiH and is not be confused with the two parties with similar names in Serbia, the Democratic Party of Serbia (*Demokratska stranka Srbije* – DSS) and the Democratic Party (*Demokratska stranka* – DS).

\(^ {112}\) *Vojска Србије.*
and had a dual citizenship in Serbia as well as BiH (Republika Srpska). He was born and raised in Serbia where he lived with his wife and son. Most of his relatives however lived in Republika Srpska and this is where he earned his veteran status. During an interview he told me the following:

Serbia never wanted to acknowledge the truth that many army officers spent some time over there [in Croatia and BiH], that it engaged in the wars, and so on. In Croatia, for example, the situation is very different. I had the opportunity to talk to many of their guys. When you listen to them you can hear how proud they are of their country. This is because the state is helping them now. Here nobody is helping us. Look at me for example, I can’t even transfer my disability payments from Republika Srpska to Serbia but I have to go there to some bank to pick it up. That disability payment is ridiculous in any case – it’s about €13 for a 20 percent war disability. Here in Serbia they get some €45 for the same level of disability. I am not even trying to fight for it anymore. I did at one point ask for some help from the local municipality, but it didn’t work. I didn’t have the right connections (pravu štelu), so I simply gave up.

These accounts centre on not getting enough material benefits, but also point to a sense of shame and loss of dignity. It appears that both Dragan and Zoran thought that most people found they did not deserve any privileges because of their direct links to the regime that was now held responsible for everybody’s multiple losses. What is more, some people took advantages of the flaws in the system of social protection and received multiple benefits. This was in direct contrast to the treatment of veterans of the Second World War, who were instrumental in the creation of the new socialist state that was regarded as equal among the ranks of the winning European nations. Although arguably many veterans were no worse off than other citizens of Serbia, they still felt marginalised because their plight was also for symbolic recognition of their special sacrifice. It seems that for many of them claims-making was ultimately not about material rewards, as they thought they could never really be ‘fairly’
compensated for their irreparable losses

**Home making in Rakovica**

However, if veterans were feeling to be losing their battle in dealings with state agencies and bureaucrats, some of the VAs made attempts to regain their lost sense of dignity. The VA in Rakovica was one such place, as many people who would come there attested. Although the VA was constantly struggling to secure sources of funding, veterans would always find ways to help those who needed it most. The story of Marko is illustrative in this regard.

Marko was one of the oldest and most respected members of the VA and a war veteran from the wars in Croatia and Kosovo. He was born and raised in a small town in Lika, southwestern Croatia and moved to Rakovica in 1995 after Croats regained those territories during the military operation Storm. When I asked him why he decided to volunteer for Kosovo he told me: ‘When the NATO bombing started something started to burn inside me. I would have died if I hadn’t gone.’ As I later learned, at the time several veterans from Rakovica decided to volunteer for Kosovo together and he decided to join them. This earned him even more respect at the VA.

Since his arrival in Rakovica Marko was living alone in a small rented apartment. However, he spent almost all of his time in the VA. He was the only ‘key holder’ apart from Mile Milošević, the president of the VA. While Mile was in charge of receiving important guests in the front office, Marko was in charge of the room in the back of the house where most of the daily life in Rakovica was taking place. Usually he would be the first one to arrive and unlock the door and when on a rare occasion he would be late the place would come to a halt. He was the person who had contact details of all the most important members of the VA who he regularly called whenever there was a meeting to be held, or a dinner planned, or when something needed fixing. Although Mile was not allowing alcohol to be sold in the VA, sometimes he would allow Marko to run a small bar if he saw that he needed to earn some extra money. Marko would then stock up the small kitchen in the back room and instead of selling the drinks he would end up giving away most of it for free. Almost everyday he would cook something at the VA and share it with whoever dropped in. At the end of the day,
he would be the last person to leave the house. At one point Marko got seriously ill and ended up in a hospital which got everyone seriously worried. This was the time when everyone realized how much he meant to their community. In all respects VA in Rakovica was Marko’s home and veterans his family. He was one of the people who made it a ‘safe house’ where everyone was welcome and could feel free to tell their stories, war-related or not. These stories were often based on recollections from the war and they ranged from highly personal accounts about their war journeys to funny anecdotes about their fellow veterans. At other times they would exchange their views about politics or share stories from their everyday lives. In this way, Marko and his friends at Rakovica made the VA into their ‘home’ that was was imbued with a sense of familiarity and belonging that, on a small scale, resembles the experiences of displaced persons in other parts of Yugoslavia and elsewhere (see Jansen and Löfving 2009).

The VA in Rakovica was also the place where people could look for advice and contacts as everyone knew someone who knew of someone who could get things done. This was also important whenever some humanitarian action was planned. For instance, during my fieldwork, in 2010, the town of Kraljevo and the surrounding areas in central Serbia were struck by a major earthquake that caused considerable damage. Veterans from Rakovica immediately organized a delivery of humanitarian aid and some of them travelled to the area to help with reconstruction. This was not new to them as they collected donations throughout the year, especially items such as school materials and clothes for children, which they would usually distribute to their members for Christmas. Since the office of the Red Cross was next door, they would often work together to distribute those donations. All of this was done informally and, I was told, without any involvement of the local municipality or other state institutions.

**Lending a helping hand in Niš**

During the time I spent in Niš, southern Serbia, I had the opportunity to hear about an organisation that was doing similar work to the VA in Rakovica, but professionally and on a much larger scale. With the help of a local VA I got in
contact with a charity organisation Love Thy Neighbour (LTN)\textsuperscript{113} that had many years of experience working with war veterans. LTN would not be much different from the next charity organisation if its president, Čeda Ralević, was not also a Baptist minister. Perhaps I was wrong, but at the time a link between a Baptist charity organisation and veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars in a town such as Niš, which was known for being one of the strongholds of the Serbian Orthodox Church, seemed exotic to me. In any case, I was soon invited by Čeda, which I gladly accepted. Čeda was a man in his fifties and with many years of experience of humanitarian aid distribution. While we were sitting in the backyard of a house that was used as storage, Čeda was overseeing the work of two people who were loading a truck with new shipment to be sent to children in Kosovo. At the same time, he was talking to me and to two young unemployed people from Niš who came to ask for his help with the writing of a proposal for a job search centre.

Čeda gave me a quick overview of the history of his organisation. He said that it was active from the early 1980s, but not to the same extent as during and after post-Yugoslav wars. During socialism, he said, the government was too suspicious about their work because they were a Christian organisation with many foreign contacts. The Serbian Orthodox Church was also very suspicious of them. Although he was born in the region he was known as a Baptist priest and theologian, which was enough to make him suspect to many people. He said that once there was an article published in a local newspaper saying that he supposedly held a humanitarian package in one hand and a sword in the other and that he was a foreign mercenary and a local sheriff. He said that he got used to these kinds of accusations and that people who worked with him did too.

When he was advised to change his organisation into something different that would not be associated with Baptists, he refused. He said that this was what made LTN different and that he did not want it to become like all other organisations that anyone could control and manipulate. LTN, he claimed, was already well known in Niš and across the country. What is more, he added, they now distributed humanitarian aid across the regions of western and southern Serbia, as well as to Kosovo and occasionally Montenegro. Sometimes they received so many donations that they had problems finding storage. Some people

\textsuperscript{113} Ljubi bližnjega svoga.
suggested they should share it with the Orthodox Church, but he refused this option and said that he would rather give it all to people. From the beginning most of their donations came from their partners in the Netherlands, but they also worked with Caritas and some other organisations. He told me that their biggest challenge was to deliver aid during the war in Kosovo. This was the time when many people were turning to them for help, including Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox, as well as many mixed marriage couples. However, he added, during the war in Kosovo, Muslims needed more help than any other group, as they were labelled as enemies.

When I asked him about war veterans, he told me that there were many of them in the area, but that most of them were not taken care of because their municipalities were too small and cash-poor to support them. This, he added, was the case with most other vulnerable groups in the area, such as for example the Roma, as they were far away from the centre. Most donations went to Belgrade, he said. All the major charity organisations were there, while none of them wanted to stay in the south. He said that was understandable since down there the costs were much higher and work conditions much more demanding.

**Conclusion**

The evocation of multiple lacks that veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars were using to describe their predicaments pointed to a number of interrelated processes that were characteristic of Serbia’s postwar social and political-economic context. By expressing their concerns about the lacks of social care, dignity and recognition, they were actively calling for a critical examination of veteran politics in Serbia, which, according to them, could be described as an exercise in neglect as large numbers of non-disabled veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars were not legally entitled for any sort of material or symbolic benefits. This also pointed to a range of important social issues in Serbia, such as the ineffective and generally lacking system of social protection, outdated legislation, and the inability and unwillingness of the political elites to come to terms with the lost wars. On a different level, this situation exposed divisions between those who demanded state and social recognition for their sacrifices in the wars and those who argued that the latter did not deserve any entitlements because of their close
links to the nationalist regime of the 1990s. All of this further impacted veterans’ sense of worthiness and dignity which they mended in their VA ‘safe houses’ while at the same time they forged new, and at times unlikely, links with NGOs that existed outside of the veteran sector. I problematise some of these issues from a different angle in the following chapter where I explore the effects of veterans’ shifting alliances, competition and conflict.
Chapter FOUR

Veterans’ (dis)associations: sites of alliances, competition, and conflict

This state has its own football fans, fishermen, students, workers, and its own veterans.

Mile Milošević (2011)\textsuperscript{114}

Throughout my fieldwork the veterans I spoke to regularly reminded me about the need for a unified veterans’ association (VA) that would embrace participants of all post-Yugoslav wars and act as a powerful actor on the Serbian social and political scene. However, this visionary call for concord among all Serbian veterans was at odds with the everyday reality of shifting alliances, competition and conflict. In this chapter I investigate how some of the VAs I worked in positioned themselves in relation to different political parties and in one case to the Serbian Orthodox Church. I then explore what these relationships can tell us about the larger zones of competition and conflict that existed in Serbia. I start with a story about an assembly of a large state-supported VA, which I use to open a discussion about fragmentation within its network. I then juxtapose the VA in Rakovica against this complex landscape in order to highlight some of the ways in which veterans pursued alliances with different organisations in an effort to secure access to state and other sources of support. At the same time, I show how veterans’ use of contradictory discourses about their allegiance to the Serbian state was used to strengthen some of those relationships.

Annual assembly of URMVIS: a case of fragmentation

In October 2011, I was invited to attend the eighth annual assembly of the Association of War and Peacetime Military Disabled Veterans of Serbia

\textsuperscript{114} (Ova država ima svoje navijače, pecaroše, studente, radnike, i svoje veterane.) This was one of the favourite lines of Mile Milošević, the president of the VA Serbian War Veterans in Rakovica.
(URMVIS). The meeting was to be held at their office at the Home of the Invalids, an impressive secessionist-style building located on the Savski Square, one of the main intersections in central Belgrade. The four-story building, as I later learned, was erected in 1930s and ever since it has been home to various veterans’ organisations. At the time of my visit this was the location of one national and several city-level VAs for the veterans from the First and the Second World War and the recent post-Yugoslav wars. On the street level of its ground floor, there was a small restaurant and an eclectic selection of stores: a pharmacy, a store with equipment for disabled persons, a bookmaker's, and a ‘Sex Shop.’ I was told that in the past this was also the location of Belgrade’s infamous (and only) adult cinema ‘Partizan.’ In front of the building there was a bus loop and a small urban park lined with several kiosks and bookstands. There were plans by URMVIS to transform the park into a memorial site for Serbian war veterans and civilian victims of the post-Yugoslav wars. Directly opposite the park was Belgrade’s central railway station.

I arrived at 9:30am, half an hour ahead of schedule. Inside the building the hallways were already bustling with people who came for the meeting. Two men, possibly in their sixties, asked me if they were heading in the right direction. It took me a while to explain how to navigate between the maze of corridors and confusing signs that all appeared too similar to one another: the National Association of Disabled War and Peacetime Veterans of Serbia, the Association of War and Peacetime Disabled War Veterans of Serbia, the War Veterans’ Movement of Serbia, the Association of War Volunteers 1912-1918, the Union of Associations of Combatants of the People’s Liberation War, and so on. I rushed upstairs to the third floor to check where exactly I should go for the meeting. Along the way I recognised several people who I met during some of my earlier visits to VAs in and around Belgrade. Upstairs one of the two URMVIS secretaries told me that the meeting would be held in the conference room on the second floor. There should be about fifty people coming from across Serbia, she added.

Downstairs, the conference room was almost full and most seats were already taken. The desks were set to form a long rectangle and people were sitting

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115 Udruženje ratnih i minrnodopskih vojnih invalida Srbije.
116 Dom invalida.
facing each other. Of the fifty or so persons the only women were the two secretaries. They showed up after the meeting had already started and sat at a desk in a small hallway just outside the conference room. The president of URMVIS and his deputy took the central position at the head of the long desk. There was a large mural painted on the wall behind their backs. It was essentially a large Serbian flag with its red blue and white stripes drawn diagonally across the wall and crowned with the line: ‘1919 – 2011: 92 years of the Association of War and Peacetime Disabled Veterans of Serbia’. I found one empty seat somewhere in the middle of the long desk, between two men who were not busy talking to anyone around them. The younger of the two, probably in his mid fifties, came from a town in central Serbia where he was president of a municipal VA for veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars. He was happy to see a ‘young face’ sitting next to him. He asked if I was a journalist. I told him that I wasn’t but that I was conducting research about Serbian war veterans. Like many veterans before him, he was pleased that someone was finally making such an effort and immediately started telling me who was who in the room and sharing his views about the challenges that veterans were facing in Serbia.

After a short while the room was filled with the sounds of overlapping voices. It seemed that most people already knew each other. Some of them had not seen each other since last year’s assembly. Most came from outside of Belgrade and were in their sixties or older and were retired. Most of the older men were dressed in grey and dark business suits and the younger ones were mostly in less formal, semi-casual clothes. One man who was sitting not too far from me had a badge with Tito’s image pinned to his collar. On the other end of the table I noticed a younger man wearing a camouflage uniform. As people greeted each other I could hear them use different forms of address. Some were referring to their friends as ‘comrades’ but also making sure to mention the appropriate military rank of the person they were talking to. Others were less formal and called each other ‘brothers’, or ‘friends’. A man sitting not far from me introduced one of his colleagues as ‘comrade-mister-general’ (*drug-gospodin-general*).

As time passed the murmur was becoming louder, but the noise quickly subsided as the president of URMVIS began his speech. He greeted everyone in the room and started the meeting with a minute of silence for all the deceased members of the VA. The president informed us that the meeting would consist of
two parts: the working part, followed by a short break and the ceremonial part when several special guests would join us. He continued the meeting with a point-to-point reading of the agenda for the day (dnevni red). The main points referred to the selection of the working bodies of the Assembly, discussion about the priorities set at the last year’s meeting, and what he described as the ‘burning issue’ that had to do with human resource matters and the excommunication of three municipal VAs from the Assembly.

The meeting continued with the reading of various reports. As time went on people's attention began to wane. At one point a waiter rolled in trays with fresh coffee. For a moment it seemed that nobody was listening to the speaker anymore. All attention was now turned to the refreshments. The water oversaw some people and now they were calling him to come back. Others needed more sugar or didn’t get their water. They started joking and talking to each other more freely. I could no longer hear what was being said at the head of the table. This lasted a few minutes until the president took control of the meeting once again. It was time to start the discussion about the excommunication of the three municipal VAs. He called for his deputy to deliver the report. The deputy, a retired colonel, read a report in which he explained the gist of the issue: three municipal VAs from Belgrade had decided to separate from the national level VA (UMRVIS) and to form their own union. The president once again took over and said:

In the last several years our associations have been attacked, but from the outside by other associations. We had several cases of attacks on our members and on the leaders of our municipal associations to join this or that organisation. Luckily we succeeded in keeping our strength and unity. This is the first time that this is happening to us from within our own ranks and that some of our associations are separating and forming something new that is not statutory

The president was talking about VAs for the veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars that existed outside of the national network and which were trying to get members of UMRVIS to join their ranks. But he was also talking about their own municipal VAs that had decided to forge a separate union outside of UMRVIS. According to
the statute of the Assembly it was not allowed for VAs that belonged to the network of URMVIS to form new associations. Furthermore, any VA that decided to do that would be excommunicated from URMVIS.

The network of VAs was organized on the national, city and municipal levels. National VAs had their satellites in all the cities and municipalities in Serbia and all the members of municipal and city VAs were also members of the national association. In cases where municipal associations decided to separate this reduced the total number of members of the national VA. This was a serious issue because lower membership caused lower ‘representation’ in relation to other VAs and reduced advantage in competition for the resources from the state budget.

*President:* Last year we had several demanding tasks. The main one was to fulfill the requirement of the Ministry [of Labor and Social Policy] to submit the list of the total number of members of URMVIS with all the relevant (personal) information, such as their unique identification numbers. The three associations did not deliver their numbers… In the meantime, they founded the ‘Union of War and Peacetime Disabled Veterans of the City of Belgrade’ without the knowledge or agreement of the city and the national association of URMVIS […] It was normal that a part of our collective (*kolektiv*) did not accept this, since our statute does not allow for the existence of two city level associations.

Another problem identified by the president was related to continuous fragmentation of VAs in the relationship between the ‘old’ members (veterans of the Second World War) and the ‘young’ members (veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars):

*President:* We are striving toward unity of all associations and that all of them unite into one. Unfortunately there were these 'young' associations […] with which we had very good relations in the past that started the fragmentation […] Five small associations were created from one and now none of them is capable of doing
anything on their own [...] Once cut, the whole loses its purpose [...] Our intentions are different. We always had one, unified association, even after the First and the Second World War. This is the only way that we can work better and get better financing, because our goals are the same [...] At the meeting of the national associations, they (the three VAs) told us that their goal was to protect disabled veterans. So, three VAs are supposed to protect all the disabled veterans in Serbia?! They told us that we are only taking advantage of the disabled veterans! So, we cannot observe this as some sort of harmless situation. But we will need to wait for further investigation and to see what will happen at our election. We must preserve the unity of our association otherwise we are doomed to failure.

After delivering his speech, he opened the floor for discussion. A strange lull filled the room. For a moment it seemed that nobody was ready to discuss the issue. Finally one man raised hand. He expressed his support for the suggestion to break relations with the three VAs and added that had to be done as soon as possible before the problem escalated any further. After a brief pause another man, younger than most (possibly in his forties) raised his hand and asked:

What are we going to do if the associations continue to secede? As you already mentioned, people are dying. Soon we will be left without members. I think that we should engage more young people and let them make decisions as well. People are leaving and dying. In a few years from now what will happen to us?

The president replied:

We are soon having our elections. Our members are mostly over 60 years of age and it's hard for them to continue working. We need to elect people who will take on their positions for a longer period of time. Although we have the largest membership we are
all volunteers here. This is why younger disabled veterans are not that eager to take on these positions.

At this point an older man stood up and asked for permission to speak. In fact, he seemed to be one of the oldest men in the room, possibly a partisan. His trembling voice made him sound quite disturbed by the situation. He was concerned that these new, young people might not have the knowledge or sensitivity to advocate for disabled veterans: ‘They will push some bad law and we will lose even these few benefits that we are getting now.’ The younger man who raised the issue shouted back at him: ‘Are you telling me that what I am saying is nonsense?!’ Everyone in the room reacted to calm him down. Now the deputy intervened and proposed that the city Assembly should investigate all the ‘breaches’ (povrede) of the statute and make suggestions for further action against the three VAs. He added however that they should not wait with the excommunication of the presidents of the three VAs. He requested an immediate vote on this matter. At this point, there was a lot of noise in the room. It felt like everyone was talking at the same time. He asked once again: ‘Who votes in support of the excommunication of the three presidents?’ Everybody raised hands. The vote was a unanimous yes. The deputy announced a break. It seemed that it came at the right time.

The second part of the meeting was spent in a much more relaxed atmosphere. As announced at the beginning of the meeting, the president welcomed several special guests who arrived during the break. Seated to his left were the assistant minister of Labor and Social Policy, a representative of the Ministry of Defense, a representative of the Ministry of the Interior and the president of the Association for the Families of Killed Soldiers. He then gave the floor to his deputy who announced that the ‘collegium’ of national VAs decided to award an honorary plaque (plaketa) to the deputy minister for his contributions in advocating for the rights of war veterans and for his help in the fostering of tradition of remembrance of the Serbian liberation wars. He then continued with a detailed reading of the assistant minister’s biography and at the end passed the floor to the president once again.

The president stood up and with a friendly smile turned to the assistant minister to hand him the award. ‘I am giving you this award now, but you should
know that you will need to do more to justify it entirely’, he said. Everyone laughed. Some people started to clap spontaneously. The assistant minister accepted the award and turned to his audience. He said that he expected this remark and added:

You should know that I have a lot of respect for VAs, but especially for your VA (baš vaše udruženje) […] we always had good cooperation and every time we [at the Ministry] had to do something important we consulted precisely your VA (baš vaše udruženje). And I can tell you that in the future nothing will be done without someone from your VA advising us how to do that […] I can’t tell you exactly what sorts of changes will be included in the new law [for social protection of war veterans], but I can promise that your rights will not be reduced. Now, I know you’ve been sitting here for too long so let’s go eat!

Loud applause erupted. The laughter and the noise that ensued was a signal that the meeting had adjourned itself.

**Tracing the network of VAs**

The above vignette contains several themes that are crucial for the understanding of the structure and operation of the network of VAs in Serbia, as well as how some categories of war veterans compete for limited resources from the Serbian state. Although it was impossible to get an accurate number of VAs in Serbia, according to my calculations only in the city of Belgrade there were more than a dozen with programmes for the veterans of post-Yugoslav wars (cf. David 2009). In addition to these there were several VAs for war veterans of the First and Second World War and the Balkan Wars and their descendants. Although all of these organisations were at some point officially registered as NGOs, many had ceased to exist over the last two decades. In fact some veterans referred to many of these as ‘phantom’ organisations because of their small membership and the lack of concrete programs for their members.
The system of VAs was organized as a three-tier structure with associations grouped at the national, city, and municipal levels that were funded from different sources. These associations included both the ‘old’ and the ‘young’ war veterans, the families of killed and missing soldiers, as well as several associations which promote remembrance and foster preservation of what has been defined as ‘the tradition of Serbian liberation wars’. The system of funding had a direct impact on the organisation of VAs and their distribution in Belgrade and across Serbia. In principle, until the year 2000 decisions about the budget and the allocation of funds to the VAs were made in Parliament. Following the 2000 change of government, decisions about the funding for the VAs were transferred directly to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MoLSP).\textsuperscript{117} However, at the time of my fieldwork, a new system was in place under which the allocation of funds was determined on the basis of ‘representation’, or the relative number of active members of a VA, its past performance, and the annual number of projects it offered for its members.

In principle, any VA had the right to apply for funding at the national level, the city level, as well as to seek funds from their local municipalities. In reality however, this was not so easily accomplished because, as many of the persons I talked to argued only a small number of VAs had connections to the right people at the Ministry, or within their local city council or municipality offices. In addition, I would frequently hear how many municipalities were simply too poor to provide financial support for their local VAs. Another important and consistently occurring problem seemed to be the lack of resources within the VAs themselves, such as staff that had the crucial knowledge and experience to write project proposals, or persons with contacts to NGOs outside of the VA sector. Because of this complex topography and limited resources many VAs were not communicating to each other and were often accusing the others of corruption and outright criminal activity. This frequently caused conflict both between and within VAs, which often resulted in their fragmentation.

\textsuperscript{117} At the time the minister was Rasim Ljajić (see Chapter 3). However, during my fieldwork many veterans argued that the person who was de facto in charge for the allocation of funds was Miro Čavaljuga, the assistant minister who was awarded an honorary plaque at the annual assembly of the URMVIS.
Serbia’s VAs, their transformations, and history of care

First references to Serbian war veterans appeared in the late eighteenth century. This was also the period when for the first time organized Serbian military units took part in an uprising against the Ottomans in the so-called Kočina Krajina during the Austrian–Turkish war (1788–1791) (URMVIS 1995:25). Soon after, in 1796, long before the establishment of the modern Serbian state, the first Serbian Army was founded in order to face the elite Janissary units and other opponents to the Sultan’s reforms. After five years of war, approximately 2,000 Serbian veterans returned with disabilities (ibid.). A series of new uprisings and wars saw the emergence of new populations of disabled veterans. Some of the most important conflicts included the First and the Second Serbian Uprising (1804–1817), the uprising of Čarapići, several insurrections at Miletina, Vučićevoa and Đakova, as well as in Banat and Baćka during the Hungarian Revolution (1848–1849), the Serbian–Turkish War from (1876–1878), and the Serbian–Bulgarian War of 1885 (Lampe 1996:49–50; URMVIS 1996:26). With later wars the numbers of disabled persons increased exponentially: the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) resulted in 5,400 individual and family disabled persons; the First World War in approximately 500,000 disabled; the Second World War in about 310,000 disabled; and the post-Yugoslav wars (not including Kosovo) resulted in 3,500 individual and approximately the same number of family disabled persons, of which about 25 percent were peacetime military disabled persons (URMVIS 1996:18,26).

The first Association of War Invalids of Yugoslavia was founded in 1919 in Slavonski Brod, Croatia. However from the beginning the Association was in a state of permanent crisis because it was under constant pressure from the rivaling Serbian and Croatian political parties. In 1939, its Croatian members founded a separate organisation and during the Second World War the Association was banned. In 1945 a new Association of Disabled war Veterans of Yugoslavia

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118 The category of ‘family disabled persons’ refers to family members of disabled veterans who were also entitled for benefits if they were unemployed or had low personal income (URMVIS 1996).

119 Peacetime military disabled persons are those who suffered injuries while serving in the military during peacetime, as regular soldiers, military students, reserve officers, or volunteers in official military duty (Mrvić-Petrović and Orlović 2005:18).
(SRVIJ) was founded by the military disabled persons who emerged from the NOR. This was the time when disabled veterans finally started to be granted special rights and social recognition. With approximately 310,000 members SRVIJ grew into a powerful social actor in socialist Yugoslavia (URMVIS 1996:26). In 1955 it was awarded the ‘Ordain of Contribution to the People of the First Order’ for its ‘exceptional contributions to social protection of disabled war veterans’ in 1955 (Mikulić 2003:11). What is more, SRVIJ had a close relationship to the Yugoslav state and directly participated in the creation of veterans’ policy. At the time, the state provided a wide range of benefits, for disabled war persons, including free housing, free health care, educational and vocational training, help with employment, spa treatments, and many others. In addition, SRVIJ also had sizeable material assets in the form of homes for the elderly, vacation camps, and even its own libraries.

In 1961, SRVIJ together with the Association of reserve and non-commissioned officers and the Association of Former Fighters of the People’s Liberation War (SBNOR) united into a massive organisation, which has since been known as the Alliance of the Associations of Former Fighters of the People’s Liberation War (SUBNOR). This organisation was highly valued as one of the most important institutions in the political system of socialist Yugoslavia and recognised for its powerful role in the protection of military disabled persons and the population of war veterans of the Second World War in general.

However, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, although SUBNOR continued to exist it was no longer in a position to provide for military disabled persons. In 1992 they founded their own ‘Union of Disabled Veterans of Serbia’ (URVIS), which was now joined by people who participated in the post-Yugoslav wars. In 1993, disabled veterans of the Second World War founded a new Association of Military Disabled Persons – Participants of the National Liberation War, which later changed its name to the Association of Disabled

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120 Savez ratnih vojnih invalida Jugoslavije
121 Orden za zasluža za narod prvog reda
122 Udruženje rezervnih oficira i podoficira
123 Savez boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata
124 Savez udrženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata
125 Udruženje ratnih vojnih invalida Srbije
126 Udruženje ratnih vojnih invalida – učesnika narodnooslobodilačkog rata
War Veterans and Peacetime Military Invalids of Serbia (Mikulić 2003:12). Here I should also note that SUBNOR and URMVIS were the only Serbian members of the World Veterans’ Federation (WVF 2006).

URMVIS had an archive of all past editions of their own journal *Vojni invalid* that had been published since October 1995. Each issue contained a variety of texts, ranging from profiles of individual war veterans, through short stories about the activities of the VA, including meetings with representatives from the government and the military, and visits to different commemorative sites, to information about other related organisations. Even more importantly, the journal served to communicate information about disabled veterans’ welfare and social policy. In fact monitoring and reporting about developments in veterans’ policy was identified as one of its major objectives (Vojni invalid 1996). The journal also revealed the close links between URMVIS and some of the Serbian social and political elites. For example, each New Year’s edition contained a sort of seasons greeting that was addressed to the Serbian president, the major of Belgrade, and important organisations, such as SUBNOR, and the WVF. The issue published in January 1996 contained a greeting celebrating the ‘victory of politics of peace and the withdrawal of sanctions’ that was addressed to Zoran Lilić, then the president of the Federal Yugoslavia. The next greeting, three times as long as the previous one was addressed to Slobodan Milošević and contained a note in which they thanked him for his efforts to end the war in Yugoslavia. It continued with a message that veterans knew best what wars were like as they would have to continue living with their consequences for the rest of their lives. They also made sure to mention that their living standards had deteriorated considerably during the period of war and the international sanctions and added a note about the need for a new law for the social protection of disabled war veterans. Finally they concluded with a sharp objection against all attempts at cancelling or decreasing their social benefits.

Several texts in *Vojni invalid* addressed, in considerable detail, some of the common challenges they faced in the provision of care. They noted how in 1994 the Federal Ministry in charge of social policy acted in an ‘arbitrary’ and ‘unlawful’ manner because it lowered the amounts of personal disability

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127 *Udruženje ratnih i mirnodopskih vojnih invalida Srbije*
128 Military Invalid
payments even when those had been protected by the law. What is more, they were not pleased with the explanation by the Ministry that the state simply had no money nor with their observation that disabled veterans were still at an advantage in comparison to the rest of the population. They also recalled a regulation that was issued by the federal government in 1994 which effectively prevented the issuing of all disability payments, first for a period of three months and then for an additional three months. Disabled veterans, they cautioned, decided to refrain from any protests during this time because they did not want to undermine the government program for economic recovery. However, after the regulation had expired and pensions and wages started to increase, the amount of disability payments remained the same. Furthermore, they argued, disability payments had been decreasing every subsequent month although that was against the law. URMVIS and RVIS complained about this to the federal Ministry, the vice president, and the federal finance minister, but the only explanation they had received was, once again, that the problem was unsolvable because there was not enough money. Furthermore, they were informed that even those people whose allowances were unlawfully decreased during the previous year would not get compensated for their losses (Vojni invalid 1996:6). Because disability allowances for August 1995 amounted only to half of what was regulated by law and because the Federal Ministry did nothing to prevent this while proclaiming that the decrease was unavoidable, members of URMVIS and RVIS decided to organise a public protest.

In September 1995, they issued a Memorandum,\(^{129}\) which contained several points that needed immediate attention, including the ‘unacceptable conditions’ in the field of social protection for military disabled persons, unlawful decrease in disability payments, and the worsening of living conditions of military disabled persons. In another text in the same issue, they underscored that several international organisations and treaties, including the United Nations and the Lisbon Conference, protected the rights for social protection of disabled veterans and as such they could not be left to the whim of individual members of state administration (Vojni invalid 1996:26). It is important to note here that all this

\(^{129}\) The full title of the document was: ‘Memorandum on the Non-implementation of the Law for the Social Protection of Military-Disabled Veterans and Families of Killed and Missing Persons’ (\textit{Memorandum o neprimenjivanju Zakona o osnovnim pravima vojnih invalida i porodica palih boraca}).
mostly concerned ‘old’ veterans of the Second World War.

**VAs and their competition for exclusivity**

One of the important ways in which VAs competed over their influence in veteran politics was through their engagement with the drafting of a new law for social protection. However, although almost all VAs that I visited had their own vision about what that law should contain, only few of them had direct access to people who were involved in the process. This situation made the draft appear like ‘the holy grail,’ as everyone seemed to know where to look for it, but no one could every find it.

One of the administrators at URMVIS, Ranko Sepe, commented on the draft of a proposal that was written by the political party Veterans Movement of Serbia (PVS), and claimed that it had caused a lot of damage to veterans. He said that the president of PVS, Saša Dujović removed an important clause according to which VAs were supposed to be funded directly from the state budget. When I replied that it seemed counterintuitive that anybody would risk not getting support from the state, he responded that Dujović’s VA had lost its status as a ‘representative’ organisation and was therefore no longer on the list for state funding which was, as he explained, the only reason why Dujović’s wanted to prevent other VAs from having that advantage. This again points to the changes within the system of funding for VAs, which directly affected the prospects for their survival and caused new shifts in alliances and fierce competition for access to state resources. The system that was at take ran at two levels and contained disability payments and other benefits for disabled war veterans that were typically more generous from those reserved for civilians and subventions for the operational costs of VAs. These changes had a direct influence on the organisation of VAs, as most, if not all of them, moved toward some form of NGOisation.

Sepe also reminded me of the fact that one of the central reasons for competition among veterans was the difference between their entitlements for social protection and national recognition. He noted that the level of social protection for non disabled war veterans was essentially the same as for civilians,
which meant that their benefits were three times lower than those for disabled war veteran. So they are all veterans, he said, but they are not legally recognised the same way. In addition, he argued that even disabled war veterans were discriminated because they were treated as ‘socijala’ (welfare recipients) which made them appear too similar to civilian disabled persons. All of these problems needed to be constantly monitored and he was afraid that soon there would be no one to take that responsibility at URMVIS, which is why it was important that it preserved its links to MoLSP.

I told my host about a possibility for them to engage in a project with other VAs and several non-veteran NGOs where they could discuss all these issues, including the draft of the law. I also told him that could potentially open up new possibilities for funding outside of the VA sector.\footnote{I shall discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.} However, he was very skeptical about cooperating with other VAs and NGOs in general. The reason for this, he explained, was that there was too much competition and ‘politicking’ among them. However, at the same time he remarked that URMVIS was having problems with developing ‘capacities’ for future work. There was no one who could speak English there, or who could write research papers and entries to their journal. In the past one of their members was doing most of this work. He was a disabled veteran who had lost both his legs in military service after which he gained a law degree and devoted most of his time to research about disabled war veterans in Serbia. After he passed away, there was no one at the VA who could take on all his responsibilities, such as monitoring of changes in the law, which was one of the crucial goals that the URMVIS had set for itself.

Sepe also noted that there were many problems with the population of ‘young’ veterans who emerged from the post-Yugoslav wars. Many of them were not happy with their social position and had, he said, been caught with what he called the ‘virus of personal gain’ (virus lične koristi) that was rapidly spreading between all VAs. Their leaders became politically active and then all they want is to take advantage of their membership to advance their own personal goals, Sepe argued. It was only natural, he noticed, that in the process others will want a piece of the same pie and then situation gets out of control. At this point Sepe again started to share his views about Dujović and repeated that he was a serious
problem because he was a shoemaker who turned politician and therefore had no knowledge or capacity to do the very complex work he was supposed to do. He claimed that other politicians who were more experienced, such as Rasim Ljajić, delegated responsibilities to their assistants and so did not have a clear overview of the real situation. Therefore, he said, the central problem was that people who were in charge of the design of the new law for social protection of war veterans were almost exclusively politicians who were not experts in the field and whose only objective was to maximize their own profits. What is more, he argued, even those who showed some initiative and genuinely wanted to help war veterans were usually in office for a very short time and as soon as they got more knowledgeable about all the complex legal matters they would be replaced by new inexperienced people.

The final problem that Sepe identified was the ‘mentality’ of people. He said that most people accepted whatever benefits they could get without any reflection why they should be receiving them. Therefore, he argued, most people wanted to get whatever they could from the system without caring whether what they were doing was fair to other users. We ended our conversation here. The last thing he mentioned was that he was looking forward to his retirement next year as he had too enough of all this work at URMVIS. Sepe’s comments resonate those made by Zoran Alimpić the President of the Assembly of the City of Belgrade and member of the Democratic Party (DS). Alimpić also hinted at the lack of self-reflection among war veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars said that they could not claim any special recognition because they had lost the war – which was, according to him a fact that they refused to admit.

**Majdanpek: (re)combinations away from the centre**

Petar was the president of a municipal VA in Majdanpek. The VA had about 350 members, mostly veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars and several ex-combatants from the Second World War. In 1991 Petar spent 45 days in a reserve unit in Vukovar, Croatia and in 1999 another three months in Kosovo. After his return from Croatia in 1992, together with several of his colleagues, he founded the local

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131 The minister of the MoLSP. See Chapter 2.
132 *Demokratska stranka*
VA. At first the VA operated as a branch of the local SUBNOR. He remembered how at the time most of the members were in fact old veterans of the Second World War, but as the number of veterans who were returning from the most recent wars increased, they slowly took over the membership. Eventually they divided the VA into two sections, one for the veterans of the Second World War, and the other for the veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars, which later also included the veterans of the 1999 Kosovo war. Petar claimed that the system functioned well until the change of the government in 2000 when DS replaced SPS. ‘These people [members of DS] simply didn’t respect us and when they took over we started to lose our members’, he said.

In the past their expenses were covered by the municipal budget, but that support had been gradually reduced until it was completely cancelled, so that over the past several years they did not receive any funding at all. Petar said that the same happened with the support from the national VA. In the past the funding which they received from the national VA was mostly spent on the financing of annual commemorative days, such as Victory Day. However, over the last two years they did not receive anything from them either. Still, he made it clear that he respected Miodrag Zečević, the president of SUBNOR, but he also pointed out that the VAs in Belgrade were much better off than they. ‘The president [of SUBNOR] gets donations directly from the state budget. If he needs a car to attend some meeting, the state will give him a car, a driver, and daily allowances, but down here we don’t get anything’, he said.

Petar’s VA faced many problems. He told me that earlier that year they had to re-register their VA as an NGO. When some of the members of the municipal council saw that he was still using the old stamp with a communist star, they laughed at him and complained that it had to be changed. He told them that he could no longer spend his own money for such trivial matters. But that was not all, according to Petar the VA had much more difficult problems to deal with. Their office was located in the local youth centre (Dom omladine) for which they had to pay the rent of €100 per month using their own money. So although they were not charging membership fees, they were forced to collect money for the rent. The municipality of Majdanpek was refusing to help them and he claimed that this was only one of the ways in which they were trying to force them out from the building. He said that although the youth centre had recently been
renovated, their office was left untouched even though everybody knew that the roof was leaking and that the room was seriously damaged. The veterans could not afford to pay for the repairs on their own and they could not get any help from the local authorities.

**Petar:** The president of the municipality doesn't want to give us any money for the rent and every other day the director of the youth center keeps sending us some invoices (*fakture*) to tell us to get out of there. [...] He is in charge of that building, so I can understand that he needs to have some sort of coverage for himself, but I told him that since he has the keys to our office he should take care of it all [...] he should throw out our archives if he wants to [...] I don't know what to do with all those papers. I don't have enough space in my house to store them and I really don't know what else to do.

Although he was the president of a municipal VA, Petar could not tell me how many veterans there were in the surrounding villages. He said that most of the local communities in the area had their own VAs each with their own president. However, they did not communicate with each other regularly. What is more, he argued that most people were losing their interest in the VAs. He thought that the biggest problem was the lack of state and municipal support:

They (the municipality) reduced our utility bills by 50 percent only once in 1991 and I think they also gave us fire wood several times, but all that stopped once the wars ended. Back then SPS\(^{133}\) was in power and most of our veterans supported them. They used to organize everything and always gave us some money when we needed it. Since they left everything changed.

Petar’s experiences are directly associated to the changes in Serbian political

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\(^{133}\) The Socialist Party of Serbia (*Socijalistička partija Srbije*). At the time of my fieldwork the president of SPS was Ivica Dačić, but Petar is refering to the time when its president was Slobodan Milošević.
landscape, particularly the change of government in 2000, after which the support of SPS for VAs waned. The effects of this change were particularly challenging for the VAs that existed away from the centre in some of the less developed regions of the country, such as eastern Serbia. This was also the time when VAs had to forge new alliances with their municipal political leaders. Let me know show some of the ways in which the VA in Rakovica maintained its relationship to political parties.

Petar’s story opens an important question: on what basis do VAs think that they should be granted free venues and support from the Serbian state and for what purpose? They would typically answer that the fact that they fought in the war and sacrificed their lives for the protection of their country was more than a good reason for the Serbian state to recognise that they are ‘deserving’ (zasluga) its support. When it came to their functions, virtually all the VAs that I contacted shared the same objective, which to advocate for the social protection of their members. However, for most of them this was almost impossible to achieve because, as most have argued, they received no financial, or other kind of support from their local government. The reason for this was, as they would typically claim, that they were not linked to any political parties.

**Rakovica’s shifting political alliances**

As I already noted, the VA in Rakovica was initially located in a house that it shared with a branch of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS). In 2008 a group of SRS MPs left the party and founded their own Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Members of the SNS came to occupy the same part of house where the VA in Rakovica was located. Soon this house became too small for them and after a series of disagreements, which included loss of support from the local municipality, the veterans moved out. For a while they were without a place, but they soon managed to again shake hands with the local municipality, which granted them a plot of land where they were allowed to build a new house for their VA. However, they had one problem that still needed to be solved. Right next to the entrance to the old house, where SNS was now located, there was a large granite board carrying the names of veterans from Rakovica who died in
combat in post-Yugoslav wars. Although veterans planned to take the board off the wall and move it closer to their new house, they had to postpone this plan several because members of SNS refused to have it taken off. They claimed that those veterans were also their veterans and sons and husbands of the members of their party. This gave them the authority to keep the board where it was. The situation became even more complicated when mothers of several killed soldiers came to protest against the VA's intentions to take the board. As Mile Milošević, the president of the VA in Rakovica, assured me this was all planned by the members of SNS as a way to coerce the veterans to give up on taking what was rightfully theirs.

One day in 2010, the veterans finally dared to take the board off the wall and move it some 50 meters away to a place where they would eventually build a small commemorative wall. Taking the board down was no small feat as it weighed several hundred kilograms and if it fell down it could get damaged and get people hurt. All this meant that veterans had to find several people and use special tools. What is more, they decided to wait for everyone from SNS to leave the office in order to prevent any further conflict. When ‘The Day’ arrived several of us gathered and waited for the right moment to take the board down. It took several men quite some time to accomplish the task, but eventually they succeeded. The event was then celebrated as another small victory of the VA in Rakovica. They eventually constructed a small wall on which they installed the board. The wall soon became the central focal point in front of the VA and was used as a commemorative site and a type of shrine in front of which there were always some flowers and candles burning. The old house, however, was left with a large stain next to entrance, which marked the place where the board once stood. Although veterans feared new conflicts with members of SNS, to my knowledge nothing of the sort ever happened.

When it comes to VA Rakovica’s relationship to other political parties and NGOs, the situation was more complicated. Mile was always curious to learn about my visits to other VAs, particularly those that were sponsored by the MoLSP. This was not surprising given that, according to Mile, although they tried, they never got any financial support from the MoLSP. Likewise, others also wanted to learn about Rakovica. In fact most of them already knew about
Rakovica and about Mile and some of them had met him personally in the past. In general they would always talk about Mile’s passionate care for his VA, but some also noted that he was too naïve with his constant attempts to create something that was not realistically possible. For example, on one occasion I spoke about Rakovica to a president of one municipal VA for disabled war persons who I refer to as Ivan. The moment I mentioned Rakovica Ivan remarked 'Oh I see, you are at Milence's' (*Milence* being diminutive of Mile), and added 'What can I say... we all have our own agendas.' When prompted for more information about Rakovica he just said that he was not sure why they complained so much, when like everybody else they had their municipality to take care of them. When I told him about their plans to become a national VA, he laughed and said they were not the only ones. What is more, he was skeptical about Rakovica's large membership and said that he was sure that many of those people had also joined other VAs. When back in Rakovica I raised the issue of multiple membership, Mile constantly reassured me that his membership was 'alive' and 'legitimate'.

One more example of Rakovica’s ambiguous relationship to political parties may illustrate the complexity of their shifting alliances. Although veterans from Rakovica would almost unanimously say that they were all traditional supporters of SPS, Mile would always add that no political party could every ‘buy’ their votes. In fact, he would repeat that the VA was ‘not political’ and that it would always remain that way. Yet, one day in May 2011, Mile told me that one their members, Vuk, went to the celebration of the patron saint’s day (*krsna slava*) of DSS. As I mentioned earlier, DSS was a right-wing conservative-nationalist party with very strong links to the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC). In contrast SPS, as the successor party to LCY had a much more ambiguous relationship to Chetniks and the SPC. Their opposition to Chetniks could be seen from their refusal to support the new law that would grant them military pensions. The decision of Rakovica veterans to attend the reception came as a surprise to me after all the instances when I was assured how they had no relationships with political parties. Mile explained that this sudden change of heart was nothing important. He said that he was also surprised when they received the invitation in the mail, and added that it would have been rude on their behalf if they didn’t go.
After all this was an honorable gesture and one cannot refuse an invitation to a slava.

As I was told, the dinner reception was held in the main offices of DSS in central Belgrade. Vuk told me that the place was crowded with people, but that they were the only veterans who were present that evening. When I asked Mile what he thought this could mean for the future of his VA, he again admitted that he was not sure. But in any case, he added, the invitation was a ‘positive development’ at least in the sense that Rakovica had a ‘good standing.’ Still, he did not think that DSS would have any concrete expectations from them. Anyway, he said, veterans were free to vote for whomever they wanted and he could not influence their decisions. However, in the end he said that the same was now expected from them and that they would have to invite members of DSS for their slava on St. Vitus Day (Vidovdan).

**Vidovdan in Rakovica: restoration of an old bond**

We prepared for the celebration of the patron saint’s day (krsna slava) in Rakovica for several days. A week earlier I printed the last of the invitations and took them personally to MoLSO and to URMVIS. Nataša, the volunteer secretary at the VA in Rakovica, and I invited representatives of all the television and print media in Belgrade that we could think of. We didn’t hear back from any of them, but Mile still thought there was a chance that some would show up. St. Vitus Day is a major church holiday for many families and organisations in Serbia and, what is more important, it is the day of remembrance and glorification of the Battle of Kosovo, which always gets a great deal of media coverage. We hoped that some news agencies would be interested in war veterans from Rakovica and how they celebrated their ‘slava’ and remembered their fellow soldiers who lost their lives in the wars of the 1990s. When I called Mile, the president of the VA that morning he sounded very excited. He asked me to come in a bit earlier in case there was still something to sort out before the first guest and the priest arrived after 11:00 am.
I met up with Noa, a friend of mine from the NGO Centre for Cultural Decontamination on one of the central squares and we headed to Rakovica. Noa had already accompanied me to Rakovica on several occasions and most of the veterans already knew her; or at least that she was a war veteran herself and that she was from Israel. We arrived at the VA just before 10:00. Mile and his veterans planted rows of yellow, white and red flowers along the lanes that led to the small memorial wall that they had built some weeks earlier. As we approached the VA, I could see fresh flowers and yellow candles placed in a new candleholder in front of the memorial. Several men and women, possibly in their fifties or sixties, were talking to each other in front of the house. I greeted them and went straight inside the VA. Mile was standing in his office talking to someone on the phone. He waived at me and told me that Nataša and the others were in the room next door. His desk was covered with plastic glasses, unopened bottles of wine and liquor and several trays of food. I went out to the porch and made my way to the meeting room in the back of the house.

There were several people there, some of whom I recognised from before. The room seemed more spacious than before. The tables that were usually spread across the room were now lined against a wall. One table was set up for the ceremony and it had a round loaf of bread (slavski kolač), one large and another small yellow candle, a large plate of cooked wheat and walnuts (koljivo), a bowl of rice and a bottle of red wine. Hanging on the wall above it was an icon of Saint Lazar, a medieval prince and martyr, later proclaimed a saint for his sacrifice in the Battle of Kosovo. Attached on the wall just above the icon was a chain string holding a small oil lamp (kandilo) set so that its flame came directly in front of Lazar’s sword. Underneath the icon was a framed piece of red tapestry with the embroidered verses of ‘Lazar’s Curse’. The lines read:

Whoever is a Serb and of Serb birth,
And of Serb blood and heritage,
And does not come to the Battle of Kosovo,
May he never have progeny in his heart desires,
Neither son nor daughter!

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134 I will reintroduce Noa in Chapter 5.
May nothing grow that his hand sows,  
Neither red wine nor white wheat!  
And let him be cursed from all ages to all ages!

On the same wall, to the right of the icon was a framed photograph of Patriarch Pavle, the late Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In the corner to the right were two flagpoles carrying two large Serbian flags, one of which was set up so that one could clearly see the portrait of the Bosnian-Serb General Ratko Mladić135 and the embroidered line: ‘Serbian hero Ratko Mladić’. On the ground in front of the flagpoles was a large empty shell of what seemed to me an antitank grenade. All around the room there were framed photographs of old Serbian army generals, most of them from the First World War. Mounted on the wall in the back of the room was a large chessboard and right next to it a small closet on top of which there was a dozen or so of pewters and goblets won in chess championships. On one of the walls there was a large blue sticker with the words ‘safe house for Ratko Mladić’.

135 After successfully hiding for sixteen years, Ratko Mladić was arrested on 26 May 2011 and sent to prison at the ICTY in The Hague. Mladić was a general and the chief of staff in the Army of Republic Srpska and was charged for genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war against Bosnian Muslims and Croats. The arrest was one of the key events that strengthened Serbia’s position in the process of negotiations for the accession to the EU.

The media reports and public commentaries that followed generally glossed over Mladić’s role in the war in BiH and the indictment. Instead, most stories were published in the form of tabloids and focused on his poor health, his family problems, the request he made while in detention in Belgrade for strawberries, a TV set and Russian classics by Gogol and Tolstoy, and on whether the baseball cap was a good replacement for the military hat that he was known for wearing and which he ‘borrowed’ from vojvoda Živojin Mišić.

None of the major political parties in Serbia, except for the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) voiced any major concerns about the arrest and somewhat surprisingly there were no major public protests organised by Mladić’s supporters.

However, even in this atmosphere of relative ambivalence it soon became obvious the the myth of Ratko Mladić as a Serbian hero would not fade away that easily, particularly among war veterans and some right wing groups. Although the image of the unconquerable warrior was now seriously tainted with media reports about a sickly old man who spent his last days hiding in a village in Vojvodina, the arrest caused a new wave of dissatisfaction among the veterans I worked with. At the VA in Rakovica, they decided to hang his picture back on the wall and pulled out a Serbian flag with his image and the line that read ‘Ratko Mladić Serbian Hero’.

Conservative elites again talked about Mladić as one of the most important symbols of the Serbian glorious military past and reminded that it should not be forgotten that he was responsible for the creation of the Republika Srpska and for saving the Serbian people in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bogdanović 2011)
In the small kitchen behind me I could see Nataša and Marko, one of the veterans at the VA. They were preparing coffee and pouring plum brandy (rakija) for the guests. The moment he noticed me Marko quipped: ‘Doctor knows when it’s the best time to show up!’ He smiled and handed me one of the trays to take it outside. In front of the VA the crowd was slowly growing in numbers. I could see one of the veterans, Vuk, arriving with four young girls. They could have been six or seven years old and they were all wearing Serbian folk costumes. It turned out that one of them was his granddaughter and they were supposed to assist the priest with the ceremony. They seemed very excited about that. In the courtyard I could see Mile talking to the guests. He was telling them about the VA and proudly showing the new house, the garden and the memorial. ‘We built all of this with our own hands and with our own money. No one helped us with any of it’, I could hear him say. Not too long after that another group of young teenage girls came in. Someone told me they were members of a girls’ choir from Rakovica.

It was just after 11:00 and there were already some 40 people in front of the VA, mostly men. Someone pointed to three young men standing a bit to the side. I was told that the youngest of the three was one of the deputies of the president of the DSS, the party that Vuk visited for their slava. Some minutes later the priest came rushing in. Mile welcomed him, kissed him and took him straight to the meeting room. The four girls in the folk costumes and only several of the guests who were standing in front of the house followed them to the room. Most people decided to stay outside and continued to sip their coffees and rakija.

The service had started. Those who were present in the room stood in solemn silence, their eyes fixed to the ground. The girls were standing around the desk and holding the candles and the wine. I could understand very little of the priest’s chant as he was singing in Old Church Slavic. The ceremony in the room lasted for about 20 minutes. The high point was the breaking of the bread. The priest, Mile and two of his comrades stood in a circle all holding and turning the bread as the priest was saying a prayer. At some point they broke the bread apart and tore it into little pieces to be served to the guests. After that the priest went outside and walked around the house sprinkling it with the holy water. Finally he said that he would continue the service outside in front of the memorial wall. Mile seemed surprised. He quickly commanded that the table and all that was on it be brought outside and placed in front of the memorial. As the priest was waiting, the
girls were struggling to protect the candles from the wind. Several men quickly set up the table and the service continued. People who were standing outside all along now all put their cups and glasses away and faced the priest and the memorial wall. Out in the open air his voice sounded even deeper and more ominous. He chanted for a few more minutes and finally read all the names that were engraved in the black stone. At the end he started a speech. He told us how important it was that we never forget Lazar’s sacrifice. As he continued, his speech was becoming more and more political. Now he said that Lazar gathered the best and the most honorable among men to fight in Kosovo. He then said:

The men whose names are engraved here should enjoy the same respect as those who died centuries ago to protect Serbia from her enemies, who wanted to destroy her history and culture […] But the enemy is not yet defeated and is still trying to defeat the very being of the Serbian people by poisoning Serbian children with immoral ideas […] Serbia is full of graves of unborn children, while her streets are full of perverts (izopačenjacì) who laugh at all that is moral… They want a perverse Serbia, to forget the Cyrillic alphabet, to denounce her religion and to spit on her heroes. They want to turn that which is holy and honorable into a crime.

As he continued I noticed that some people had tears in their eyes while others started to whisper and shake their heads in disapproval. The priest finally ended with the words: ‘May Lazar help us make our earthly Serbia become heavenly’. The celebration continued with a performance of the girls’ choir. They sang three songs in front of the memorial – two about the glory of the men who died in the Battle of Kosovo and one about Karadorde, the leader of the First Serbian Uprising. After the performance the guests began feasting. I went to Mile to ask about his impressions. It was obvious that the speech got him excited. He said me that it is possible that the priest sounded a bit harsh but that personally he wasn’t surprised by it. ‘You know, such are priests around here’, he smiled, ‘What can you do…’ One woman heard us, but she did not share Mile’s opinion. Her son died in Kosovo, she said, and speeches like this do not make her any more proud. The conversation quickly turned into discussions about the wars and the Serbian
sacrifice that again centered on the unwillingness of the Serbian state to recognise its war veterans and about particular political parties, such as DS, for promoting anti-Serbian politics.

**Conclusion**

As the above examples show, in addition to being ‘safe house’ for veterans, VAs represented different sites of alliances and conflict within a social and political terrain that was in a constant state of turmoil. As some of them were breaking alliances, others were reviving old bonds, which they previously wrote off as impossible. These relationships could be again placed in zones of ambiguity and unresolved conflict, which allowed for a particular kind of political knowing and acting. For some of the VAs, such as Rakovica, this meant that they could stake claims about their non-political status, and at the same time forge links with political parties, while also claiming that there was nothing wrong with their choices. Instead all these were ‘positive developments’ which meant that their VA was ‘in good standing.’

In the following chapter I discuss how the VA in Rakovica joined a collaborative project with a well-known activist civil society organisation which veterans regarded as one of their traditional ideological enemies. In the process of voicing their concerns in front of different audiences, veterans from Rakovica further extended the reach of their social network as well as engaged in new process of political subjectivation.
Chapter FIVE

Interventions in veteran politics: flirting with the ‘Other Serbia’

We know these people, we remember them.
And don’t tell me they have changed; they haven’t! They are the same! […]
The same language, the same gestures; the same faces […]
This is how they behaved in the nineties
and this is how they behave today.136

Borka Pavičević (2013)

There is stultification
whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another […]
Whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies.

Jacques Rancière (1991)

In this chapter I explore some of the tensions that existed in the relationships between members of the so-called ‘two Serbias’: war veterans and the ‘liberal’ cultural elites. This will expose a wide gap that existed between veterans’ associations (VAs) and ‘civil society’ NGOs, particularly those whose members presented themselves as pro-democratic antiwar activists and who typically located their position on the opposite side of the political-ideological spectrum. In order to do this, I will present an account of a sequence of ‘dialogues’ that were organised by war veterans and members of an activist NGO in Belgrade, in which I also had an active role. I will then use insights from the dialogues to argue that although significant disagreements indeed existed between different groups, such as in their understandings of the reasons for the escalation of the post-Yugoslav wars or their views about patriotism and their own location in the victim hierarchy, there were also important similarities in their critiques of the postwar Serbian state and political establishment. What is more, despite their differences they showed a concerted effort to reach out to each other and act together as agents of social change. In my analysis of these events I will expose some of the less visible turns and trajectories in the course of transformation of civil society in

136 Pavičević’s comment is about the survival of the Serbian political ‘right,’ especially those politicians and political parties who emerged as leaders of the Serbian government despite their nationalist past and their active support for and orchestration of the post-Yugoslav wars (interview in Vreme, 2013).
Serbia, which will expose the emergence of new forms and workings of postconflict governmentality.

**Veterans performing for the ‘liberal’ cultural elites**

One of the first organisations that I contacted in Serbia was the War Trauma Centre (WTC)\textsuperscript{137} in Novi Sad. I learned about their work several years earlier during my research about posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Croatian psychiatry (Dokić 2009b). As an organisation that had links with different veteran groups, they were a good source of contacts with VAs in Serbia. In December 2011 one of their staff invited me to the opening of a theatre performance *Tanatos*,\textsuperscript{138} which he described as ‘run by war veterans for war veterans.’ The performance was to be held at the Rex Cultural Centre in Belgrade and was supposed to be followed by a discussion between the organisers, the artists and the audience. Before the performance I learned that this was a collaborative project of WTC and the Belgrade NGO Let’s…\textsuperscript{139} founded and run by a group of applied psychologists who organised projects based on non-formal education. The NGO published a statement on their website in which they mentioned that their primary goal was to have young artists and war veterans join in a dialogue through a series of activities to discuss the ways in which they could collaborate in art and other aspects of social life. The statement was followed by the summary of the performance:

When the heart stops beating, dying begins. There are times when in the strands of social DNA, neurons, heart valves [...] this same giving up happens. Without clear awareness society choses death. The symptoms are obvious, but the soul resists the idea that this is the way it should go. Destruction and lack of sympathy are the proof that something inside, in the human makeup, gave up the fight... Psychoanalysis suggests that Thanatos (the death drive) in the foundations of this giving up (*Hajde da...* 2011).

\textsuperscript{137} *Centar za ratnu traumu.*  
\textsuperscript{138} From *Thanatos*, the ancient Greek personification of death.  
\textsuperscript{139} *Hajde da...*
These psychoanalytic searches into the dark confines of ‘human nature’ and the way in which suffering of a society was modelled on individual suffering and transposed to the collective level made me suspect that the performance might be yet another way to make use of the same old narratives of victimisation. Still, I was content that I could observe the reactions of the audience and participate in the dialogue.

I arrived at the Rex some fifteen minutes before the start of the show. The entrance was already crowded with people chatting and waiting to get in. Most of them were in their mid forties or fifties and seemed to fit the description of Belgrade urban middle class. My acquaintance soon arrived with some of his friends. He was quite excited to see the premiere, as he was involved in the organisation of the performance together with people from several other NGOs from Belgrade. What made it even more exciting for him was the fact that some of the war veterans who participated in the workshops at WTC were also performing in the show.

The Rex was located in a large two-storey house in the old part of Belgrade city centre that was still known as the old Jewish quarter. In fact the name of the street where the Centre was located was Jevrejska, which in Serbian stands for ‘Jewish’. The Rex was well known for its performances that ranged from music concerts and theatre plays to various exhibitions and workshops. As I later found out the Rex was in fact one the stronghold of anti-war activism in Belgrade. It was founded in 1994 as an initiative of the Radio B92, which was itself an important media outlet that openly opposed the regime of Slobodan Milošević throughout the 1990s (Jansen 2001). Since its foundation, the Rex served as a gathering place for dissident artists and over the years continued to be profiled as the house of the ‘culture of urban Belgrade’ (Rex 2000), which was typically regarded as standing in opposition to the ‘rural’ and ‘uncivilised’ milieu from which the majority of war veterans emerged. But before I problematise this relationship, let me first return to the performance and the discussion that followed.

At the time of my arrival there were already some fifty or more people sitting in the auditorium, waiting for the show to begin. They were seated in four rows, two on both sides of the room, facing each other. The central space between the rows and the stage in the back were left open for the performers. Most of the
seats were already taken and we had to wait a bit longer for everyone to settle in. Soon the lights went off. The performers were two young female actors and five war veterans (all male). The plot followed the journey of a young man, played by one of the female performers, from his life on the fringes of society through his joining the war and his psychological transformation during the war, to his attempt to return to a life of postwar normalcy. The return was far from easy and he faced many obstacles, all the while haunted by his traumatic memories of the war. Some time in the middle of the performance the veterans joined in with their personal testimonials about the wars. At this point we (the audience) were bombarded with a barrage of personal narratives of suffering combined with distorted sound effects. While we were listening to the stories of each of the five men, skewed close-ups of their faces were projected on a large screen behind them. If the intention was to cause an exhausting emotional impact with the audience, this worked with me. The performance then turned into what seemed to me a story of dominance and submission communicated by a blend of fascist, femme fatal and S&M aesthetics that I did not enjoy in this context at all.

The play was followed by loud applause. It seemed that the performers and the organisers were happy with the reception. Some twenty people stayed in the auditorium for the discussion. Among them were two psychiatrists and several of their assistants from the WTC, the director of the performance, a group of six or seven veterans, the performers, and several people from the audience whom I never met before. There was a general feeling of satisfaction in the room. The discussion immediately turned into self-congratulatory praise of the performance. One woman in her mid forties raised her hand to share her thoughts about the play. She presented herself as an actor/director and manager of an NGO in Belgrade. She said that she enjoyed the performance very much and found it very important that someone was finally talking about these people. Then she corrected herself and said that it was even more important that veterans were telling the story from their own experience and that she could understand how difficult all this must have been for them. She then went on to share her personal experience of living in Belgrade in the 1990s, away from the war, and remarked that she was deeply ashamed because of her complacency. She further added how for a long time after the wars had ended she felt ashamed to say that she was Serbian and from Belgrade. Then she mentioned how it would be interesting to hear what
some of those people from the other side would have to say about the performance. A man from the audience quickly remarked: ‘I am one of those from the other side; from Sarajevo.’ Some people laughed. The conversation continued in a similar tone. Another woman, an actor, praised the performances of the two female actors and agreed with the woman who spoke before her that it was very important for people to finally step out and openly talk about their participation in the wars. After her one psychiatrist from the WTC told us about the challenges of sharing such deeply intimate experiences in public and in front of audience. All the while, the war veteran performers remained silent.

At this point I could not help but think: what would some of the war veterans with whom I worked have to say about the performance? Would they share the same enthusiasm with the people in the Rex? Would they think that what was said expressed their views? Would they feel that they had something in common with the war veterans for whom the organisers said they were performing? I was convinced that most of them would not wait to see the end of the show and that they would not agree with the way their identities were constructed and communicated. In fact, I was sure that many would be disappointed by the way people perceived them as both victims and perpetrators. Since this was a performance ‘by war veterans for war veterans,’ I raised my hand to add a comment and said exactly that. For a moment I felt that the comment undermined all of the previous laudatory remarks. I could see that the two women who first shared their views and the director were not pleased with what I had said. The first of the two women who shared their opinions at the beginning of the discussion briefly commented that it is sometimes difficult to recognise the value and complexity of a performance for people living outside of the theatre community. Her comment was followed by that of the director who said that he agreed with my observation that the performance should ‘live on’ by travelling and by being performed in front of different audiences at venues that are not reserved only for the select few of the Belgrade cultural elites.

In hindsight, what surprised me the most was that even though the veterans openly shared their intimate fears and communicated their war experiences during the performance they did not participate in the discussion other than to say how thankful they were to be afforded the opportunity to participate in this important performance even when they had no formal training
in theatre and acting. The part of their performance that seemed to have attracted most attention was the way they communicated their own repentance and a sort of moral coming of age. Yet, although they were introduced as the stars of the show, they found their own (traumatic) experiences secondary to those of the professionals running the show.

However, the fact is that the language that was understood and shared by both the veterans and members of the enlightened liberal cultural elites was the language of trauma. The one difference was that in this setting the latter also openly extended their sympathies for veterans’ suffering during and after the wars. Still this understanding extended only as far as all of them could share the feelings of shame for their own (in-) actions, as one of the women intimated when she told us that for a long time she felt ashamed to say that she was Serbian and from Belgrade in front of foreigners. As she explained, she did not want to be held responsible for those same wars that the veterans fought in. Therefore, in this context, there was no room for recognition of veterans’ patriotic sacrifices. Instead, the expectation was that everyone would show remorse for their participation in the wars and their failure to act against them. In addition, there was a sense that everybody agreed that participation in war falls outside of the scope of normal experience, which makes it ‘traumatic’ by definition. In fact, it seemed that the language of trauma, which this particular group of veterans had mastered through their dealings with WTC, was the only lingua franca that was understood and shared by everybody who stayed for the discussion.

The performance at the Rex and the conversation that followed exposed the ways in which veterans were perceived as not belonging to the domain of the liberal ‘civil society.’ It is important to note here that the latter was largely shaped by its critical response and opposition to Milošević’s regime of the 1990s that sent people to war (Fridman 2011). Although this separation between ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’ society is flawed and limited in its conception, it was deeply ingrained among many of my interlocutors. However, this essentialist view is not exclusive only to Serbia as civil society was (and is) commonly evoked as a trope of opposition to totalitarian regimes, particularly in postsocialist societies of Eastern Europe (Kopecký 2003:3). Here it is important to emphasize that Serbian liberal civil society organisations need to be contrasted with a range of nationalist organisations that emerged at about the same time, but which, although similar in
structure, typically promoted non-liberal agendas (Mikuš 2014:17). Therefore, in Serbia ‘civil society’ is not to be understood as belonging only to an apolitical sphere. Instead, it is defined by a ‘plurality [of] scenes of associational practice that articulate diverse visions of a legitimate social order and see each other as antagonists rather than parts of a single harmonious civil society’ (ibid.:18). Another important point is that in Serbia civil society organisations were usually equated with ‘NGOs’ (*nevladine organizacije*), although the latter term was never legally recognised (Paunović 2006).\(^{140}\)

Therefore, as I mentioned above, since the beginning of the 1990s, Serbian political and cultural elites had, to a degree, been regarded as belonging to two diametrically opposed political-ideological and social-cultural camps with the first one supporting the regime of Slobodan Milošević and its nationalist warmongering politics, and the second promoting antiwar, liberal-democratic, pro-European values. Although this dichotomy has a longer history, the most recent ideological ‘schism’ emerged in 1992 with the foundation of the so-called ‘Belgrade Circle’,\(^{141}\) at the time an informal and to a large degree politically powerless grouping of intellectuals who shared a sense of urgency for resisting what they saw as the ‘terror of nationalism’ that dominated the consciousness of the majority of the Serbian society, including most of its intelligentsia (see Konstantinović 2002:8–10).

As the wars raged in Croatia and BiH, the Belgrade Circle members held regular protest meetings in the Students’ Cultural Centre in Belgrade and published their speeches in some of the few available anti-regime newspapers, such as the daily *Borba* where they first started to refer to themselves as members of the Serbian cultural *altérité*, which they branded the ‘Other Serbia’.\(^{142}\) From the very start the term was linked with a set of values that were ‘civil,’ urban, cosmopolitan, antiwar, antinationalist and in direct contrast to those of the so-called ‘First Serbia’ that were rural, primitive, nationalist, and authoritarian (see

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\(^{140}\) Instead of ‘NGOs,’ the Serbian law recognised ‘associations of citizens,’ ‘endowments’ and ‘foundations’ (ibid.). Nevertheless, in everyday speech some of these terms, including ‘NGOs,’ were used interchangeably. Here I mostly use NGOs, as that was the term that was most often used by my interlocutors.

\(^{141}\) Beogradski krug.

\(^{142}\) ‘*Druga Srbija*’ could also be translated as the ‘Second Serbia’, but I opted for the ‘Other Serbia’ to emphasize the dimension of alterity that was purposely employed by the intellectuals who coined it in order to present themselves as the ‘cultural others’ in relation to the nationalist majority of the 1990s Serbian society.
Jansen 2001; Spasić and Petrović 2012:23). What is more, the first category was typically reserved for the antinationalist civil/civic opposition,\footnote{\textit{Građanska opozicija} is derived from \textit{grad}, the Serbian word for `city` (Jansen 2005c:152).} while the latter represented the `rural newcomers` who, supposedly, came to occupy central positions in politics and government, as well as provided the bulk of manpower for Milošević`s wars (Jansen 2005c:152; also see Mikuš 2014:69). That being said, the relation between the two camps should not be understood as a type of balanced opposition, as the term `First Serbia` was not chosen or accepted as a self-definition, but was rather imposed as an artificial category and a label by those who wanted to create a sense of their own positive difference (Spasić and Petrović 2012:38). Here I wish to stress again that the context in which this occurred in the 1990s was such that the `Other Serbia` was represented by a relatively small, yet resistant and persistent group of people with virtually no effective political influence in Serbian society.

However, by the time of my fieldwork the circumstances had changed so that the conception of the `Other Serbia` as an elitist cast that was impenetrable for the vast majority of `ordinary folk` was very much alive among the veterans I spoke to. What is more, it was the veterans who now claimed that they represented a marginalised majority, while accusing the members of the `Other Serbia` for occupying all the key positions in the government and, even more importantly, for being granted privileged access to the much needed local and international sources of funding. Yet, as I will show, they would not make such arguments in front of members of NGOs. In fact, as I have argued throughout this thesis, underneath there laid a murkier reality and some of the VAs that I worked with started to openly flirt with the NGOs from the so-called `Other Serbia` in an effort to increase their own visibility and make their claims known to the general public. Another reason was the potential to gain access to funding from different donor agencies. However, although both groups had a common interest in securing funding, the opposition cannot be reduced only to a matter of status, money and self-interest. Instead, as I will show, there also existed important and seemingly unbridgeable political–ideological differences.

With this in mind, in the section that follows I will outline a sequence of events that led to the development of a large collaborative project between the VA
in Rakovica, the Centre for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD) from Belgrade, and the WTC from Novi Sad. All of these organisations were driven by the desire to reach out to each other and engage in a much-needed dialogue about the wars and the postwar social and political reality in which large numbers of people – both veterans and civilian victims of wars – remained invisible. The sequence of events and workshops that led to the development of public dialogues at CZKD, and the dialogues themselves, laid open a number of important issues that existed within and between different VAs, ‘civil’ sector NGOs, as well as an array of different stakeholders, including freelance writers and antiwar ‘peaceniks,’ retired high-ranked officers of the JNA and politicians, some of whom were still active in the Serbian government.

**My becoming an activist (for a tainted cause)**

One person in particular, Noa Trester, whom I met during the performance at the Rex, proved to be particularly important in forging the link between war veterans in Rakovica and several important civil society organisations. Noa was an artist, activist, and veteran of the Israel–Lebanon war. She arrived in Serbia several years earlier and for some time lived in a village near Majdanpek, eastern Serbia, where she started an art project and a cooperative in which women from the surrounding villages used their skills to produce and sell various items of clothing. Noa went on to develop several other ‘art interventions’ that centred around the themes of rural–urban transformations, and included, for instance, the oral history of the Romanian Vlachs in eastern Serbia, the return of the Serbian Gastarbeiter,144 and finally experiences of postwar social and political reintegration of war veterans, and the plights of former workers of some of the failing Serbian industries. At the time she was not yet linked to CZKD, but through a stream of timely coincidences she soon found her way in. In fact, with our assistance, veterans from Rakovica became some of the central actors in the repertoire of workshops at CZKD, while Noa became one of the programme managers within the platform Ignorant Schoolmaster and His Committees145 where I also participated as an assistant and moderator in the public dialogues.

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144 German for ‘guest worker’ or ‘migrant worker.’

145 Učitelj neznalica i njegovi komiteti.
Soon after the performance at the Rex, Noa and I made plans for her to visit the VA in Rakovica and when she finally arrived, the veterans greeted her with a warm welcome. The fact that she was a war veteran herself, and a woman/foreigner who shared similar experiences of war to the men in Rakovica, made her at the same time an exotic other and an insider. As usual, the president of the VA Mile Milošević wasted no time and immediately shared his litanies about the dire straits of the veteran population in Serbia and without hesitation asked for our help with the writing up of project proposals that could potentially earn the VA some funding. It was not too long before it became obvious that Mile and his veterans lacked some of the basic resources and skills that were essential if they were to approach some local and international funding agencies. As I already mentioned (see Chapter 4), the context had changed so that war veterans no longer felt, or indeed had, the ideological and material support they had in the 1990s (at the expense of other ‘civil society’ organisations). One of the new problems for Mile’s VA was that no one spoke English, and although they had an active website, they rarely (if ever) used their email accounts. Even more importantly, they had no practical experience in dealing with non-veteran civil society organisations. Mile mentioned that several years earlier they had a visit from an NGO that was promoting peace and reconciliation in the region and had plans to organise meetings between Croatian and Serbian war veterans, but in the end the project was never realised. When it came to the local civil society, he was very skeptical that any cooperation would be possible. His main concern was that antiwar activists would not be able to reconcile their political views with him and his veterans. Nevertheless, he was determined to search for potential partners outside of the VA sector.

The ‘cure’ of political subjectivation vs. trauma therapy

The first organisation that we approached was, again, WTC from Novi Sad. At the time this seemed as a reasonable choice since they already had several years of experience in organising workshops for war veterans. By the same token, for WTC this was an opportunity to, for the first time, add the VA in Rakovica to the
list of their partners. WTC was founded in 1999\textsuperscript{146} by a group of volunteer psychologists and psychiatrists who provided free counseling to residents of Novi Sad during the NATO bombings (The War Trauma Centre 2010). In 2002 they received a donation from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and started a collaborative project with an NGO from Stuttgart, \textit{Ohne Rüstung Leben},\textsuperscript{147} after which they extended their initial programme to include the work on postwar social reintegration of war veterans and their families (Ljubičić 2009:8). As part of the project they trained new counselors in Serbia and Macedonia and started to combine trauma therapy with workshops on peace and reconciliation through several new initiatives, such as the ‘Constructive Usage of Wartime Experience’ and ‘War Participants as Peace Builders’ (Media Centre Belgrade 2003). In addition, over the next several years they built an extensive network of contacts with a range of international (and to a lesser degree local) organisations that focused on providing psychosocial support for people with direct experience of war (Ljubičić 2009:9). One of its founders, Vladimir Beara, told me in an interview that the Centre had an ambitious plan to expand into an organisation that would include all the states in the Balkans.

However, during out first meeting in Rakovica it became evident that Mile and his veterans, Milan, a representative of WTC, and Noa all had different ideas about the type of project that would best correspond to the needs of the VA. Milan was approaching the issue very tactfully as his understanding was that the VA in Rakovica was a place where potentially a large percentage of people were burdened with traumatic memories of wars and possibly suffered from psychological disorders, such as PTSD. Milan was trained to listen to people and motivate them to talk about the wars, while at the same time drawing their attention to what he called the potential for the ‘constructive use of veterans’ experiences,’ which was, as I mentioned earlier, one of the therapeutic methods employed by the WTC. He was very clear that these initial stages were crucial for establishing a relationship of mutual trust and he approached this issue very carefully.

\textsuperscript{146}At the time its name was the Society for the Protection of Mental Health of War Veterans and Victims of Wars of 1991–1999 (\textit{Društvo za zaštitu mentalnog zdravlja ratnih veterana i žrtava ratova 1991–1999}). They changed the name to its present version in 2002.

\textsuperscript{147}German for Life Without Weapons.
However, the problem was that neither Noa nor the veterans whom Mile had selected to participate in the meetings showed any particular interest in Milan’s methods. Moreover, the stories that veterans shared lacked the personal introspective dimension and intimacy that Milan was searching for and would instead typically return to discussions about why the former state fell apart, why people chose to go to war and why they were forgotten by the Serbian state and society after the wars. It seemed to me that veterans found the talk about trauma worthwhile only to the extent that it served to show how marginalised the population of war veterans was in Serbia. In fact, for Mile this was a very important point, as his main goal was to find ways to make the predicaments of his members and the VA heard in public and to forge new links with different NGOs. In fact, he told me that his ideas about a project were completely different. Instead of providing trauma therapy for his membership, he was thinking that we ought to make the general public realise that veterans from Rakovica were not ashamed of their participation in the wars and that the real issue was that the state ignored the sacrifices of the majority of veterans, while it favoured only a select few of the VAs that were close to the government. However, for Milan the focus on veteran politics and competition for state resources was a serious problem that would ultimately lead us to a dead end or would at best undermine his efforts at helping the veterans to deal with their traumatic experiences. For Noa, however, Mile’s critiques of the state and the insistence on subversion of the existing powers and hierarchies within the order of VAs was a sign of a need for political subjectivation of war veterans and she was ready to pursue this route.

As the time went on, we managed to identify several core issues that veterans in Rakovica thought needed to be addressed, two of which appeared particularly important for them: the organisation of the system of funding for the VAs, which Mile and his veterans found to be outdated, clientelistic and corrupt, and the need for the introduction of a new and more inclusive law on the social protection for war veterans and their families. Although Milan and his colleagues from Novi Sad were initially skeptical about what he somewhat pejoratively called the politicisation of veterans’ experience, they nevertheless agreed to offer their support, at least in the beginning stages, until they could see how the project would develop.
For Noa, veterans’ claims would have a chance to be heard only if they could be channelled to Belgrade’s liberal political/cultural elites, and for that she made plans to link the VA in Rakovica with CZKD, which was recognised as one of the central and most influential organisations of the so-called ‘Other Serbia’. Although Mile never refused this option, he thought that this was an impossible mission, as CZKD was the hotbed of antiwar and antinationalist activism and the meeting point of some of the most outspoken critics of Milošević’s regime. In short, this was a place where, in his view, veterans were and would always be considered *persona non gratae*. However, guided by his conviction that his veterans had nothing to be ashamed of and that they in fact deserved full recognition for their participation in the wars, he decided not to back off from the plan. Here I have to note that Mile’s insistence on a clear cut separation between the powerful ‘liberal’ cultural elite that renounced the wars and the powerless ‘patriotic’ veterans who were all proud of their participation in ‘defensive’ war was simplistic. Contrary to his opinion, most members of Serbian political and cultural elites have not renounced the role of Serbia in the post-Yugoslav wars. Rather, it appeared that the veterans and people at CZKD stood on two different poles at either end of the political-ideological spectrum so that there were those who regarded Serbian war generals as heroes and those who never did. In reality however, most people in Serbia were somewhere in between.

**Decontamination of the ‘Other’ kind**

The idea about a need for a centre that would serve as a gathering place for antiwar activists, artists and intellectuals who opposed the violent destruction of Yugoslavia first transpired among the members of the Belgrade Circle, some of whom were credited for coining the term ‘Other Serbia’. From the very beginning, the centre was intended to serve as a place for art interventions and antiwar and antinationalist activism. Its future director Borka Pavićević, a well-known dramaturge and activist, notes how in the early 1990s, while she searched for a location for the new centre she even considered to move into an empty morgue in a hospital in Belgrade:
A morgue would have been a kind of a symbol of our despair and inability to stop the Serbian forces that were shelling Sarajevo for three and a half years with, as never seen before, sniper and artillery fire [...] Somebody even came up with an idea to surround the cultural center with barbed wire, while Stojan Cerović suggested that in front of it we build a ‘Monument to the Deserter!’ (Pavićević quoted in Nikčević 2013).

However in 1995 the local municipal government, led by the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), granted them a place in the, at the time dilapidated, Pavilion Veljković. Since then CZKD remained devoted to pursuing its initial objectives and established itself as a place of art and activism, or as its members would have it, ‘an autonomous zone of [a] permanent campaign for the freedom of individuals and solidarity, as well as an agent of cultural and artistic production that supports these values’ (October Salon 2011). When prompted about the ‘decontaminating’ element in the name of the Centre, Pavićević explained that this was a deliberate attempt to evoke dedication to the fight against nationalism and the culture of ‘contaminated patriotism’ (Pavićević quoted in Munk 2001:28).

With all this in mind, it is no wonder that Mile and his veterans showed distrust and skepticism about the potential for a successful partnership with CZKD. What is more, in addition to Pavićević who was bestowed with a kind of cult status by Belgrade’s cultural elites and critics of the political establishment of the 1990s, numerous other important figures, many of them women, acted within and through CZKD, such as Sonja Biserko, the president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia (HO), Staša Zajović, the co-founder and coordinator of the NGO Women in Black, and Nataša Kandić, the director of the Humanitarian Law Centre in Serbia (FHP).

All of these persons, and many others, were well known in Serbia and internationally as outspoken critics of the Serbian involvement in the post-Yugoslav wars and the atrocities that were committed against civilian populations.

148 Before the Second World War, the Pavilion was known as Museo Veljković, and was one of the first private museums in Serbia. In 1947 it was nationalised and in 2012 returned to its owners (Politika Online 2012).
149 Helsinki komitet za ljudska prava u Srbiji.
150 Žene u crnom.
151 Fond za humanitarno pravo.
in the name of the nation. What is more, they were remembered as key actors in
the protests against the wave of mobilisations of the 1990s and for their later work
with civilian victims of war (see Jansen 2005a:64–71). The fact that this group of
women acted in such forceful opposition to nationalist violence was not well
received by Serbian patriots, including the male dominated institutions such as the
military, as their work posed a serious threat to official authority (cf. Greenberg
2006). What is more, their sustained advocacy for the protection of ethnic and
sexual minorities had an effect on the entire Serbian NGO sector, which, in
addition to being perceived as ‘anti-Serbian’ was now also labeled as ‘gay’ and
‘effeminized’ (Veličković 2012:259). For all these reasons, all of these women
were threatened on numerous occasions by members of Serbian nationalist groups
and branded as ‘traitors’ (izdajnici) and ‘foreign mercenaries’ (strani plačenici).
In fact, not far from CZKD, on a wall of a building overlooking Slavija, one of
the busiest squares in Belgrade, there was a large graffiti reading ‘Nataša Kandić
Traitor!’ which stood as a grim reminder that for some people peace and
reconciliation were not yet achievable, or at least not on the terms advocated by
organisations and persons who dared to challenge nationalist patriotic sentiments
and who testified in front of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former
Yugoslavia (ICTY) against Serbs accused of war crimes.

Yet, despite these deep ideological differences, both the veterans from
Rakovica and members of CZKD reached out to yesterday’s foes and agreed to
organise a series of dialogues about the effects of the post-Yugoslav wars. In the
following section I will sketch out the dynamics of these dialogues as they
developed and present some of their most important and contentious moments.

Preparations for ‘Naming IT War’

Soon after the first meeting between Noa, Mile and Milan, we started writing up a
proposal for a project that would later be known as Naming IT War. The ‘IT’ in
the title stood for the euphemisms such as ‘manoeuvres,’ ‘military exercises,’ and
‘armed conflicts’ that were regularly used by the institutions of the Serbian state
and government to conceal this country’s direct involvement and potential
responsibility in the post-Yugoslav war. Thus, on the one hand the objective of
the project was to discuss the conditions that led to the intentional avoidance of
naming all those conflicts wars and, by default, to make war veterans socially and politically visible. On the other hand, the series of public dialogues were to serve as a platform for an exchange of opinions between different groups of war veterans, members of non-veteran civil society organisations, as well as civilian victims of wars. Thus, one of the important intentions was to bridge the gap that existed between anti-war activists and war veterans and to influence state institutions, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MoLSP), to create a more inclusive veterans’ policy.

Some time in August 2011, several donors finally offered their funding support.\(^{152}\) At about the same time we intensified our preparations for the dialogues. Initially the responsibility for the project was supposed to be shared between the VA in Rakovica, CZKD and WTC. Mile and his veterans offered their house in Rakovica for the preparatory meetings, while the main series of workshops and dialogues were to be held at CZKD and coordinated through its platform Ignorant Teacher and his Committees that was led by Noa, Branislav Stojanović-Trša, and Jelena Veljić. It was also agreed that all meetings at CZKD would be audio and video recorded and made available free of charge via different websites as well as promoted through local media outlets.

However, there was still no consensus about the exact role of WTC, as there were constant disagreements about the extent of their involvement in a project they viewed as straying away from the focus on the creative use of veterans’ war experiences toward discussions about veteran politics. Furthermore, when it came to workshops that they were supposed to coordinate they had a set of very strict requirements about how these should be organised and executed and which themes needed to be discussed. The primary focus in all of them would be on talks about veterans’ experiences of war, recollections of traumatic events, training sessions about PTSD, and workshops about postwar reintegration into civilian life. In addition, each session would require a presence of one or more experts in the field of psychological trauma, some of which would need to make regular trips from Novi Sad to Belgrade. All this, of course, meant that a substantial amount of the funding would in fact need to be spent on covering the

\(^{152}\) The funding came from: the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung South East Europe; Open Society Foundation in Serbia; the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self-Government; and the Cultural Centre of Belgrade.
costs of WTC’s educators. One day I was present during a ‘bargaining’ process in which a representative of WTC set the lowest price for their services at 200 euros per day per person, which did not include travel costs. Although these costs were initially accepted, in reality they further distanced WTC from CZKD. Moreover, during this time Noa and Trša increasingly expressed their concerns about WTC’s insistence on talks about trauma and openly complained about the lack of any language that would not fetishise veterans and their supposed ‘vulnerable’ position. Nevertheless, it was agreed that WTC would provide their expertise during the beginning stages of the project and link CZKD and the VA in Rakovica with veterans from other parts of Serbia who participated in some of their earlier workshops.

When it came to my role, from the start I was perceived as a sort of mediator. Thinking back I would say that from the very first time that I introduced Noa and later Milan to veterans in Rakovica, I was viewed as an important link between all of them. In fact, Noa would never go to Rakovica without my company and neither would Milan, at least in the beginning. This also affected the ways in which I was included in the project. Although in many ways I, with my vested interests had an important role in its design as I was eager to listen to and take part in discussions about the issues that I found central to my own research, I was also keeping my distance by emphasising my ‘volunteer’ position and by letting the others have a final say about the course of the project. This, combined with my ‘outsider’ status as a student of anthropology at the University of Manchester who was not a member of any NGOs, but who also had a degree of informed understanding and a certain depth of knowledge about veterans in Serbia, made me a suitable candidate for a moderator in the dialogues. However, I would learn only later what this role and being in the ‘front line’ really meant.

As my field notes for this period show, not everything went smoothly with the preparations in Rakovica and I marked the evening of our first meeting as particularly dramatic. Mile had no problems with compiling a list of veterans who would be taking part in the dialogues and most of them accepted the offer, but one member of the VA who was perceived as especially important, retired general Milisav Sekulić, kept refusing to join the project. General Sekulić was one of the ‘friends of the house’ of the VA in Rakovica who Mile and his veterans were very proud of. In fact, most other VAs that I visited during my fieldwork typically had
at least one or two high-ranking (and usually retired) members of the officers’ corps who took part in important meetings and gave an aura of legitimacy to their organisations. However, general Sekulić was special not only because of his high rank, but also due to his dedication to research about Serbian war veterans and his books in which he venerated their sacrifices and criticised the regime of the 1990s and the JNA’s high command for failing to protect the former state from dissolution.\textsuperscript{153} What is more, the VA in Rakovica sponsored at least one of his many publications.

It is also important to note that Sekulić’s rank in the JNA was that of colonel, while he earned his rank of major general in the ‘Army of Serbian Krajina’, the armed force of the self-proclaimed ‘Republic of Serbian Krajina’,\textsuperscript{154} which was a Serb-controlled territory in Croatia that was never recognised as a legal entity by the international community. Still, for veterans in Rakovica there were no doubts about the reality of Serbian Krajina as many of them fought for its establishment and preservation, hence the rank of general Sekulić was also never brought into question. As I mentioned above, general Sekulić kept rejecting our invitations to participate in the dialogues, which came as great disappointment for representatives of CZKD and veterans from Rakovica. The message he kept repeating was clear and firm – he simply was not convinced that CZKD was the right type of place for discussions about war veterans and he would not bring himself to such humiliating position to have to argue with persons who were well known for denigrating war veterans and the JNA. He reminded us that according to his experience most people usually refused to accept the ‘real’ truth about the wars and was afraid that the audience at CZKD would do the same. However, Noa, and Trša would not give up trying to convince him that this was precisely why it was important that he should join the project, so he could argue against such remarks and act as a representative of all those persons who felt the same way as he did.


\textsuperscript{154} The Republic of Serbian Krajina lasted from 1991 until its dissolution in 1995.
While all this was happening in Mile’s office, the rest of us who came in for the first meeting waited in another room in the back of the house. Soon enough, some of the other veterans also started to express their doubts about the project. They asked me whether certain people, such as Nataša Kandić from FHO would also be there and said that if that was the case they would not continue with the project. As we waited for a resolution, there was a sense in the room that the entire project was forced upon everyone and that it was doomed to fail. Yet, no one decided to leave that evening, and even general Sekulić who seemed very disturbed kept his position in Mile’s office knowing that the meeting would not continue without him. Although in the end he agreed to stay on the project, as almost certainly everyone who knew him suspected he would, this was not the only occasion when he and some of his high-ranking colleagues would need to be reassured how important it was that they remained involved. It seemed to me that the generals felt particularly threatened because they would have to deal with civilians who were not particularly sensitive to military ranks and hierarchies nor thankful for their war-time achievements.

In October 2011 the project was included in the programme of the 52nd Oktobarski Salon (October Salon) in Belgrade, a well-known annual international fair of conceptual arts. This gave the project additional press coverage and brought it even closer to Belgrade’s cultural elites. This was also the time when the meetings at CZKD had started. The three main dialogues that would be held in front of live audiences in the Pavilion centred on themes that veterans and antiwar activists identified as crucially important for the understanding of the postwar social and political reality in Serbia. These included the non-existence of any official state recognition of the wars and war veterans as an important category of the population with special needs, the urgency for a dialogue between VAs and other non-veteran civil sector NGOs, and a discussion about the outdated and exclusionary law on the social protection of war veterans and their families. Each of the three public dialogues was preceded by a workshop in which the participants exchanged their views about the topic of discussion and made plans who to invite for the main meetings. Likewise, each public dialogue was followed by a meeting in Rakovica which was intended to give the opportunity for the participants to reflect on the previous meeting. All the dialogues and workshops, except for the post-dialogue meetings in Rakovica, were video recorded and
attended by 15 to 20 persons, including war veterans from Rakovica and other parts of Serbia, as well as members of CZKD. The public dialogues at CZKD were held in front of live audiences.

Most of the veterans who took part in the first meeting and in later dialogues were veterans from the VA in Rakovica, but also from other places from across the country, such as from Novi Sad, Zrenjanin, Vlasotince and Vranje. Although they took part in the first preparatory meeting, the representatives of WTC eventually decided to back out of the project because they found that it became too political. Nevertheless, the veterans who entered the project via WTC decided to stay in the project, which members of the CZKD regarded as their point of ‘coming of age.’

Although it was intended as a briefing, the first workshop lasted for over four hours. In the beginning the conversation revolved about personal experiences of war. This was understandable because for most people this was the first time they had met. What is more, for some veterans this was the first time that they had talked in an antiwar activist NGO. This, however, was not true for the veterans from WTC. What is more, during the first meeting they were branded as ‘gentlemen veterans,’ because they had more experience with non-veteran NGOs and because the language they used was perceived as more sophisticated than that of veterans from Rakovica. They were also viewed as different because they would often turn to what I would describe as ‘trauma talk’ through which they emphasised the importance of reflection on individual experiences of war, which often made their discourse appear as more introspective and ‘therapeutic’ than that of the rest of the group. Despite these differences, however, they easily bonded with veterans from Rakovica and some of them continued to collaborate on new projects.

As I already mentioned, during the preparatory meetings we compiled an extensive list of people who would be invited to participate in the public dialogues, which included a number of important figures from public life in Serbia, such as politicians and legal experts with direct influence on the creation of veterans’ policy, representatives of different VAs, as well as members of civil society NGOs that were recognised as belonging to the so-called ‘Other’ Serbia.
In the end most of them responded to our calls, while some of those who did not, such as Miro Čavaljuga, the assistant minister at the MoLSP, were openly criticised in front of the audience for their disregard for veterans and for presumably wanting to preserve the status quo.

It is important to note that dialogues were occurring at the same time as the protests of students and workers in which some of the members of CZKD had an active role. Jelena Veljić, a student of anthropology at the University of Belgrade and an activist, was one such person. She told me that the protests motivated many people to take part in some of the ‘alternative’ workshops at CZKD. In fact, all these events made CZKD appear as a sort of activist headquarters with people constantly coming in with first hand information about events that were happening in different parts of the city. Many times we would hear important and detailed stories about events that would only much later be reported by the media (if at all), such as when a group of neo-Nazis broke into one of the rooms at the University of Belgrade and attacked Jelena and some of her colleagues while they were in protest. Although she even recorded this event and showed it to some of the administrators at the University and to the police, the attackers were never caught, while the students were accused of provoking the attack. Some of the veterans eventually joined student protests, while some students came in for the public dialogues. At the same time, veterans met some of the former workers that had been participating in similar workshops in which they discussed the effects of the closing of their factories and the loss of their jobs. These interactions in many ways helped to bring veterans closer to other groups with similar problems, and in fact revealed that many veterans were also former workers who had lost their jobs. Furthermore, they found that although their agendas for action may have been different, they all shared at least one identical goal: affirmation and some sort of state recognition of their needs. Let me now turn to the sequence of public dialogues.

The list was extensive and included, for example: Rasim Ljajić, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and his assistant Miro Čavaljuga, who was in charge of the sector for war veterans and disabled persons, several presidents of state-supported VAs and retired generals of the JNA, Saša Janković, the Ombudsman, Sonja Bisserko, director of HO in Serbia, Staša Zajović of theWomen in Black", Miljenko Dereta, director of Civic Initiatives", Miodrag Linta, president of the coalition of associations of refugees in Serbia, Miloš Vasić, journalist and one the founders of the prominent Serbian weekly Vreme, Zoran Janjić – Zokster, well-known publicist and satirist, and many others.
Public dialogue 1: Who owns the war(s)?

The objective of the first public dialogue was to discuss the postwar living conditions of war veterans and their families, as well as to outline some of the main challenges that were faced by the VAs in their relationship to the state and to other non-veteran antiwar NGOs. After my brief introductory note, the discussion started. As soon as the speakers started presenting their views about the predicaments of war veterans and VAs in Serbia, it became obvious that this dialogue was in fact a novel experience for many of them. In fact, several persons, including veterans from Rakovica and, for example, Miljenko Dereta of the Civic Initiatives, admitted how they found it very important to be able to talk to each other even when they did not share the same views about wars or issues such as Serbian patriotism. What is more, one of Dereta’s comments revealed some of the deeply engrained stereotypes about war veterans. Using a rather apologetic and confessional tone, he said that the general public in Serbia regarded war veterans as radical nationalists. This view, he explained, had largely been influenced by the media that never aired images of a regular, organised army, but instead showed pictures of strange looking men and disorganised paramilitary units. All of that, he argued, was done purposely by the state that portrayed the wars as butchery and at the same time invited people to take part in them. Thus, according to him, on the one hand the state-media apparatus effectively influenced public perception about the wars and created an image of war veterans as killers who willingly took part in senseless bloodshed, while on the other hand it relegated the responsibility for the participation in the wars to those same people who were mad enough to take part in them. However, although Dereta is correct when he argues that the official media presented the wars as a chaotic fight, apart from a few minor exceptions most of them portrayed Serbs as having to protect themselves against the butchery done by others (see for example Thomson 1999).

Dereta’s comments reflected deep ideological differences that existed between antiwar activists and war veterans that ran through all the dialogues and would never be reconciled. Yet, the discussion also exposed other important issues one of which was the official state denial that the ‘wars’ were ever fought. Dereta noted that the only war that ever officially happened in former Yugoslavia was the NATO bombing of Serbia. He also said that while he could understand
veterans’ concerns about their systemic invisibility, he could not understand their faith in state institutions when it was obvious that the state refused to deal with the past in order to avoid any responsibility for the wars or potential war reparations.

Miloš Vasić, a journalist of the weekly Vreme, agreed with these observations and added that the problem was that Serbia had lost four wars and that for most people every conversation about war veterans was at best a source of discomfort (nelagoda). However, he went further and said that in this sense veterans were victims of mad (slaboumna) and suicidal (samoubilačka) politics whose orchestrators wanted this part of Serbian history forgotten. Still, he recognised the importance of exerting a sustained pressure on the government and warned that it was crucial that VAs act together because any disagreements between them would eventually be used at their expense. Branimir Stojanović – Trša thought that it would be cynical to say that veterans’ demands were naive because the same mechanisms that worked against veterans were also employed against students and the unemployed in order to prevent their fight against nepotism, corruption and privatisation. Therefore, he asked rhetorically, ‘how was it possible that veterans and anti-war activists were in conflict when their claims were essentially the same?’

However, although it seemed that most veterans in principle agreed with Trša’s views, some of their comments revealed that their position and understandings of the problem were different. For example, one veteran shared a story about his brother who died in the war in Brčko, Bosnia. At the time his brother was a member of a police unit from Belgrade. However, despite this, his brother’s family received no compensation for their loss and were in fact discouraged from seeking any benefits. The reason for this, he argued, was that the state did not want to admit its active involvement in the war in Bosnia. He also argued that former members of police units were the most neglected category of veterans because they were not officially recognised to have fought in any of the wars, including the war in Kosovo. To this he added that although he was a loyal citizen and a war veteran and that his brother died fighting for his country, he was still not recognised as equal to Serbs. The reason for this, he argued, was that his last name was Bulgarian and ended in ‘-ov’ instead of ‘-ić’. Yet, although he was aware of all these issues, he also said that since he fought for this state, he had to believe in whatever it was doing. A female veteran and a refugee from Croatia
shared a similar view. She spent several years guarding a military post in a war zone and at the same time cared for her children and husband who was also a veteran and a war-disabled person. She added that because of the time spent in the war and having to care for her family she had no opportunity to get a job and pay for her own pension insurance. She thought that it would only be fair if the state would allow her to use those years of war service toward her retirement, as many veterans in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina can do. However, even though, like the person above, her participation in the war was not recognised by the state, she said that she was a proud patriot and that she would teach her children to be patriots too. It follows from these examples that veterans claims were different because they thought that their sacrifice was part of a legitimate ‘defensive’ war. They also thought that the state should compensate them for this sacrifice more than other groups in Serbian society. What is more, unlike others, they wanted to publicly express their loyalty to the Serbian state.

As the conversation turned toward a discussion about VAs and their relationship to other NGOs in Serbia, Dereta remarked that civil society in Serbia, as anywhere else, was not a unified, single value system and added that it should not be forgotten that there are also many differences in opinion between the antiwar activists. Similarly, two members of the political party Veterans’ Movement of Serbia noted that in the Serbian parliament there were at least four generals and over forty veterans who refused to defend the interests of war veterans. They used this as a pretext to promote their party and its president Saša Dujović who, they argued, was the only person who was not corrupt and who sincerely cared about war veterans in the parliament. Their president was also, they argued, the first person to talk about the need for a new definition of the veteran status and to push the idea about the introduction of national recognition for war veterans. Some of the veterans protested against this kind of political promotion. Mile Milošević from Rakovica, visibly excited, once again reiterated that VAs did not cooperate with each other because many of them had been created by the state which was favouring a select group of VAs over the others. Jelena Veljić from CZKD argued that the state supported different interest groups in order to promote the idea of a conflict in which the interests of one group were threatening for those of the others. She shared the view of some of her colleagues from CZKD that NGOs should not be acting as conflicting interest groups, but
instead acknowledge the fact that their problems were shared and that, for instance, students, workers and veterans faced the same issues. Although it seemed that veterans and antiwar activists may have reached a point of agreement about certain issues, the next public dialogue showed that there were still many differences between them, most of which had to do with conflicting views about the responsibility for wars.

**Public dialogue 2: The polyphony of talk about the war**

The second dialogue was intended to bring together individuals and representatives of NGOs that included war veterans, antiwar activists and civilian victims of the post-Yugoslav wars that were typically regarded as having opposing views about the responsibility for the wars and the need for a postwar social recognition of war veterans. This was also the meeting in which two retired generals of the JNA, Jevrem Cokić and Milisav Sekulić, would have their presentations about the number of casualties among the armed forces and the acts of desertion and draft dodging. The first topic was to be presented by general Sekulić from Rakovica, who again had special requirements and demanded that he should be allotted much more time than we had initially planned. As a moderator, I had to inform him that this was a problem because we had several people scheduled to present that evening in a very short time. However, he again threatened to pull out from the discussion and from the project. What is more, some of his acquaintances started to complain against my alleged lack of respect for the generals and for what they viewed as my continuous efforts to undermine their presence and authority. Although we eventually came to an agreement by which he was granted a bit more time for his presentation, our minor ‘squabble’ soon proved to be an overture for a much larger disagreement between them and war veterans on one side and most of the antiwar activists on the other.

General Sekulić’s presentation was basically a long exposition of a whole range of figures he came across during his research about the numbers of soldiers who died in combat or were pronounced missing. Although he was known for his passionate arguments about what he described as the state neglect for war veterans and for his critiques of JNA’s high command for their failure to save the former state from disintegration, the tone of his presentation that evening was very
different. What is more, the gist of his critiques closely resembled those that were raised in the previous dialogue and were aimed at the Serbian Ministry of Defence and Miro Čavaljuga, the assistant minister at the MoLSP, for their disregard for war veterans.

The next in line for a presentation was general Cokić, who also entered the meeting via the VA in Rakovica. From the moment he started to share his views about the legality of draft dodging and desertion from the JNA, it was clear that his ideas would not be well received by the antiwar activists. I could see some of them, including Borka Pavićević from CZKD, shaking their heads in disapproval. Unaware of the atmosphere in the room, general Cokić continued and described desertion as a ‘complex form of negative individual and collective behavior,’ and concluded with the following statement:

Considering not only the professional, but also the human, patriotic and constitutional duty for the protection of one’s country, [all varieties of] desertion represent grave forms of criminal acts and acts of treason against one’s nation, army, and people. Therefore, when discussing acts of desertion, we are essentially talking about treason, which was, unfortunately, very common in the process of destruction of Yugoslavia and its armed forces.

At this point Pavićević interrupted the general’s presentation, saying she could no longer listen to it. Her protest caused outrage among some of the veterans as well as parts of the audience. Some people stood up threatening to leave the meeting, while others shouted that her behaviour was unfair and unacceptable. As I was trying to calm the situation, Pavićević continued and said that she was aware that it was not right for her to interrupt the presentation in this way, but also reminded everyone in the room that despite everything she after all was the host (domaćin). She then spoke directly to the generals and said that she would tell them the same thing that she told one general at a military airport in Mostar, BiH, in 1991 when he refused to evacuate civilians who were trying to escape from a war zone. She said that it was the generals who betrayed the constitution of the former country in which she lived and to which she belonged and added:
It is my moral and legitimate right to refuse to go to the army that is taking sides in conflict [...] We were all paying the JNA as well as the clergy, but they betrayed my country [...] So I think that the JNA is responsible [for the post-Yugoslav wars] and that it is a legitimate right of every person to refuse to serve in the military that did not protect that country [...] I think that desertion is the pride of this country [applause] and those soldiers who deserted are patriots, not traitors.

Pavićević also reminded all the participants that she in fact intended to erect a monument to the deserter as a symbol of all those who have risen against the war that was not a spontaneous event but a deliberate plan for the destruction of Yugoslavia.

She was immediately followed by a forceful response of Staša Zajović of the Women in Black who said that she could not understand how it was possible that they (antiwar activists) were placed on the level plane with those who manufactured death. She continued with critiques against the JNA referring to it as a ‘criminal army’ (zločinačka armija) that waged a ‘war of aggression’ (agresorski rat) and committed a ‘crime against peace’ (zločin protiv mira). As she continued, people started reacting and calling for me to stop the meeting. Zajović was not responding to my appeals to shorten her intervention, until Mile shouted, ‘That was enough woman!’ (Ajde dosta ženo!) During the break that followed, veterans protested against what they viewed as a set up. They were deeply offended by Pavićević’s interruption of general Cokić, while one of the veterans said that if I were to continue to moderate he would leave the meeting. However, in the end it was not this person who decided to leave, even though I continued to moderate, but the two retired generals and Miodrag Linta, the leader of a refugee coalition in Serbia. Some of the antiwar activists helped to spread word about the generals leaving the meeting by repeating the phrase ‘the generals have deserted.’

The second part of the meeting continued in a more relaxed atmosphere. One of the veterans, Novica Kostić from Vlasotince, who also went throught WTC training, reflected on what he heard that day and said that he was aware that he took part in a war that hurt many people but that he was ready to accept responsibility for his own actions. He further added that he envied those who acted...
against the wars and that he was sorry that he did not join them. But, it was too late for that, he said, and now he had to live with the label of war veteran.

One of the central objectives of this dialogue was to identify the position of those who perceived themselves as victims and it turned out that in fact everybody did, including the retired generals, civilian victims of war, antiwar activists and war veterans. In the beginning it seemed to me that this usurpation of victimhood would work against the efforts to create a constructive dialogue, however, it soon became evident that this was regarded as an important way in which to make claims for recognition and state support.

**Public dialogue 3: The (non-) existence of a law on veterans**

In contrast to the previous two dialogues, the third passed in a more formal tone. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the law on the social protection of war veterans and their families. The idea was to move beyond discussions about the effects of the wars and the relationship between war veterans and antiwar activists toward a more focused reading of the proposal for the new law.

However, from the beginning we were faced with several obstacles, which reflected the situation that veterans had been facing for many years when making demands for the introduction of a new law. Although we learned from different sources that there were several versions of a draft of the new law circulating in the MoLSP and some state-sponsored VAs, we could not get a hold of any of them. In fact, during my meeting with Miro Čavaljuga, the assistant minister at the MoLSP, I was promised a copy of the draft. However, he could not seem to find one and there was no one available to print a new copy. I had a similar experience during one of my meetings with Nebojša Orlović, the president of the Association of Disabled War and Peacetime Veterans of Serbia (URMVIS; see chapter 4), only this time I was told that the draft was still in preparation and that I would be given a copy as soon as it was completed, which in the end never happened. Despite this, and because of his close links to the MoLSP and the team of legal experts who were in charge of the creation of the new law, Orlović was identified

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as one of the key persons for this dialogue. However, just like Čavaljuga before him, he never responded to our invitation.

The only version of the draft that was publicly available was the one we found on the website of the Veterans’ Movement of Serbia (PVS). However, this version had a number of inconsistencies and many veterans found it useless for their discussion. Nevertheless, the veterans present identified several themes, which they used as entry points for future discussions about the proposal for a new law, which included the need for a more inclusive definition of the war veteran status, the definition of war and peacetime disabled veterans, the status of the families of killed and missing soldiers, and the role of the so-called ‘national recognition’ for war veterans. The latter pertained to veterans’ request to be granted a special status that would make them different from civilian disabled persons and victims of wars. Therefore, all claims were about increasing special treatment in scope and range. Even though at the time the third meeting seemed less successful than the previous two, in reality it resulted in new important workshops in which veterans managed to draw the attention of legal experts who helped them in the creation of a draft of the new law.

**Post-dialogue afterthoughts**

The project ‘Naming IT War’ was an attempt to forge links between people with different experiences of war, particularly war veterans and antiwar activists, and to exert pressure on the institutions of their Serbian state which kept denying the existence of any other wars except for the 1999 war in Kosovo. It emerged from the realisation that the mechanisms of silencing acted to suppress the experiences of different social groups, including war veterans, antiwar activists and civilian victims of wars. As a consequence, those groups were left, and in many ways encouraged, to compete for very limited resources, which they often did by emphasizing their own ‘victimhood’ at the expense of the others. Yet, it is important to note that although many of the groups that took part in the dialogues perceived themselves as different, some of them in fact had certain things in common. For instance, war veterans emerged largely from the population of workers who lost their jobs during and after the wars, and some of them even participated in anti-regime protests after the war. Similarly, many families of the
killed and missing soldiers participated in antiwar protests and had problems with having their losses recognised by the Serbian state.

However, the lack of systemic responses to the effects of the wars and the official negation that some of those wars even occurred created a sense of mistrust in relation to persons with direct war experiences who were in many ways perceived as the ambivalent others. This created a context in which the political elites could keep avoiding to address their own responsibility for the wars and for not attending to the postwar predicaments of large sections of Serbia’s population, such as war veterans and the unemployed. What is more, by refusing to directly deal with its responsibility for the wars, series of successive governments transferred that responsibility to civil sector organisations, which largely established their political position through the construction of ‘victim hierarchies.’ This was so even in those instances when some of them communicated their supposed non-political stance by equating all forms of suffering with the phrase ‘we are all victims of war.’

On a different level, in some important ways, several of the veterans’ accounts reflected close links in the relationship between veterans, military, citizenship and the state. According to Sasoon-Levy (2009), contemporary military service in Israel is perceived as one of the most important elements in the construction and expression of citizenship variously defined as minimal obligation to the state in exchange for civic, political and social rights (in the liberal sense) and by participation in the contribution to the ‘common good’ (in the republican sense) that is often articulated in terms of security (ibid.:321). However, not everybody serves in the military for the same reasons and contrasting views about exemption reflect both subjective and systemic differences in the recognition of different civic rights and duties. Furthermore, not all people show the same kind of compliance with the hegemonic demand for military service. This is particularly true in times of war when people are pressed to make tough choices about whether or not to take up arms, and in postwar periods when competing discourses about the need for social recognition of war time sacrifices emerge. In fact, the latter proved to be one of the most important aspects in the tensions that existed in the relationship between veterans, antiwar activists and different representatives of civilian victims of war, where each group had their own views about their place in the victim hierarchy.
Conclusion

In this thesis I have investigated the ways in which war veterans of the post-Yugoslav wars mobilised a particular discourse of victimhood in order to stake their claims for welfare entitlements and status recognition from the Serbian state and society. Therefore, I have analysed the predicaments of Serbia’s veterans and how these were instrumentalised as particular discursive tools to differentiate and grant a particular social group with special rights to material and symbolic resources. My analysis tracked the practices through which veterans communicated their demands for recognition and how these were attended to by the Serbian state and society. Following Foucault, I have treated these practices as techniques of government and exercises in postwar governmentality (Foucault 1990).

My starting assumption was that following the post-Yugoslav wars Serbian veterans emerged as a formidable group of citizens who, in comparison to other groups of welfare beneficiaries, to various degrees of success re-invested their privileged position in the relationship to the new nation state. However, my research revealed that their condition was much more ambiguous. Most persons who fought in the post-Yugoslav wars and who considered themselves war veterans were not granted with any special benefits. Instead, only those veterans who suffered injuries and had a validated disability status could qualify for any war-related compensation. What is more, large numbers of veterans spent time fighting in some of the war zones in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia during period that was not officially recognised as ‘war’ by the Serbian state. This, in combination with what veterans regarded as the continuation of the privileged treatment of the ‘old’ ex-fighters from the Second World War, further impacted their sense of pride and added to their ‘injury’.

All this was occurring in what I have described as zones of ambiguities and unsolved contradictions. As I have shown, two decades after the post-Yugoslav wars, Serbia still had no official records about the exact number of killed and missing persons, or about the size of its veteran population. This also means that the state officialdom had no information about postwar living conditions of a large portion of its population. In fact, this suggests that Serbian
political elites indeed have shown incapacity and unwillingness to recognise the full extent of their involvement in the post-Yugoslav wars, which impacted veterans’ and other people’s ideas about nationality, the state and their rights as Serbian citizens.

In order to account for the overlapping competencies of various state institutions I started my investigation with a Foucauldian analysis of the top-down approach of the Serbian veteran policy. This involved an investigation of the ways in which the bureaucratic apparatus of the Serbian state defined the category of ‘veteran’, as well as how this category was used to determine veterans entitlements to welfare benefits (Chapter 1). Although the framework of governmentality proved useful in exposing workings of the state through its techniques or regulation and categorisation (Chapter 2), its also showed that it had blind spots as it could not account for the ways in which large numbers of people were left ‘unregulated’ and ‘uncategorised’. What is more, it could not provide an explanatory framework for what appeared as the movement of people between different state and non-state domains, nor justify people’s calls for an increased presence of the state in their lives (Chapter 3). Furthermore, it did not register what appeared as new forms of political subjectivation (cf. Ferguson 1990).

As I have shown, Serbian war veterans exposed some of those shortcomings of the governmentality framework through the ways in which they voiced their discontent with what they described as the state policy of neglect for their marginal position in Serbian society. Veterans communicated their disenchantment with the state officialdom and the wider society through what I have observed as narratives of multiple lacks and losses, which they employed to point to particular sites of ‘injury’ (cf. Brown 2006) that affected their sense of dignity (Chapter 3). Those sites included specific state institutions, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy which, they argued, was not advocating for a more inclusive veterans’ policy, the clientelistic network of state-supported veterans’ associations (VAs) that did not provide for their patrons, the corruption and conflicts between some of the VAs (Chapter 4), and that part of the Serbian ‘liberal’ cultural elites which, in their view, showed no concern for the patriotic sentiments and the sacrifices they made in the wars.

Yet, under conditions in which they had to search for new sources of funding and ways to increase their public exposure, some veteran groups decided
to forge alliances with civil society organisations which they traditionally regarded as their ideological opponents (Chapter 5). In the process Serbian war veterans, as well as members of non-veteran civil society organisations engaged in the formation of new political subjectivities. This collaboration revealed new workings of power that are not characteristic of just the Serbian state and society, in which ‘injury’ is increasingly instrumentalised in a way to present different status groups as victims in need of state protection. Yet, as Brown (2006:xii) notes, in this paradoxical process, in which states recognise different politicised identities, its subjects typically replicate those same powers of the state which they seemingly oppose.

As we have seen in the context of increasing existential threats, competition among various interest groups, and the emergence of new identity politics, are at the confluence of powers driving postwar governmentality in Serbia. For these reasons it is likely that veterans plight for the recognition of their sacrifices will continue to resurface in the future and influence the appearance of new interest groups and claims for social recognition. The question to pose here is: what kinds of formal and informal contracts might arise from those reconfigurations?
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