THE CONTESTED MEMORY OF THE SARAJEVO ASSASSINATION

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the mutually exclusive ethno-national narratives constructed during and after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–95) through the analysis of the memory of the Sarajevo Assassination, which came into the focus of public interest due to its hundredth anniversary. The goal is to show how this important historical event, which gave Austria-Hungary a pretext to attack Serbia and led to the First World War, has been appropriated within the ethno-national narratives of the Yugoslav successor state, in which the last war (1992–95) is seen as a foundational myth, combined with the destruction or appropriation of the common Yugoslav past and anti-fascist values of the second world conflict. With the hundredth anniversary of the "shot hear around the world," with which Gavrilo Princip shot dead the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenburg, also the story of the Sarajevo Assassination has been mobilized in the support of mutually exclusive versions of the past, which legitimize the current ethno-national regimes and deepen divisions in the country even twenty years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords.*

Key words: *memory, the Sarajevo Assassination, Gavrilo Princip, The First World War, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Introduction

In the last decades of the twentieth century, there was an unprecedented "return of the past." According to John Keane, "crisis periods also prompt awareness of the crucial political importance of the past for the present. As a rule, crises are times during which the living do the battle for the hearts, minds and souls of the dead."[1]

In Central and Eastern Europe, within the third wave of nation-building,[2] which took place with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and

[1] John Keane, "More theses on the philosophy of history," In *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 204.

[2] The Norwegian scholar Kolstø defines nation-building as: "Strategies of identity consolidation within states and distinguish it from 'state-building'. The latter term, as we use it, pertains to the administrative, economic and military groundwork of functional states – the 'hard' aspects of state construction. Nation-building, in contrast, concerns only the 'softer' aspects of state consolidation, such as the construction of a shared identity and a sense of unity among the population." Pål Kolstø, "Introduction," In *Strategies of Symbolic Nation-building in South Eastern Europe*, ed. Pål Kolstø (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 3.

had much shorter time-spans and more prominent methods of identity consolidation,[3] the return of memory, according to Müller, has taken place on different levels: "first the geopolitical business left over from the Second World War is in the process of being 'finished off,'"[4] as the example of Yugoslavia shows, in which suppressed memories from that period fueled hate and legalized the use of force at the beginning of the 1990s.

"Second, there has been a process of a ... (catching-up) nation-building, for which collective memories have been mobilized and for which often a more distant past has been invented. Where national collective memories have been increasingly 'desacralized' and democratized in the West, there seems to be a desperate need for founding myths – just as there was after 1945 – in the East…"[5].

New states needed new pasts and memories, as the "invention of tradition" occurs more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens and destroys the social patterns for which old traditions had been designed.[6] In the studies of nationalism, scholars agree about the importance of the past for nation-building. For modernists, the past is a social construct, formed in the present, and is important for grouping people, establishing cohesion and legitimizing authority, and often also includes oblivion and invention.[7] Monuments, memorials, ceremonies are saturated with "ghostly national imaginings," with which the living people feel their connection with the dead ones of the same imagined community.[8] Also for ethno-symbolists, myths and historical memories play a vital role. In Smith's words, "The concept of the nation, however, cannot be sustained without a suitable past and a believable future ... In order to create a convincing representation of the 'nation', a worthy and distinctive past must be rediscovered and appropriated. Only then can the nation aspire to a glorious destiny for which its citizens may be expected to make some sacrifices."[9]

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[3] Kolstø, "Introduction," 4.

[4] Jan-Werner Müller, "Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory," In *Memory and Power in Post- War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 9.

[5] Müller, "Introduction," 9.

[6] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," In *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4.

[7] See: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[8] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 50.

[9] Anthony Smith, "The 'Golden Age' and National Renewal," In *Myths and Nationhood*, eds. Geoffrey Hosking

Memory politics in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and the change of regimes were followed by changes in memory politics, with the employment of a number of strategies. With the argument "our people had been fighting a defensive war," all the warring sides used the concept of Homeland War,[10] followed by the denial of certain facts from the conflict, categorizing people into "positive" (we are this) and "negative" (that is our opposite) groups. The common Yugoslav past and the elements of "the others" on ethnically-cleansed territories were erased, while new mutually exclusive narratives and versions of the past were created, within which the last war has been placed as a foundational myth, which combined with older myths, was used to legitimize the new ethno-national regimes, giving new interpretations also to prewar events and figures.[11]

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Dayton Peace Accords consolidated the division of the country into two entities (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska), and one district (Brčko)—caused by ethnic cleansing and massive population displacement—and of its citizens into three distinct "constituent" groups, Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, the "war on memory" has been particularly intense for the last twenty years, including protests, vandalism, and incidents. The country lacks one state-level law that would control the erection of memorials and there is no centralized approach towards memorialization, making a situation in which perpetrators in one entity are celebrated as heroes in the other. War on memory is visible in urban spaces, where memorials, as well as religious objects, mark the territory, ethnically homogeneous spaces that can guarantee safety to the majority group. Streets and squares were renamed, recalling memories from heroic pasts, and monuments and memorial plaques to military and civilian victims of one ethno-national group and army formations of the war of 1992–95 were erected in large numbers, reminding of the country's terrible past.

In the Republika Srpska, which has a centralized and coordinated memory politics, and where a separate nation-building process of the entity, seen as a state of its own, has been taking place, memorials are predominantly dedicated

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and George Schopflin (London: Hurst & Co., 1997), 36.

[10] Ana Ljubojević, Darko Gavrilović and Vjekoslav Perica, "Myths and Countermyths and the Incorporation of the Myth," In *Political Myths in the Former Yugoslavia and the Successor States, A Shared Narrative*, eds. Darko Gavrilović and Vjekoslav Perica (Dordrecht: Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation and Republic of Letters Publishing BV, 2011), 70.

[11] Anida Sokol, "War Monuments: Instruments of Nation-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Politička Misao* 5 (2015): 3. See also: Nicolas Moll, "Fragmented Memories in a Fragmented Country: Memory Competition and Political Identity-building in Today's Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Nationalities Papers* 41 (2013): 910–35.

to the Army of the Republika Srpska and Serb civilian victims. On the other hand, in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where memorialization is decentralized and tensions exist between Bosniaks and Croats, with the latter calling for an entity of their own, memorials commemorate the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croatian Defense Council as well as the civilian victims of the two groups. Although, they portray mutually exclusive versions of the past, each side uses similar strategies: the concept of the Homeland War, the exclusion of other groups, the cult of victimhood, religious symbols and ceremonies, and the connection to the Second World War atrocities and anti-fascist values. Regarding the last aspect, often, the memory of the Second World War and ant-fascist struggle are appropriated: for example in the Bosniak narrative, the Day of Sarajevo, April 6, marks both the liberation of the city in 1945 and the beginning of the siege in 1992,[12] while in the Serb memory politics, there have been tendencies to erect memorials to Serb victims of 1992–95 in the vicinity of those dedicated to the Second World War victims, such as in the village of Kravica, to emphasize the historical dimension of Serb suffering.[13]

Remembering the Assasination in Sarajevo

With the hundredth anniversary of the Sarajevo Assassination, whose perception changed in different historical periods and regimes, the memory of this distant historical event has been mobilized and appropriated in the support of the existing mutually exclusive narratives.

Generally, it should be said that in the last decades there have been an increasing number and enhanced profile of anniversary commemorations to mark the beginning and ending of wars and their most important events. "This is one component of a wider anniversary boom, fuelled and amplified by the public communications media, which seize upon forthcoming commemorative dates to stimulate cultural production of all kinds."[14] The hundredth

[12] Amra Čusto, *Uloga spomenika u Sarajevu u izgradnji kolektivnog sjećanja na period 1941-1945. i 1992-1995. – komparativna analiza* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2013), 109.

[13] Darko Karačić, "Od promoviranja zajedništva do kreiranja podjele, Politika sjećanja na partizansku borbu u Bosni i Herzegovini nakon 1990," In *RE:VIZIJA PROŠLOSTI, Službene politike sjećanja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji od 1990*, eds. Darko Karačić, Tamara Banjeglav and Nataša Govedarica (Sarajevo: ACIPS), 17–90; Ger Duijzings, "Commemorating Srebrenica: Histories of Violence and the Politics of Memory in Eastern Bosnia," In *The New Bosnian Mosaic. Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society*, eds. Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms and Ger Duijzings (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 162–62.

[14] T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," In *The Politics of Memory: Commemorating War*, eds. Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (London, New York: Routledge 2000), 4.

anniversary of the Sarajevo Assassination was a true media event, reported and analyzed in special publications, conferences, reports, and documentaries, attracting many politicians and tourists to the city, in which the Short Twentieth Century had started. On that day, on which Gavrilo Princip shot dead the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, the Duchess of Hohenburg, with the aim to liberate Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Austro-Hungarian rule and clear the way for a Yugoslav unification, historical symposiums, concerts, and plays were organized, with the focus on Sarajevo as an important historical dimension of the twentieth century.[15]

On June 28, 2014, the famous Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra performed in one of its landmarks, the Sarajevo city hall Vijećnica, the old national library, built by Austria-Hungary and formally opened in 1896. The library was destroyed during the siege of Sarajevo and reopened two months before the ceremony, on May 9, the Victory over Fascism Day as well as the Day of Europe, connecting the narrative not only to the European one, but also to the antifascist struggle of the Second World War. Many Serbian politicians refused to participate due to an inscription on the entrance which in the English version reads: "On this place Serbian criminals in the night of 25th-26th august, 1992. set on fire National and university's library of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Over 2 millions of books, periodicals and documents vanished in the fame. Do not forget, remember and warn!"[16] Serbs argue that the term *Serbian criminals* gives room for the generalization of the guilt as the collective guilt of one nation and see the inscription as another way to depict the Serb nation as the *evil one*.[17]

The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra started the concert with the Bosnian anthem, continuing with compositions of Joseph Haydn, Franz Schubert, Alban Berg, Johannes Brahms, Maurice Ravel and ending with Beethoven's

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[15] Alberto Becherelli, "Remembering Gavrilo Princip," *The First World War: Analysis and Intepretation*, Volume 1, eds. Antonello Biagini and Giovanna Motta (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 17–30.

[16] The text here reported is the original English version at the entrance of Vijećnica. It includes a number of grammatical errors.

[17] Numerous articles have been published in many national and international newspapers and websites for the hundredth anniversary. See for example: Benjamin Beasley-Murray, "Gavrilo Princip's Legacy Still Contested," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Global Voices*, https://iwpr.net/global-voices/gavrilo-princips-legacy-still-contested; John F. Burns, "In Sarajevo, Divisions That Drove an Assassin Have Only Begun to Heal," *The New York Times*, June 26, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/27/world/europe/in-sarajevo-gavrilo-princip-set-off-world-war-i.html?_r=0; Nick Hayes, "100 years after an assassination: Sarajevo remembers and forgets an anniversary," *Minnpost*, June 2014, http://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2014/06/100-years-after-assassination-sarajevo-remembers-and-forgets-anniversary.

"Ode to Joy" from the Ninth Symphony, adopted as the anthem of the European Union. This event was broadcasted and the concert was shown on screens outside Vijećnica to a larger audience. The very symbolic performance and place connected the Bosnian and Herzegovinian past and future with Austria-Hungary and the European Union, both supranational entities, reminding on the prosperity the Bosnian and Herzegovinian province had under the Austro-Hungarian rule and on the country's aspirations to enter the European Union. During the concert, Clemens Hellsberg, Chairman of the Vienna Philharmonic, addressed the audience: "On this historically significant occasion, here in the Vijećnica, we wish to demonstrate, through our music, our deep respect for the idea of a united Europe, the greatest and most visionary project for peace in the history of our continent."[18]

Other central part of the day was a midnight performance entitled "A Century of Peace, after the century of War," staged by Bosnian director Haris Pašović on the Latin Bridge, combining dance, music, theatre and video, and involving 200 artists. The place of the performance is symbolic and deliberately chosen; the northern end of the Latin Bridge, a historic Ottoman bridge over the River Miljacka, was the site from which Gavrilo Princip shot dead Franz Ferdinand. Through the Latin Bridge, which during Yugoslavia was called Princip's Bridge, and its surrounding the ideologies of the past regimes could be read and interpreted.[19] In 1917, the Austro-Hungarian authorities had placed a tall monument to Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, named *Sühnedenkmal* or *Spomenik umorstva,* which was removed by the authorities of the Yugoslav state, established in 1918.[20] The latter erected a memorial plaque in 1930 celebrating Gavrilo Princip as the man who proclaimed freedom on Vidovdan (St. Vitus Day) and as the embodiment of the Yugoslav fight against foreign oppressors. After the Second World War, Socialist Yugoslavia dedicated another plaque to him as "a symbol of eternal gratitude to Gavrilo Princip and his comrades, to fighters against the Germanic conquerors" and also engraved footprints where Princip stood at the moment when he shot dead the archduke and his wife, which became one of the main tourist attractions in the city. During the siege of Sarajevo, the bridge's original name, *Latinska Ćuprija* was

[18] Vienna Philharmonic, "Concert in Sarajevo," June 29, 2014, https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/orchestra/philharmonicjournal/year/2014/month/6/blogitemid/1036/page/1/pagesize/20.

[19] Selma Harrington, "The Politics of Memory: The Place and Face of the Sarajevo Assassination," *Prilozi, Contributions* 43 (2014): 113–39.

[20] Indira Kučuk-Sorguč,"Prilog historiji svakodnevnice: Spomenik Umorstvu – Okamenjena prošlost na izdržavanju stoljetne kazne," *Prilozi* 34 (2005): 61–66.

brought back and the footprints were destroyed.[21] With the erasing of the common Yugoslav past, the act of the assassination took on exclusively Serbian connotations, within the narrative of the creation of Greater Serbia and the Serb suppression of other Yugoslav nations within the common state.
Today, on the place of the assassination, there is a simple plaque, which reads: "From this place on June 28, 1914, Gavrilo Princip assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie."

Unveiling the statue of Gavrilo Princip

In contrast to the ceremonies held in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbs in the Republika Srpska celebrated the event as the liberation of the Serbian people from foreign oppressors, in which the central place was dedicated to Gavrilo Princip, the hero who fought for freedom. One day earlier in East Sarajevo, the Serbian part of the city, a two-meter high bronze statue of Gavrilo Princip was unveiled by Serbian politicians Milorad Dodik, the president of the Repulika Srpska, Nebojša Radmanović, the Serb member of the tripartite Bosnian and Herzegovinian Presidency, and the mayor of East Sarajevo, Ljubiša Ćosić.[22] During the ceremony a young actor who represented Gavrilo Princip fired two shots in the air and cited a poem Gavrilo wrote in captivity, followed by folk dances. In Višegrad, on June 28, 2014, in Andrićgrad, the newly-opened theme park dedicated to the novelist Ivo Andrić, a performance entitled *Pobunjeni anđeli* (*Rebel Angels*) was staged by the controversial Serb filmmaker Emir Kusturica, reconstructing the event of the Sarajevo Assassination. It was made in three acts and involved 300 actors and statists; the first was dedicated to the assassination, in which the members of the Mlada Bosna were represented wearing angels' wings, the second portrayed the trial that followed and the last act was dedicated to the Serb victims of the First World War.[23] Before the play, concerts by the Serbian group No Smoking Orchestra and of the orchestra of the violinist Nemanja Radulović were held and a large mosaic of the members of the Mlada Bosna, by the painter Bisenija Tereščenko, was unveiled on the walls of the cinema Dolly-Bell. The ceremony was ended on the square Petar II Petrović-Njegoš

[21] Paul B. Miller, *Compromising Memory: The Site of the Sarajevo Assassination*, Accessed October 2015, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/333-compromising-memory-the-site-the-sarajevo-assassination.
[22] Aida Čerkez, "Bosnian Serbs erect statue to man who ignited WWI," *The Huffington Post*, June 27, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/27/gavrilo-princip-statue_n_5538356.html.
[23] "Scenski prikaz Sarajevskog atentata 'Pobunjeni anđeli,'" *Andrićgrad*, June 29, 2014, http://www.andricgrad.com/2014/06/scenski-prikaz-sarajevskog-atentata-pobunjeni-andeli/.

with fireworks and with the concert of the choir of the Russian Army forces Aleksandrov.

During the ceremony, special emphasis was placed on the St. Vitus Day: Serbian writer Matija Bećković stated that it "is a Serbian holiday for eternity, that day is everything that we celebrate, and that is that the Church is one roof, Vitus one day, Kosovo one field and the peony one flower."[24] According to the Serbian myth, after the Battle of Kosovo on June 28, 1389, peonies started growing and became red from the blood of the fallen heroes, spreading all over Serbia.

In 2015, also Belgrade gained its statue of Princip, which was a gift of the Republika Srpska, and was unveiled on June 28, 2015, hundred and one years after the Sarajevo Assassination. The Serbian president Tomislav Nikolić gave a speech: "Today we are not afraid of the truth. Gavrilo Princip was a hero, a symbol of the idea of freedom, the assassin of tyrants and the carrier of the European idea of liberation from slavery."[25]

A liberation or an assassination: these terms connote different interpretations of the Sarajevo Assassination and reflect the tensions and divisions that exist among the ethno-national groups in the Yugoslav successor states.

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[24] "Princip-Junak kojeg stavljaju gdje mu nije mjesto, " *Andrićgrad*, June 28, 2014, http://www.andricgrad.com/la/2014/06/kusturica-princip-junak-kojeg-stavljaju-gdje-mu-nije-mjesto/.

[25] "Gavrilo Princip, assassin who sparked WWI, gets statue in Belgrade," *DW*, June 29, 2015, http://www.dw.com/en/gavrilo-princip-assassin-who-sparked-wwi-gets-statue-in-belgrade/a-18546305.

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