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FORGOTTEN YUGOSLAVISM AND ANTI-CLERICALISM OF YOUNG BOSNIANS

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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.¹ 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-

¹ 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.

slavia's founding fathers, as established by Veselin Masleša and Vladimir Dedijer, though as we all know they were too young and naïf for either.

Marking its centenary, Sarajevo outrage has been invoked not only as a trigger but a serious cause for the Great War.² The issue of responsibility looms large because the tragedy that ensued determined the course of events in Europe for almost a century. Especially in Bosnia what happened on that fatal day still matters and can easily upset the fragile peace. Therefore, I decided not to attempt to populate any further the very contested field of interpretations of war origin and guilt by pursuing a detective style investigation of who said or did what first or who passed the weapon to whom, etc.³ From all the knowledge and documentation assembled over the years I can only deduct that: 1) the war guilt is tenuous and spread over many frontiers, and 2) if we take the assassination of Franz Ferdinand as the reason for the WWI that would be a unique case that a group of teenagers was able to change the course of history and actually provoke the greatest tragedy of mankind ever. I will also leave for another discussion the fascination with what Žižek calls subjective violence, whose epitome Princip's act is, which blinds us to the so called systemic violence endemic to our socio-economic order and often with catastrophic consequences.⁴ Finally, the discussion was marred from the outset by the flawed and not consequential use of terms terror and terrorism, disregarding the transformation of their use and perception over time. Let me note that the Bosnian Muslim National Organisation (MNO) in its memorandum to the Ottoman Parliament just few years before the assassination described the Habsburg rule as "state terrorism."⁵

² For the war origins' assessment and more on 90th anniversary see Jay Winter, ed., *The Legacy of the Great War*. Columbia, Mi, University of Missouri Press, 2009, where distinguished historians Jay Winter, Niall Ferguson and Paul Kennedy do not even discuss the Balkan factors when analysing the causes for the war.

³ In this regard I subscribe to the opinion of Sarajevo writer and former ambassador Zlatko Dizdarević who described the overwrought centennial celebrations including this conference as "an expression of cynicism". According to Dizdarević they are to no advantage of Sarajevo or its inhabitants because the war did not start in Sarajevo and Sarajevo was not responsible for the war but the great powers. Moreover, Dizdarević, sums up the common perception, "they've re-opened a battle among us over Gavrilo Princip," so new fault lines are being created and old wounds deepened. See the interview with Dizdarević: *Sarajevo, One Hundred Years* at <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Bosnia-Herzegovina/Sarajevo-One-Hundred-Years-151730/%28from%29/eng-newsletter>.

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence. Six Sideways Reflections*. New York, Picador, 2008.

⁵ Anonymous. Memorandum muslimana iz Bosne i Hercegovine: predan Osmanlijskom Parlamentu mjeseca februara 1909 god u Carigradu. Carigrad: n.p., 1909, 20. Cited in York

My modest concern here is only to rescue one aspect of the event from manipulation, namely the agency of Young Bosnians. First of all, recent revisiting of Sarajevo assassination is unashamedly approached from above.⁶ The most talked about recent portrayal of the major players of the period for example, that of Christopher Clark, is disappointingly two-dimensional, with opera-going, horse-race-loving royalty, ministers and diplomats on one side, and vulgar, bloodthirsty Balkan plotters and murderers on the other. In a book of over 600 pages, Mlada Bosna is assigned just two paragraphs and reduced to a tool of the Serbian secretive and irredentist Black Hand, with no mention of any own motivations its teenage members might have had. Furthermore, in his introduction Clark recasts the role of young assassins by problematically constructing historical continuities where they simply do not exist. The book itself begins with and draws parallels to the assassination of the Serbian King Alexander Obrenović in 1903. The circumstances of this brutal murder were immediately widely known and analysed but not to imply some barbarity to the assassins but racist and orientalist stereotypes and discourse in its descriptions like that of the *New York Times*, published on 24th of June 1903.⁷ Same could be said for Clark's account of this murder, which crowns a wealth of redundant detail about Serbian and Balkan politics in a chain of disparate episodes of unrelated, and often gruesome, violence that is overwhelming, irrelevant and serves to reinforce negative and stereotypical conceptions of the region that have long been disproved by scholars. Finally, Christopher Clark and others openly question whether Young Bosnians' alleged Yugoslavism was nothing but aggressive Serb nationalism in disguise by draw-

Norman, Are Muslims 'Jews' or 'Gypsies'? A Reassessment of Bosnian Muslim Political Thought under the Habsburgs. unpublished manuscript, 2010.

⁶ See Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe Went to War in 1914*. London, Penguin, 2012 is echoed in Sean McMeekin, *July 1914: Countdown to War*. London, Icon, 2013 and previously *The Russian Origins of the First World War*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 2011 claiming that Young Bosnia was just an offshoot of the Black Hand but less so by Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace: How Europe abandoned peace for the First World War*. London, Profile books, 2013. Among recent publications is also a blatantly revisionist and romanticised account by Greg King and Sue Woolmans, *The Assassination of the Archduke*. New York, St. Martin's Press, 2013. No new evidence appeared recently so most claims of these books are based on Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of The War of 1914 Vol. I-II*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1952. Volume II, pages 1-119 deal with the assassination and its origins.

⁷ Z. A. B. Zeman, The Balkans and the Coming of War in R. J. W. Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandman, eds., *The Coming of the First World War*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, 19-32. here 21.

ing parallels and connections to how Serb nationalism was a driving force behind much of interwar Yugoslavia, some horrific crimes committed during the WW2 and last but not least - its key role in the destruction of the second Yugoslavia as well as in wars and crimes committed in 1990s.

Nonetheless Clark's or McMeekin's revisionist portrayals of Sarajevo events have encountered many supporters and led to changing perceptions among an educated audience without deep knowledge of the region. Most reviewers of Clark were no expert in the subject, not even historians, and many easily misunderstood the author but nevertheless, abided by Clark's own analogies, went on to project what happened in Sarajevo. Thomas Laquer writes about it as an example of Serbian irredentism, defined as a poisonous mixture of self-serving history and mushy metaphysics.⁸ In his review on History News Network, Jim Cullen writes about Young Bosnians as fanatical Serbian terrorists and then explains to his readers that Serbian nationalism has long had strong religious overtones.⁹ Contemporary observers would certainly find plenty of evidence for this as one of the bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church recently characterized Princip and friends as "Serbian fighters for eternal life in freedom and dignity."¹⁰

Now that I defined the problem let me turn to the modest aim of the rest of my paper and discuss Young Bosnia's Yugoslavism and anti-clericalism that defy their above characterisation as Serbian nationalists and links with later emanations of Serbian nationalism. While nationalism was definitely a driving force in Serbian culture and politics for a century there was nothing metaphysical about it. American historian David MacKenzie duly explained it including the workings of the Black Hand, secretive irredentist paramilitary organization that supplied weapons and some crude training to young would-be assassins.¹¹ Yet describing Gavrilo Princip and friends as

⁸ Thomas Laqueur, *Some Damn Foolish Thing*, *London Review of Books* Vol. 35 No. 23, 5 December 2013, 11-16, available on <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n23/thomas-laqueur/some-damn-foolish-thing>.

⁹ Jim Cullen, Review of Christopher Clark's "The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914" published on 8.1.2013 and available on <http://hnn.us/article/152847>.

¹⁰ As stated by Bishop of Bihać and Petrovac Atanasije held the requiem for Princip in his hometown of Bosansko Grahovo on May 2nd 2014, on the anniversary of his death. See http://www.spc.rs/sr/za_slobodu_dostojanstvo_srpskog_naroda.

¹¹ See David MacKenzie's trilogy, *Apis: The Congenial Conspirator; The Life of Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijević*. Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1989, *The "Black hand" on Trial: Salonika, 1917*. Boulder, Colo., East European Monographs, 1995, *The Exoneration of the "Black Hand," 1917-1953*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1998.

agents of the Great Serbian project directed from Belgrade or reducing them to offshoots of Black Hand blatantly ignores their own confessions which we know were not made under duress. Unlike recent studies earlier literature made an effort to investigate their motivations and thus heavily relied on court transcripts, Gavrilo Princip's interviews with Dr Pappenheim and recollections of survivors.¹² These have all ascertained the Young Bosnians' integral Yugoslavism, anarchist –socialist leanings, anticlericalism and revolutionary violence. According to copious research in former Yugoslavia Mlada Bosna was described as an amorphous, informal movement whose adherents were scattered in various mostly high school student associations. They appeared as a reaction to the Empire's annexation, occupation and rule of Bosnia which had been encountered by armed resistance, followed by mass emigration of the Muslim population, long-drawn-out struggle for autonomy, and prolonged and deep dissatisfaction over the country's unresolved agrarian question. Disillusioned with the generation of their fathers and their political leaders, who engaged in a decade-long struggle by legal means to achieve a limited cultural autonomy, Young Bosnians preferred to think in terms of revolution and individual acts of

¹² Court transcripts exist in several languages here *Sarajevski atentat – izvorne stenografske bilješke sa glavne rasprave protiv Gavrila principa i drugova, održane u Sarajevu 1914.*, Sarajevo, Državna arhiva NR BiH, 1954. In English: W. A. Dolph Owings, *The Sarajevo Trial*. Vols. 1 and 2. Translated and edited by W. A. Dolph Owings, Elizabeth Pribic, and Nikola Pribic, Chapel Hill, N.C., Documentary Publications, 1984 and Edward W. Knappman, ed. "Archduke Franz Ferdinand's Assassins Trial: 1914." *Great World Trials: The 100 Most Significant Courtroom Battles of All Time*. Detroit, Gale Research, 1997. Gavrilo Princip recounts his reasons for resisting the Monarchy; the assassination itself and the general atmosphere which conducted it and finally his own responsibility for the war that followed in Martin Pappenheim, *Gavrilo Princip's Bekenntnisse*. Vienna, 1926. The conversations between the Viennese doctor and Princip were translated into English and published in the U.S. in the August 1927 issue of *Current History* as "Dr. Pappenheim's Conversations with Princip: Confessions of the Assassin Whose Deed Led to the World War" edited by Hamilton Fish Armstrong. Among many volumes of recollections of group members who survived the imprisonment or were only loosely associated with "Young Bosnians" and thus not set on trial see Vladimir Gaćinović, *Sarajevski atentat*. Sarajevo, 1956; Cvetko Popović, *Oko Sarajevskog atentata*, Sarajevo, 1969; Borivoje Jevtić, *Sarajevski atentat*. Sarajevo, 1924; Among hundreds of volumes written by historians later see Seton Watson, Borivoje Jevtić, *Sarajevski atentat*. Sarajevo, 1924; St. Stanojević, *Ubistvo austriskog prestolonaslednika Ferdinanda*. Beograd, 1923; Vojislav Bogičević, *Mlada Bosna*, Sarajevo. 1954; Drago Ljubibratić, *Gavrilo Princip*. Beograd, Nolit, 1959; Dragoslav Ljubibratić, *Mlada Bosna i Sarajevski atentat*. Sarajevo, Muzej grada Sarajeva, 1964; Vladimir Dedijer, *Sarajevo 1914. godine*, Beograd, Prosveta, 1966.

terror in order to speed up the process of national and social emancipation of Bosnia from the Habsburg rule. This reasoning was widespread in Europe, especially among the Russian revolutionaries (we know they read Kropotkin, Herzen, Bakunin, Gorky, Chernishevsky, and Plekhanov). In this respect they both followed in the steps of full blown Serbian nationalism seeking the destruction of the Monarchy but also clearly defied it.¹³

As for their national leanings, the conspirators/assassins who belonged to all three major confessions found in Bosnia all declared ethnically Yugoslav or Serbo-Croat when facing the prosecutor. They believed that the cooperation between Serbs, Croats and Muslims should result in a common South Slav state. Many of these Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim youngsters from Bosnia but also Croatia would later volunteer to Serbian troops.¹⁴ The fact that their idealised Yugoslavism was annihilated in the immediate aftermath of the war and the all-pervasive Serbian government backed centralism does not mean it never existed.¹⁵

Their position on religion is even more evident. The father and uncle of Vladimir Gaćinović, the author of *Mlada Bosna* article (inspired by *Giovine Italia*, and thus its precursor or founder, were Orthodox priests.¹⁶ So were the fathers of Trifko Grabež, one of the three key organisers, or Petar Kočić, Bosnian Serb writer, closest to them in his idealism and anti-Austrianism. But hundreds of pages of trial records and subsequent investigations gloss over Young Bosnians' connection to the Church and for reason. In fact the investigators and prosecutors were puzzled by the young assassins' atheism. They repeatedly asked them about it during the process. Čabrinović's lawyer Premužić, and pater Anton Puntigam, superior of Sarajevo Jesuits who followed the process closely, even attempted to rationalise it by linking the plot to French free masons. The absurdity of these insinuations was best demonstrated when

¹³ Dimitrije Djordjević, *The Serbs as an Integrating and Disintegrating Factor*, *Austrian History Yearbook*, 1967, Vol.3(2), 48-82.

¹⁴ Ibrahim Fazlinović and Đulaga Bukovac were being prepared for an earlier murder attempt in Vienna which the Balkan wars prevented. See Nikola Trišić, *Sarajevski atentat u svijetlu bibliografskih podataka*, podatak 902 and 1199. Hamdija Nikšić, another Yugoslav nationalist from the circle, unveiled the Young Bosnia memorial plaque in 1930.

¹⁵ See the life path of Stevan Moljević for example, Yves Tomić, *Stevan Moljević et la question nationale serbe*, *Balkanologie*, Vol. XII, n° 1 (2010).

¹⁶ Dragoslav Ljubibratić, *Mlada Bosna i Sarajevski atentat*. Sarajevo: Muzej grada Sarajeva, 1964, 49

picked up by the Nazi propaganda, which also discovered Princip to be a Jew.¹⁷ On the other hand, anti-Serb pogroms staged throughout Bosnia and Croatia in the aftermath of Franz Ferdinand's murder usually led by Croatian clericalist activists (Frankovci) were clearly targeting and vandalising Orthodox churches and attacking, humiliating and even murdering Orthodox priests.¹⁸

Not only that Young Bosnians shunned any link to organised religion they thought it was part of the problem they were fighting against. According to the testimony of Cvetko Popović, the only Catholic in the group, Ivo Kranjčević nourished the idea of blowing up the convent-residence of Sarajevo archbishop Štadler, who was the most vociferous representative of the Catholic proselytizing efforts during the Habsburg rule and a staunch anti-Yugoslav.¹⁹ Serb Orthodox prelates did not fare much better. Bogdan Žerajić, Gavrilo Princip's precursor as unsuccessful assassin of Emperor Franz Joseph in 1910 (and then later of general Varešanin, governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina) was disgusted when the Serbian bishops ordered priests and church elders to greet the Emperor. Couple of years later, in 1912 when the Bosnian Serbs and others were celebrating Serbian victories in the First Balkan War, the recently formed Bosnian Sabor with but consultative powers adopted a declaration of congratulation to Serbia enthusiastically embraced by all Serb deputies except for the Sarajevo Metropolitan and the head of the Orthodox Church in Bosnia, Metropolitan Evgenije Letica. Metropolitan Letica's austrophilia was blatant as he decorated his private chambers but also Serbian Church's official premises with Habsburg paraphernalia. A source of shame for the Serbian clergy and people, he was forced to resign in the new South Slav state created after the war.²⁰ While Letica was definitely prioritising Habsburg over interests of his clergy and faithful there was a widespread dissatisfaction among the Serbs with the Church's stance in gen-

¹⁷ Cvetko Popović, *Slobodni zidari i Sarajevski atentat* cited in his *Oko Sarajevskog atentata*, 189-199. Puntigam is also remembered for performing the last rites to the royal couple and for being a zealous opponent of masturbation.

¹⁸ Vladimir Ćorović, *Crna knjiga. Patnje Srba Bosne i Hercegovine za vreme svetskog rata 1914-1918. Godine*. Beograd: Čigoja, 2002.

¹⁹ Cvetko Popović, *Prilog Istoriji Saraj. Atentata*, *Politika*, 31.III-5.IV 1928. Also in Pero Slijepčević, *Mlada Bosna* in his, ed., *Napor Bosne i Hercegovine za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje*. Sarajevo, Oblasni odbor Narodne odbrane, 182-218, here 197.

²⁰ Sonja Dujmović, *Srpska pravoslavna crkva u Bosni i Hercegovini i stvaranje nove države (Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca) 1918. godine*, *Historijska traganja*, 3, 2009, 121-136, 225.

eral.²¹ After the creation of Yugoslavia, a state newspaper described how the Church behaved during the war:

“Individually some of them strove for their people and clergy, but they never stood up united for the good of their people and Church although there was such a high need for it throughout the war”.²²

This was no anomaly. While later suppressed, the story of the Orthodox Church hierarchy during the Austrian rule sees them as tools in hands of the occupying authorities. During the struggle for ecclesiastical and educational autonomy because of the attitude of the Church leadership Orthodox churches were boycotted for years and this extended to baptisms, communion, weddings and funerals.²³ For years the local inhabitants boycotted the Serbian Church in Blažuj that was built with the support of Austria’s government of Bosnia and left generations of children without baptismal sacraments.²⁴ After ending the struggle for Church and School autonomy, even the old generation of Bosnian Serb political actors turned away from supporting the Church, and instead of building any churches after 1901 funds were streamlined into schools and education.²⁵

To view the Young Bosnians’ atheist mind-set only in relation to Austrophilia of high clergy would be greatly reductionist. They cherished a rich and long history of anticlericalism among the most influential Serbian authors and leaders from Dositej Obradović, Svetozar Marković and Vaso Pelagić, tradition ignored or downplayed in the Serbian historiography and even less present in that in other languages.²⁶ Sto-

²¹ For more on the role of religious leadership during the Austrian rule in Bosnia see Petar Vrankić, *Religion und Politik in Bosnien und der Herzegowina (1878-1918)*. Paderborn, F. Schöningh, 1998; Robin Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

²² “Pojedinačno su se neki zauzimali za narod i sveštenstvo, ali jedinstveno nikada ne istupiše za dobro svojega naroda i svoje crkve i ako je to potreba iziskivala kroz cijelo vrijeme trajanja rata” from *Narodno jedinstvo*, br. 12, Sarajevo 11. januar 1919. Cited in Dujmović, p. 127.

²³ Mirko Maksimović, Crkvene borbe i pokreti, 85, In Pero Slijepčević, ed., *Napor Bosne i Hercegovine za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje*. Sarajevo, Oblasni odbor Narodne odbrane, 1929.

²⁴ Srđa Đokić, Razvoj društvenog života, in Pero Slijepčević, ed., *Napor Bosne i Hercegovine*, 351.

²⁵ Ibid, 356.

²⁶ Mirko Đorđević, Klerikalizam i antiklerikalizam u Srbiji, *Republika*, 444-445, 1-31. 01. 2009.

jan Novaković, Vasa Stajić, Vladimir Ćorović²⁷, Jovan Skerlić, Petar Kočić, Antun Gustav Matoš and Ivo Tartalja were contemporaries who provided much intellectual stimulus to Young Bosnians and are all known as outspokenly critical of the Serbian Church and/or religion in general rejecting domination of any faith or nationality in favour of Slav commonality and equality of all “Slavic tribes”.²⁸ Surviving members of the group Vasa Čubrilović and Cvetko Popović remained firmly atheist and anti-clerical until the end of their long lives.

To conclude, 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.

²⁷ Esad Zgodić, *Vladimir Ćorović: Pansrbizam, Bosna i Bošnjaci*, available on http://www.diwanmag.com.ba/arhiva/diwan5_6/sadrzaj/sadrzaj8.htm discusses Ćorović's Serbian nationalism that refuses identification with the Orthodox church which Zgodić calls ethnic panserbism.

²⁸ Stojan Protić, Miša Trifunović, Jaša Prodanović, Ljubomir Stojanović, Milan Grol, Slobodan Jovanović and other top Serbian politicians also supported Yugoslavism at that time and dismissed any role of the Church.