

UDK 929 Princip G.

## ICONOGRAPHY OF AN ASSASSIN: GAVRILO PRINCIP FROM TERRORIST TO CELEBRITY

Robert J. Donia  
University of Michigan, USA

*Abstract: By assassinating Habsburg Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo in June 1914, Gavrilo Princip became a historically significant but polarizing figure. Consecutive regimes and political movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries either valorized or disparaged him in order to promote their particular ideology or world view. In the last four years of the Habsburg Monarchy (1918-1918), he was characterized by the monarchy's supporters as a murderous terrorist; during Royal Yugoslavia (1918-1941) he was portrayed as a Yugoslav or Serb national hero; during the Second World War (1941-1945), Nazis and Ustasha viewed him as a degenerate criminal; and in the time of socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1992) he was represented as a youthful hero of armed resistance. During the last two decades of socialism, he increasingly assumed the role of celebrity, one who drew attention and incited curiosity based not on a moral or political assessment of his deed but rather as a figure of monumental consequence in world history. Although politicians and popularizers continue to promote politically-motivated assessments of his life and deed, Princip's posthumous persona as a global celebrity is most likely to remain more widespread and appealing than either his ideologically-inspired heroic or his demonic representations.*

By firing the fatal shots that killed Francis Ferdinand and Sophie on June 28, 1914, Gavrilo Princip became not only an assassin but a secular icon as well. Physically nondescript and unimposing while alive, Princip served posthumously as a *tabula rasa* onto which others could project their interpretations of him. Consecutive regimes and political movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have used him as a propaganda tool, distorting his life and deed to comport with their ideologies and world views.



"Gavrilo Princip at the time of his trial"

In this paper I will describe five different characterizations ascribed to Princip over the past hundred years: terrorist (1914-1918), Yugoslav national hero (1918-1941), degenerate criminal (1941-1945), revolutionary youth hero (1945-1970), and celebrity (1970-present). I argue that the "celebrity" is likely henceforth to be the dominant and most durable of Princip's attributed personas, dooming rival interpretations to oblivion.

## The Unbuilt House of Imperial Gloom (1914-1918)

In the days following the assassination, many Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina considered Princip and his accomplices to be Serb national heroes. The assassins became known among Serbs as the Heroes of St. Vitus Day (*Vidovdan* – June 15 by the Gregorian calendar; June 28 on the more widely used Julian calendar), a date already commemorating the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. In contrast, Habsburg officials and their supporters in Bosnia mourned the deaths of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, valorizing them as martyrs of the Habsburg Monarchy. At the same time, imperial officials began to vilify Princip and his accomplices as criminals and terrorists.

Princip and twenty-four alleged co-conspirators were arrested, brought to trial in Sarajevo, and found guilty of participation in the assassination.<sup>1</sup> Three of the accused were sentenced to death on 29 October 1914 and hanged in a military prison in Sarajevo on 3 February 1915. Thirteen others received prison sentences ranging from three years to life. Nine defendants were acquitted. The court faced a dilemma in Princip's case, since the judges were presented with two birth certificates, one showing that he had not yet turned twenty by June 28 and another showing that he had already reached that age. Remarkably, the court gave Princip the benefit of the doubt, spared him the death penalty, and sentenced him to twenty years in prison. He was transferred to a prison in Theresianstadt, in the present-day Czech Republic, to serve his sentence. He died of tuberculosis April 1918 while in prison and was buried in an unmarked grave.

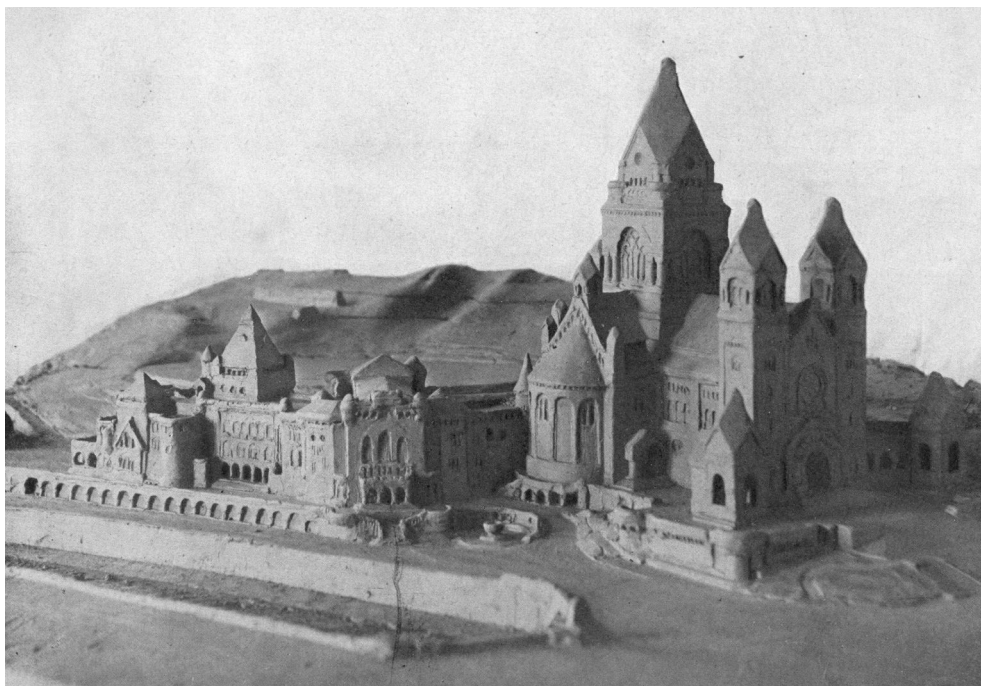
In the days after the assassination, leaders of all religious communities in Bosnia held memorial services for the Archduke and his wife. Speakers at the services mixed denunciations of the assassins with expressions of grief and mourning for the imperial couple. On July 4, 1914, memorial services were held in the Catholic Cathedral at 9:00 a.m. and in the nearby Serbian Orthodox Church at 10:00 a.m.<sup>2</sup> On July 12, some of Sarajevo's most prominent and politically active Serbs, Jews, Muslims, and Croats gathered in the Croatian Central Bank building and agreed to collect donations for a monument to honor the Archduke and Sophie.<sup>3</sup> The assembled dignitaries voted to gather funds, but they reached an impasse failing to agree on the location, character, and design of the proposed memorial.

---

<sup>1</sup> On the trial and sentences, see Dragoslav Ljubibratić, *Mlada Bosna i Sarajevski atentat* (Sarajevo: Muzej grada Sarajeva, 1964), 194 and 205-206.

<sup>2</sup> *Sarajevski list*, July 4, 1914, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Sarajevski list*, July 14, 1914, 1-2.



Clay model of proposed memorial church

The stalled efforts of pro-Habsburg leaders in Sarajevo were dwarfed by a project of the Emperor Francis Joseph to build a grandiose but gloomy memorial church dedicated to the assassins' victims. We know of this undertaking owing to a booklet found in the library of the Regional Museum (BCS *Zemaljski muzej*, German *Landesmuseum*) that included detailed sketches and models by the sculptor Eugen Bory.<sup>4</sup>

The Imperial court proposed an enormous, cavernous Catholic church. The church, which would have cast a pall on all who entered, was to be located beside the Miljacka River at the assassination site, much like the Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood (*Cerkov Spasa na Krovi*) constructed at the site of Czar Alexander II's March 1881 assassination in St. Petersburg, Russia.

In retrospect, the heavy Romanesque design and brooding interior of the proposed church seemed to portend the Monarchy's impending doom as well memori-

---

<sup>4</sup> Eugen Bory, *Spomen-crkva Nadvojvode Franje Ferdinanda i Sofijin dom u Sarajevu* (Vienna: C.Kr. Dvorska i državna tiskara, n.d.).



Drawing of proposed church interior

alizing Francis Ferdinand and Sophie, each of whom was to have been represented kneeling before an altar in a large sculpture in the church.

The imperially-sponsored structure was never built. Mercifully, it remained only sketches and images in a diminutive yellowing pamphlet. Not until June 28, 1917, the third anniversary of the assassinations, did officials erect a monument across the street from the actual site.



MODEL KIPA NADVOJVODINA (PO PROFESORU EUGENU BORY)



MODEL KIPA VOJVODKINJE (PO PROFESORU EUGENU BORY)

Drawings of statues of Francis Ferdinand and Sophia

The monument was a secular structure comprising two soaring Greek-style columns topped with engraved images of the assassination's two victims.<sup>5</sup> Catholic priests presided over a large crowd that gathered to witness the monument's dedication.

The monument did not last long. According to the historian Paul Miller, it was torn down in the early months of Royal Yugoslavia and its parts used to pay those who had helped construct it only a few years before.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Paul B. Miller, *Yugoslav Eulogies: The Footprints of Gavrilo Princip* (Pittsburgh: The Carl Beck Papers, University of Pittsburgh, 2014), 14. Miller ably describes the shifting memorial landscape at the murder site.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



Dedication of Monument of Atonement

### Yugoslav National Hero (1918-1941)

Officials and many citizens of Royal Yugoslavia (first named the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918 and renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929) conceived of Princip as a *Yugoslav* national hero – he had, in the popular imagination, fired the first shots in a war that ended in the formation of Royal Yugoslavia. At the assassination site, officials placed a plaque that read, in Cyrillic, “On this historic place, Gavrilo Princip pronounced in favor of freedom on June 14/28, 1914.” These words profoundly minimized Princip’s deed – declaring oneself for freedom is a far cry from murdering the heir to the throne of an empire – but it should be remembered that at the time, Royal Yugoslavia’s officials were cultivating all three recognized peoples of Yugoslav – Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes – and wished to avoid alienating any of them.

As national differences arose and intensified in Royal Yugoslavia, Princip was increasingly presented as a Serb national hero as well as a Yugoslav icon. How can

we untangle these two elements of his iconic status? Which was the transcendent identity?

Princip's post-assassination utterances and writings suggest that he was both, but that his fundamental loyalty was to Serb nationalist ideals, which in turn led him to support Yugoslavism. In 1916, while incarcerated, Princip spoke for many hours with a psychiatrist, Dr. Pappenheim, with the permission of Habsburg officials. In two written statements and conversations from prison in 1916, Princip showed himself conversant with ideologies of socialism, anarchism, Serb nationalism, and Yugoslavism. But he expressly denied being driven by socialist or anarchist principles. "We as nationalists, although we have read both socialists and anarchists, don't concern ourselves much with this question," he wrote, "since we hold that each of us has another duty, a national duty."<sup>7 (1)</sup>

Princip suggested that his commitment to Yugoslavism derived from his intense Serb nationalism. In summarizing his conversation with the assassin on May 12, Pappenheim paraphrased Princip's words as follows: "Unity! ... Everything associated with his ideals was destroyed. ... My Serb people! [Princip has] hope that things might get somewhat better but is still skeptical. Ideals of youth: Unity of the South Slav peoples, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, but not under Austria."<sup>8 (2)</sup> Presuming Princip was being candid, we may conclude that he saw Yugoslavia as the *means* by which the Serb national *end* was to be achieved. Indeed, most Serb nationalists supported a unified Yugoslavia as long as it remained a viable political option. They subsumed their Serb nationalism within their enthusiasm for a unified, centralized Yugoslav kingdom, which they envisioned as fulfilling their Serb nationalist hopes.

In 1920, officials of Royal Yugoslavia, with the cooperation of the government of newly-formed Czechoslovakia, arranged to exhume Princip's remains, transport them to Sarajevo, and rebury them in a Serbian Orthodox cemetery at Vrbanje (near where the Skenderija Sports Center now stands). Mourners and sympathizers made the new graves at Vrbanje a second shrine (after the assassination site itself), and many visited the graves on Serbian Orthodox religious holidays.

As the kingdom lost favor among many non-Serbs, support for Yugoslavia increasingly became a Serb affair. In the late 1930s, some Serb nationalists took to

---

<sup>7</sup> *Gavrilo Princip's Bekenntnisse: Ein geschichtlicher Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte des Attentates von Sarajevo; Zwei Manuskripte Princip's; Aufzeichnungen seiner Gefängnispsychiaters Dr. Pappenheim aus Gesprächen von Feber bis Juni 1916 über das Attentat, Princip's Leben und seine politischen und sozialen Anschauungen* (Vienna: Rudolf Lechner & Sohn, 1926), Letter of Gavrilo Princip dated May 12, 1916, 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

feeling betrayed by their fellow South Slavs, whom they accused of weakening Yugoslavia and rendering it vulnerable to German or Italian invasion. They saw in Princip a Serb national patriot who had sacrificed himself to advance the cause of Yugoslavism, and they called upon others to follow his example. By the late 1930s Princip had lost much of his Yugoslav patina and was more frequently identified as a Serb martyr. In 1939, when Sarajevans were conducting drills to defend their city against a widely anticipated outside invasion, one Serb writer explained how Princip's deed represented a clarion call for others to stand up for Royal Yugoslavia:<sup>9</sup>

“In these days more than ever, the words of this hero must be remembered in free Yugoslavia. ... Those for whom Gavrilo Princip sacrificed his life, must know today that his testament was a unified Yugoslavia. We must preserve that testament and be ready to sacrifice new victims for it.”<sup>10 (3)</sup>



Koševo Memorial Chapel, built 1939

---

<sup>9</sup> *Jugoslovenska Pošta*, August 20, 1939, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Jugoslovenska Pošta*, August 21, 1939, 4.

In 1939, authorities unearthed from the cemetery at Vrbanja the remains of the St. Vitus Day Heroes and moved them several hundred meters to the north to a specially constructed Serbian Orthodox chapel in the Koševo cemetery. The chapel, designed by a Belgrade architect, largely followed Serbian Orthodox church architectural conventions but featured a large red brick cross incorporated into its eastern side.

Without public announcement or ceremony, the remains of the St. Vitus Day Heroes were moved to the chapel prior to its formal dedication in October 1939.<sup>11</sup> The Koševo Chapel thereafter took over the role of a second shrine, after the site of the assassination itself, visited by those commemorating the St. Vitus Day Heroes and their deeds. The chapel reaffirmed Princip's essential Serbness by highlighting the deceased conspirators' connections to the Serbian Orthodox Church.

### Nazi and Ustasha Pariah (1941-1945)

In April 1941 German and Italian forces rapidly conquered all of Yugoslavia. In short order, German occupiers created a puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia, and installed a murderous regime of Croatian extreme nationalists, the Ustasha



Hitler contemplates Princip memorial plaque presented to him on his 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday on April 20, 1941.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Jugoslovenska Pošta*, September 19, 1939, 4.

(Ustaša), to rule Bosnia and most of Croatia. Upon entering Sarajevo on April 17, German troops removed the Cyrillic alphabet memorial plaque from the assassination site and sent it to Berlin where it was presented to Hitler on the occasion of his 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday, April 20.<sup>12</sup>

The Nazis assigned approximately the same urgency to this task as they did to the destruction of Jewish synagogues and the deportation of Jews, indicating the importance they assigned to ending the valorization of Princip and his co-conspirators. Both German occupiers and their puppet Ustasha rulers vilified Princip once again as a terrorist and criminal.

### Anti-Fascist Youth Hero (1945 -1975)

Four years later, on April 6, 1945, Partisans drove German occupiers from Sarajevo and began rehabilitating Princip. They purposefully recast him as a youthful hero of anti-fascism, but they waited a full month to dedicate a new memorial plaque while they arranged for a youth organization to honor him.<sup>13</sup> On May 6, 1945, communist youth leaders convened a congress of Bosnian youth (*Ujedinjeni savez antifašističke omladina Bosne i Hercegovine – USAOBiH*) and voted at its opening session to unveil a new plaque the next day to replace the one sent to Hitler.<sup>14</sup> The new memorial was aimed squarely at the recently-defeated Germans. The plaque did not mention communism, socialism, revolution, or nationalism of any kind – appropriate omissions, given the broad support the Partisans enjoyed and popular hopes that the new Yugoslavia would be governed by a broad coalition of anti-fas-



Princip footprints and plaque, 1953-1992

---

<sup>12</sup> [www.politika.rs/rubrike/drustvo/Principova-spomen-ploca-Hitlerov-licni-pfen.html](http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/drustvo/Principova-spomen-ploca-Hitlerov-licni-pfen.html), viewed February 17, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Borko Vukobrat, “Prvi Kongres USAOBiH-a i otkrivanje spomen-ploče Gavrilu Principu,” in *Sarajevo u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji*, vol. I, 267-270.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

cist forces. The new plaque read: “As a sign of everlasting thanks to Gavrilo Princip and his colleagues, fighters against German conquest, the youth of Bosnia and Herzegovina dedicate this plaque. Sarajevo, May 7, 1945.”<sup>15</sup> (4) Both the plaque’s pointedly anti-German language and Princip’s youthful anti-fascism were replaced in a new plaque dedicated in 1953. The new memorial broadened Princip’s iconography to include all of Yugoslavia’s peoples but mentioned no specific enemy. The text presented Princip as a part of the long-term struggle for the liberation of “our peoples” without naming them, and it failed to identify precisely from whom they were seeking liberation. It read:

“From this place on June 28, 1914, Gavrilo Princip proclaimed with his shots a popular protest against tyranny and for our peoples’ centuries-long struggle for freedom.”<sup>(5)</sup> Officials also carved out footprints in the sidewalk directly in front of the plaque, giving visitors an opportunity to reenact the assassination at its approximate location. The first floor of the corner building at the assassination site was converted into a small, single-room museum and filled with exhibits valorizing Princip and his revolutionary deed.

## Celebrity

During the last two decades of socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1992), Princip became a global celebrity. This was to be the most important, and likely the most enduring, of his reincarnations. By the 1970s, Princip’s oft-changing political colorations were overwhelmed by his status as an icon of popular culture. Barring the collapse of the global capitalist system, Princip will likely first and foremost be known as a global celebrity, although he may also have a secondary, less consequential persona as embodying good or evil, terrorist or national hero, nationalist or transnationalist.

The term “celebrity” has a specific meaning in scholarship on the subject. In short, a “celebrity” is someone who is celebrated for being who he or she is, what he or she has accomplished, or the extraordinary wealth he or she has accumulated. The term brings to mind images of Hollywood actors possessed with beauty or good looks, great wealth, huge homes, and a lavish lifestyle. Studies of the phenomenon emphasize that the celebrity’s elevated status evokes envy in the rest of us.<sup>16</sup> Most of us yearn to ascend to his or her level, to be in his or her presence, and to make contact (visual, verbal, or physical) with the celebrity, in order to render him or her a bet-

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

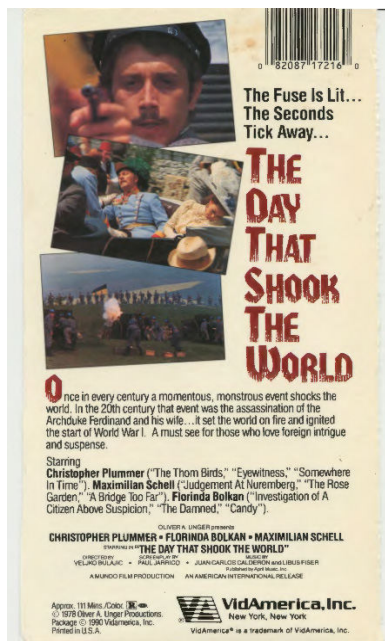
<sup>16</sup> P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 3.

ter known and less inscrutable person. The celebrity becomes the object of our intense curiosity, awe, and admiration; he or she incites in us a desire to “uncover the real person behind the public persona,”<sup>17</sup> so that we can size them up, satiate our curiosity, and experience vicariously the deeds that make or made them so special. Importantly, the celebrity’s moral merit and political orientation is of little or no consequence to those who hold him or her in awe.

We are fascinated with celebrities not because they are good or evil, but because they are unique or did something extraordinary. As noted by David Marshall, “The celebrity can be described only as an ambiguous sign in contemporary culture.”<sup>18</sup> The celebrity functions

as a Rorschach test, becoming, like an inkblot, a complex, ambiguous, and inscrutable being onto whom others project their interpretations and fantasies. Contained in the public perception of every celebrity is an unresolved creative tension, heightening intrigue and allowing each observer to attribute to the celebrity the meaning or values that he or she most cherishes. So the global public is largely indifferent to whether Princip is a terrorist or national hero, the heated controversy that rages today in the former Yugoslavia. To most of those living outside that region, he is known for committing a unique, monumental deed; they are disinterested in other labels that are applied to him but are fascinated by the sheer monumentality of his life and deed, whether famous or infamous.

Celebrity is a phenomenon of the age of global capitalism. It relies upon global market forces, mass marketing campaigns, electronic and print media, and inexpensive travel. Human circus exhibits were among the first celebrities of the modern era. Most of these early celebrities were physically abnormal: a woman who claimed to be 161 years old; midgets; giants, people with too many, or too few, extremities; peo-



The Day that Shook the World

<sup>17</sup> Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 3, citing Richard Dyer.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

ple with large heads or oddly shaped bodies.<sup>19</sup> In the nineteenth century, the general public learned of such people from newspapers, pamphlets, and other mass media of the time. They craved to see these celebrities in person and proved willing to pay to see them, making the circus economically viable. But travel was time-consuming and costly. Few members of the curious public had the means or time to travel far to partake in such morbid entertainment. Thus, instead of millions traveling to a central location to see celebrities, the circus brought such human exhibits to hundreds of cities and towns, remaining in each place for only a few days. When radio and television became widely available, public awareness of such attractions spread even more quickly and widely. And when it became possible to travel cheaply by rail and air, the “celebrity” transitioned from the odd, grotesque, and irregular to a beautiful person, a model human being to be envied and emulated. The universal adulation of the celebrity was captured by Goldie Hawn, in the role of wealthy Joanna Stayton in the 1987 movie *Overboard*: “Everyone wants to be me!”<sup>20</sup>

It takes a marketing campaign to make a celebrity, and Princip was no exception. Seeking to make Princip a global celebrity, Yugoslav authorities in 1975 supported a motion picture about the assassination, entitled “*Sarajevski atentat*” in Bosnian, and in English under the more compelling title, “*The Day that Shook the World*.” The cast, costumes, and publicity aimed to entertain a foreign audience rather than to validate a political ideology.

I was in Sarajevo during the filming and recall a lumbering, antiquated car appearing on the city streets – the car, shipped from Vienna, in which the Archduke and Sophie had been shot. The producers marketed the film completely differently to Yugoslavs and to foreigners. On the cover of the videotape container, foreigners who “love foreign intrigue and suspense” were urged to see the film. It was marketed as entertainment – specifically, historical drama – rather than as a political indictment or exoneration. The film promised a ringside seat for a “momentous, monstrous event” rather than blame, absolution, or ideological justification.

So obsessed were the filmmakers with the celebrity phenomenon that they listed as stars the Canadian-born actor Christopher Plummer (Francis Ferdinand), Austrian-born Maximilian Schell (Djuro Šarac); and Brazilian-born Florinda Bolkan (Sophie). Irfan Mensur, the Bosnian-born actor who played Princip, had no celebrity status in the West and warranted neither a photo nor mention on the cover of the English-language videocassette, even though he was the film’s central character.

---

<sup>19</sup> James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) 1-12.

<sup>20</sup> Leslie Dixon (writer), Garry Marshall (director), *Overboard*, 1987.



Scenes from film

Mensur was far from the stoic, expressionless Gavrilo Princip who stood trial for killing the heir to the throne in 1914. In the film he is glamorous, handsome, confident, and conversational, wearing a fine suit and bow tie—dressed, in short, more for an evening at the Oscars than at a tumultuous assassination. He is an affable soul, cavalierly exchanging best wishes with fellow conspirators and receiving their support. He shoots his pistol with careful calculation, focused determination, and a sure hand. Other characters in the drama are likewise personally attractive and properly dressed for a celebrity appearance. Florian Bolkan, as Sophie, loses none of her Brazilian good looks or fashionable hair style as she reacts with theatrical horror to the Archduke's graceful passing from this world. All the players are dignified, self-possessed, and unblemished in this sanitized rendition of one of history's brutal transformative moments.

Particularly in socialism's later years, Princip was represented physically as the essential rugged, handsome Hollywood celebrity. In the Young Bosnia Museum at the assassination site, Princip was crafted in relief as athletic and coarsely attractive, with curly hair, a jutting jaw, and penetrating eyes. In the same museum today, Fran-



Unidentified tourist, 1987  
(Believed Princip fired a semi-automatic  
weapon to strike his targets)

cis Ferdinand and Sophie are represented as attractive and ceremoniously attired manikins. They, too, have become beautiful, fashionable people, their faces expressionless but their apparel immaculate and colorful.

Like other celebrities, Princip lured others to imagine their own participation in the deed that made him famous. Footprints embedded in the sidewalk helped the visitors imagine themselves carrying out the killings. The footprints served as a visual invitation to visitors to experience vicariously what Princip had seen, done, and felt in that fateful moment. Many visitors had their picture taken while standing in the footsteps, enabling them to prove to family and friends that they had truly visited the site and imitated the deed. One visitor, imagining an event even more cataclysmic than it had actually been, pantomimed Princip firing a semi-automatic weapon to carry out the killings.

Officials arranged for similar reenactments in late June 2014, on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination, by placing at the assassination site a replica of the car in which Francis Ferdinand and Sophie were riding when they were killed. Visitors to the site dressed in attire reminiscent of that worn by the Arch-

duke and his wife, paying to have their pictures taken while posing in the car's back seat. An Elvis Presley impersonator wielding a yellow water pistol mockingly reminded the crowd that someone had actually been shot there a hundred years ago, making the performative event even more entertaining. By engaging in these reenactments, visitors could participate vicariously in the events of a hundred years ago and provide photographic evidence of their connection to the celebrity protagonists.

The adulation of Princip was temporarily interrupted early in the war of 1992-1995. The footprints were ripped from the sidewalk, and the socialist-era plaque was torn from the side of the building and broken into pieces. The destruction has been widely condemned by outside observers, but it should be noted that this singular destructive act was committed by a few individuals against a highly polarizing secu-

lar political memorial. Many of those trapped in besieged Sarajevo in the early 1990s viewed the war and siege much as they perceived the assassination: an assault by primitive rural rebels on a civilized urban society. Sarajevans were acutely aware that the encircling Serb forces were systematically destroying their most treasured cultural and religious monuments. With their libraries burned, many of their government and commercial buildings damaged or destroyed, their mosques and churches being desecrated and bulldozed, and their fellow citizens being killed and wounded, a few Sarajevans exacted revenge on that secular representation of Serb nationalism within their reach. City officials, in contrast, preserved the exhibits in the Museum of Young Bosnia by secreting them in the basement of a nearby Jewish synagogue, safe from the shelling from



Museum representation of Princip,  
Sarajevo, 1980<sup>s</sup>



Destruction of the Princip memorial plaque between 1992 and 1995

Serb forces in the surrounding hills. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbian Orthodox Church in the heart of Sarajevo suffered more damage from Serb shelling than from vandalism by those under siege.

As he achieved global celebrity, Princip's political role diminished and became largely irrelevant. The global public sought to enter his aura not because he was evil or good, but because he was extraordinary and memorable: He made history (in the popular view) and helped shape our world. Like all celebrities, he generated profits when people paid for the privilege of proximity to the man and his deed. His celebrity status was promoted, both by socialist Yugoslavia and by independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, to bring people and their money to the country. The financial beneficiaries of Princip's celebrity include the airlines and bus companies that transport tourists to Sarajevo, the hotels and restaurants that serve them, and the governments of Sarajevo and Bosnia that receive additional tax revenues.

His enormous commercial potential dictated that Princip should attract as many celebrity-seekers as possible while offending none or few of them. Thus, the "celebrity" Princip is rarely portrayed today as evil or heroic, black or white. In most representations, he is colorful, significant, appealing, intriguing, but politically androgynous. Francis Ferdinand and Sophie are likewise portrayed as attractive, engaging, and elegant; stripped of their political associations, they are ethnically neutral personalities who entertain and fascinate but aspire never to polarize.

All three celebrity figures are contoured to appeal to the same outsider's curiosity that drew gawkers to the circus in the nineteenth century. Ironically, the antagonists of 1914 have become inextricably locked in one another's embrace in 2014, trapped in the personas of celebrities who once collided but now together evoke curiosity and a widespread desire to be near the site where the shootings took place.

Princip's celebrity status has rendered other representations of him obsolete or short-lived. But not everyone has abandoned the effort to exploit his memory to promote nationalist propaganda. As historians laid plans for scholarly conferences to be held in Sarajevo in June of 2014, they encountered opposition from imperial and authoritarian regimes seeking to superimpose ideological interpretations upon Princip and his signature deed. The governments of Serbia, France, and the inter-Bosnian entity of Republika Srpska worked hard to suppress all interpretations that strayed from the narrative of Princip as a martyr and hero of Serb national liberation. To that end, those politicians and ideologists tried to prevent and undermine scholarly conferences intended to foster open discussion of various interpretations.

French officials operated largely behind the scenes to sabotage the planned scholarly conferences. They sought to prevent European Union member states and



Visitors reenact a ride in the car in which the Archduke and Sophie were killed.

its central organs from providing financial support for such conferences.<sup>21</sup> Former and current officials of the Republic of Serbia and the Republika Srpska led the public effort to discredit conference organizers and undermine the conferences. Ivica Dačić, former Prime Minister of Serbia, told a reporter, “Serbia will neither allow a revision of history, nor will it forget who are the main culprits in World War I.”<sup>22</sup> Milorad Dodik, President of the Republika Srpska, denounced the planned scholarly dialogues regarding the assassination as a “new propaganda attack against the Serbs.”<sup>23</sup> The Serb polemicists found a willing accomplice in the journalist Paul Hockenos. On the eve of the conferences, Hockenos wrote a polemical attack, disguised as a news article, on the conference organized by the Institute for History in Sarajevo. He claimed that the conference “has triggered an ethnic firestorm in the

---

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Husnija Kamberović, *Aktual* (Zagreb), February 5, 2014, 59-62.

<sup>22</sup> “World War I Conference in Sarajevo Triggers Ethnic Tensions,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 18, 2014. <http://chronicle.com/article/World-War-I-Conference-in/147195/>, viewed August 5, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



Francis Ferdinand and Sophie as represented in the City Museum of Sarajevo, 2013

Balkans.”<sup>24</sup> Since Hockenos wrote the story several days before the conference began, and filed it with a dateline of Berlin (hundreds of kilometers from the event), his report on the conference itself was pure speculation. The conference produced no such “ethnic firestorm,” either within its halls or in the city where it was held, revealing Hockenos’s article to be little more than a recitation of the propaganda themes favored by Serb nationalist leaders.

Post-1990 attempts to revive Princip’s role as an ideological polarizer have proven short-lived or unsuccessful. Those who destroyed the plaque at the Young Bosnia museum in the early 1990s had to wait until war’s end to see it replaced by another, but the text of the replacement is blandly factual and imputes no political significance to the event: “From this place on June 28, 1914, Gavrilo Princip assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Francis Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie.”<sup>25</sup> (6) The Franco-Serbian effort to impose an ideological orthodoxy on interpretations of the assassination also collapsed. French officials abandoned their effort to enforce Princip’s image as national liberator, and Serb nationalists were powerless to prevent Sarajevo’s scholarly conferences from proceeding. Two conference participants, in a letter to the editor published by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, showed Hockenos’ report on the conferences to be fabricated and his partisan attack to be groundless.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Over the past hundred years, Gavrilo Princip has been serially exploited by a succession of regimes and political movements to embody their ideologies and to discredit rivals and predecessors. In the last several decades of the twentieth century, such efforts abated, and Princip and his two victims were represented as celebrities, stripped of their polemicizing traits but holding allure, intrigue, and mystery. With the failure of recent efforts to revive Princip as a polarizing Serb nationalist, he is likely to be known henceforth by the global public as an intriguing and mysterious individual who committed a monumental, history-altering deed.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> [www.politika.rs/rubrike/drustvo/Principova-spomen-ploca-Hitlerov-licni-plen.lt.html](http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/drustvo/Principova-spomen-ploca-Hitlerov-licni-plen.lt.html), viewed February 22, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> “World War I Conference in Sarajevo Produced No ‘Ethnic Firestorm,’” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 30, 2014. <http://chronicle.com/blogs/letters/world-war-i-conference-in-sarajevo-produced-no-ethnic-firestorm/>, viewed August 7, 2014.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Doch wir, als Nationalisten, obwohl wir auch sozialistische und anarchistische Schriften gelesen haben, befaßten uns nicht viel mit dieser Frage, den wir hielten dafür, daß jeder von uns eine andere Pflicht hätte, eine nationale Pflicht.”

<sup>2</sup> “Einsamkeit. ... Was in Verbindung, mit seinen Idealen war, alles zerstört. Mein serbische Volk! Hoffnung, dass etwas verbessern könne, sei aber doch skeptisch. Ideale der Jugend: Einheit südslawischer Völker, Serben, Croaten und Slovenen aber nicht unter Österreich.”

<sup>3</sup> “Stoga u ovim danima više nego ikad ranije, u slobodnoj Jugoslaviji treba se sjetiti riječi ovog heroja. ... Oni za koje sa Gavrilo Princip žrtvovao, danas treba dobro da to znaju. Gavrilov amanet je bio jedna Jugoslavija. Mi taj amanet moramo da očuvamo, i da za njega budemo gotovo na nove žrtve.”

<sup>4</sup> “U znak vječite zahvalnosti Gavrilu Principu i njegovim drugovima borcima protiv germanskih osvajača, posvećuje ovu ploču omladina Bosne i Hercegovine – Sarajevo 7. maja 1945. godine”

<sup>5</sup> “Sa ovog mjesta 28 juna 1914 godine Gavrilo Princip svojim pucnjem izrazi narodni protest protiv tiranije i vjekovnu težnju naših naroda za slobodom”

<sup>6</sup> “Sa ovog mjesta 28. juna 1914. Gavrilo Princip je izvršio atentat na austrougarskog prestolonaslednika Franca Ferdinanda i njegovu suprugu Sofiju”

UDK 329.78(497.15)"1906/1914"

## FORGOTTEN YUGOSLAVISM AND ANTI-CLERICALISM OF YOUNG BOSNIANS

Bojan Aleksov

UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London

*Abstract: Worldviews and political ambitions of Young Bosnians were a far cry from later and contemporary emanations of Serbian nationalism, as evident in their Yugoslavism and staunch anti-clericalism. They should neither be praised for what they did nor blamed for what happened later. Their act can be understood and interpreted only in its own historical context, which opens new avenues for research away from false analogies and political abuses.*

There is an old noble custom practised in the United Kingdom whereby academics (and others) declare an interest when discussing matters/persons to which they might have a relation. Unfortunately this has not been the case in the historiography of those highly disputed issues such as the origins of First World War.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that documentary evidence from all sides was published already in the interwar period, the differences of interpretation and opinion abide or even increase with time so that what is being written often reflects the context and background of its author rather than the event analysed. I want to break this circle of unacknowledged bias by declaring that I was born and raised in the street bearing the name of Nedeljko Čabrinović, the failed Sarajevo bomber and thus from early age subject to the grand Socialist Yugoslavia's narrative of Young Bosnians as freedom fighters and Yugo-

---

<sup>1</sup> For the manipulation of archival records and evidence relating the the responsibility for the outbreak of WWI in the interwar period and later see Keith Wilson, ed., *Forging the collective memory: government and international historians through two World Wars*. Oxford, Berghahn Books, 1996.