

UDK 929 Princip G.

## “UP IN FLAMES” - GAVRILO PRINCIP AND THE CITY

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*Abstract: In this paper the author makes use of the few biographical facts about Gavrilo Princip to elaborate on the hypothetical connection between migrants' issues and political radicalization. The assassin's life-story has been used and misused in socialist, nationalist and revisionist history-writing. For socialists, Princip was the personification of a dialectic struggle; for nationalists he was the symbol of a nation. For many western revisionist historians, Princip was a naïve protagonist in a Balkanist-flavoured narrative about rebellious hotheads. In order to clear up these politically inflected stories, the author adopts a microhistorian's perspective to observe Gavrilo Princip as a single person, in his own social context. The author suggests that in shifting away from ideas and ideology and using sociological ideas about migration and urbanization, it may be possible to gain new insights into the radicalization of the Sarajevo assassin.*

### Introduction

The life of the Bosnian-Serb assassin Gavrilo Princip has been a sensitive subject in the Balkans, because his deeds touch upon national identity, trauma and pride. Today, questions on the political orientation of Princip provoke heated debates in both media and parliaments of Bosnia, Serbia and Austria. Obviously, it is mainly politicians who participate in this non-academic fight over history, threatening each other with the of statues, plaques or monuments or the building of new ones.<sup>1</sup> For

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Revija prošlosti u režiji velikih sila. *Politika* 09/06/2013; Gavrilo Princip nije bio terorista. *Blic* 10/06/2013; Sarajevo bi moglo dobiti spomenik Franji Ferdinand-

me, as a Dutch historian whose background is not associated with any of the Yugoslav successor states, it was not Princip that fascinated me, but rather his radicalization. This requires a short explanation. Political assassination has been topical in contemporary Dutch politics, since the violent outrage in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2002 populist politician Pim Fortuyn was assassinated by a left-wing animal welfare activist, and in 2004 polemicist cinematographer Theo van Gogh was shot by a young Muslim fundamentalist, after which he used a dagger to leave a 5-page message on the slain body, calling for new assassinations of high-ranking Dutch politicians. Assassins in both cases were young and angry zealots, coming from difficult, although very different, social backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> I will not delve too deep in the 'terrorism-comparison' and the issue of whether Princip was a freedom fighter or a terrorist. I ascribe to the notion that freedom fighters can be terrorists at the same time, because the *ideal* (freedom) is not the opposite of the *method* (terror) and one does not rule out the other. Keeping in mind the above-mentioned assassinations in the Netherlands, I prefer to present a more interesting question, which is: What made Princip radicalize? Being aware of the impossibility to give a clear and concise answer, I will elaborate on just one explanation that was given by the British/Canadian writer Doug Saunders in his highly-acclaimed book *Arrival City. How the largest Migration in History is reshaping our World* (2010).<sup>3</sup> This study offers interesting food for thought about the violent tensions in the outskirts of cities in both the Global South and the Western World. Within it, Saunders coined the notion of the 'Arrival City', a transitional urban space on the outskirts of global metropolises, where ex-villagers struggle to establish a new life and integrate themselves socially and economically. In contrast to what policy-makers tend to think, the Arrival City is not necessarily the doomed slum where urban planning and social engineering eventually failed. Saunders claims that the *favelas*, *plattenbau*-quarters and *banlieus* can be - and actually often are - dynamic urban spaces, where people do climb the social ladder, make the best out of their harsh lives in order to offer their children a better future. Still, because of their vertiginous social and cultural dynamics, the Arrival Citi-

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du, *Glas Slobode* 9/9/2013; Gradnjom spomenika Ferminandu Sarajevo veliča okupatora, *Večernji Novosti* 12/06/2013.

<sup>2</sup> An elaborate study on this subject matter is: Ron Eyerman, *The Assassination of Theo van Gogh. From Social Drama to Cultural Trauma*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2008. Further reading: Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam. The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance*. New York: Penguin Press, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Doug Saunders, *Arrival City. How the largest Migration in History is reshaping our World*. London: Weidenfels, 2010.

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es have other potential as well. Not *in spite of* but *because* of the high growth-potential, they can develop into explosive social environments, where revolutions, political crises and even wars start.<sup>4</sup> Recent examples of this are the 2005 riots in the Paris outskirts, or the violence perpetrated by disillusioned migrants in suburbs of London, Berlin and Amsterdam. As a prime example from the past, Saunders mentions – surprisingly - the radicalization of the ex-villager Gavrilo Princip, as a result of the *unsuccessful* Arrival City.

A problem each historian faces in the research concerning Gavrilo Princip is the lack of reliable sources. However, a few details of the life of the 1914 assassin do give enough information to test Saunder's statement. In the next few paragraphs I will first focus on the migrant position of Princip in the Austro-Hungarian city of Sarajevo, where he lived between 1908 and 1912. Then I will observe the social circumstances in the margins of the Serbian capital Belgrade, where Princip lived from 1912 to 1914, and finally I will come to some concluding remarks on Princip's radicalization in light of migration issues and rural-urban contrasts in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Balkans.

## Sarajevo

One of the few facts we know about the assassin is that he was the younger brother of Jovo Princip, a city-dweller who moved from his rural hometown of Bosnian Grahovo to the Austrian city of Sarajevo. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sarajevo had developed rapidly, both economically and socially. After the Ottomans left, the Austrians heavily invested in infrastructure, city-development and architecture, and they invited Central European traders, craftsmen and officials to find their luck in the new province. The so-called *kuferaši* ('suitcase-people') became a migrant community of Sarajevo. Besides these adventurous, partly middle-class visionaries from all over Europe, quite a number of Bosnian lower countrymen also moved to the city. One of them was Jovo Princip, who lived a simple life in the margins of society, where he earned his money as a waiter, cab-driver, lumberjack and finally as a successful entrepreneur by founding his own company in wood-transport and pro-

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<sup>4</sup> In case we would perceive Young Bosnia as a social movement, the argument of the growth-potential in social peripheries can be connected to the political process theory of sociologist Doug McAdams and others. They claim that social movements emerge in times of declining repression and increasing political opportunities. See: Doug McAdams, John Carthy eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

duction. During and after the First World War, he became a leading merchant dignitary of the Sarajevo suburb of Hadžići.

In short, Jovo Princip could be perceived as a representative of the Arrival City. He was a former villager and ex-peasant who found his fortune in a rapidly changing and modernizing Sarajevo. His high ambition was noticed by entrepreneurs and merchants, who helped him to become a businessman. A counter-argument to this observation could be that Sarajevo, with approximately fifty-five thousand inhabitants, may be called a city in the local context, but it should not be compared to today's enormous urban agglomerations.<sup>5</sup> However, this argument can be rejected on two grounds. Firstly, Sarajevo *was* a migrant city, where one-third of the population claimed to be originally a citizen of a distant region of Austria-Hungary. Secondly, the population of the city of Sarajevo doubled in a time frame of three decades. The speed of this process strongly resembles today's urbanization process, particularly in the global south.

Other facts demonstrate how Jovo involved his family in his success. Although a self-made man, he insisted on sending his younger brothers, Gavrilo and Nikola, to the city to get a proper education. So it was Jovo, not his father, who enrolled his then 13-year old brother Gavrilo in the Merchant's School in Sarajevo. There, Gavrilo, as a peasant boy from the Bosnian periphery, was placed in class among the children of the local mercantile elite. It can be assumed that Gavrilo's school career was financed with money his brother Jovo earned as a guest worker *avant-la-lettre*.<sup>6</sup>

In 1911 Gavrilo transferred from the Merchant's School to the more intellectual Gymnasium – a decision that could be motivated by anti-capitalism or the adolescent longing for a life of poetry and *Weltschmerz*. Later, in prison, Gavrilo explained to the psychiatrist that 1911 was the year everything profoundly changed for him because he 'discovered idealism'.<sup>7</sup> The secondary schools of Sarajevo fostered ideas of resistance to the Austrian occupation and notions of a collaborationist Bosnian mercantile elite. Through informal and international networks, the pupils of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's schools learned about anarchism, socialism and nationalism.

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<sup>5</sup> Details taken from Robert Donia, *Sarajevo. A biography*. London: Hurst & Company, paperback edition, 2009, 64.

<sup>6</sup> Memoirs of former schoolmates give some evidence: Drago Ljubibratić, *Gavrilo Princip*. Beograd: Nolit/Prosveta, 1959, 55. Ratko Parežanin, *Die Attentäter. Das junge Bosnien im Freiheitskampf*. München: L. Jevtić, 1976, 90.

<sup>7</sup> *Ein geschichtlicher Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte des Attentates von Sarajevo. Gavrilo Princip's Bekenntnisse* (Vienna 1926).

Here I take a step back to Saunders' concept. The Arrival City, as he describes it, makes resistance, emancipation and the ability to speak up against oppression possible. Most Bosnian peasants around 1900 did not have any knowledge of a larger world and would not even consider opposing their lords. Yet, as we can observe today as well, it is not the traditional urban upper class but often the newly settled ex-villagers who raise their voices against suppressive authority. This raises an interesting paradox. Thanks to the economic and social infrastructure of the Austrian Empire, Jovo could become a respected businessman and Gavrilo an elitist *gymnasiast*. On the other hand, due to the same infrastructure, Gavrilo could be educated to form his own ideas regarding the Austrian Empire, and learn methods of how to oppose it. This means that Gavrilo's radicalization should be read in light of social emancipation in the Bosnian context. Jovo and Gavrilo were very different characters, but they both were inspired and educated by the same Austrian cultural semi-colonial project. In other words, Gavrilo's radicalization may not have been a reaction to Austrian cultural policy, but a result of it.

While living on the margins of Sarajevo from 1908 and 1912, Gavrilo Princip developed antipathy for the Bosnian mercantile elite. According to his former schoolmate Borivoje Jevtic, Gavrilo supposedly stressed his hatred for the 'Čaršija' – the trade-centre of Sarajevo, and expressed his wish to "send it all up in flames".<sup>8</sup>

## Belgrade

In order to test Saunders' statements, it is more fruitful to examine Princip's life after 1912, when the 18-year old student decided to move to Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. This time it was his own personal choice, and not that of his brother, to begin a new life in a new city. A characteristic of migrants in the Arrival City, as in Saunders' concept, is their great ambition and zeal to become fully-accepted members of the urban community. This fits Gavrilo's life in Belgrade. As a Bosnian Serb living in the occupied zone of Sarajevo, he had high hopes of making a career in the capital of independent Serbia. He used to call Belgrade the "Piedmont of the South Slavs", referring to the region from which the unification of Italy was initiated. On a postcard he sent to Sarajevo in 1912, he wrote: "Greetings from Belgrade. The city is even nicer than we ever have imagined!"<sup>9</sup> Unlike Sarajevo, Belgrade was the place of Gavrilo's arrival.

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<sup>8</sup> Borivoje Jevtić, *Sarajevski Atentat. Sećanja i utisci*. Sarajevo: Petar N. Gaković, 1924, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Arhiv BiH, ZOP. 911.

A closer look at the state of Belgrade in the year 1912 shows aspects that resemble the Arrival Cities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First of all, Belgrade was a city for men. In 1914, 58 % of the population was male.<sup>10</sup> The number of one-person households was six times higher than in the rest of the country. Most of the inhabitants of Belgrade were like guest workers, sending the money earned to their families in the countryside. Furthermore, there were a large number of soldiers in Belgrade, preparing themselves for the First Balkan War that broke out towards the end of the year. This 'war-like' atmosphere made the city of Belgrade a latent dangerous place, not a city for young romantic soul searchers such as Gavrilo Princip.

Princip came to live in an area close to the train station, where he shared rooms with other Bosnians, predominantly Bosnian Serbs. This part of town, circled around today's *Gavrilo Princip Street* and the *Zeleni Venac* marketplace, was like a 'Little Bosnia'. Only poor, young migrants from Bosnia lived there and they had little or no contact with their Serbian neighbors. This part of town was notorious for its dirt, criminal activities and unhealthy living standards. Tuberculosis, the disease of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, took its toll in these slum-like areas. In Belgrade 50 % of the population died of this disease, but in the milieu of migrants from the Habsburg and Ottoman areas, this percentage was much higher. Local authorities failed to comprehend and manage this Arrival City. According to historian Dubravka Stojanovic, this mismanagement was the result of a poorly developed civil society in the young Serbian state.<sup>11</sup>

In the trial records Princip and all his accomplices confirmed that they had lived in Belgrade in a 'Bosnian enclave' and felt excluded from society. This complicated 'in-between-identity' must have played a role in the radicalization of the young assassins, including Princip. In fact, in Bosnia they were seen as Serbs and in Serbia they were seen as Bosnians. Cabrinovic, the typographer who made an assassination attempt on Franz Ferdinand on the very same day as Princip, described during his trial an incident in the printing plant where he worked in Belgrade, in which he was introduced to the Serbian king as 'a Bosnian' – much to his dismay. Contemporary philologist Predrag Palavestra, a Bosnian Serb, explained to me in a conversati-

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<sup>10</sup> Nataša Mišković, *Basare und Boulevards. Belgrad im 19. Jahrhundert*. Vienna: Möhlau 2009, 290; 'Kretanja broja stanovnika, domova, domaćinstava i porodica', in: Vasa Čubrilo-  
vić ed., *Istorija Beograda II*. Belgrade: Prosveta, 1974, 271.

<sup>11</sup> Dubravka Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt. Urbanizacija i evropeizacija Beograda 1890-1914*. Belgrade: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2008. The observations on Serbian civil society around 1900 are discussed in her other books: Dubravka Stojanović, *Srbija i demokratija 1903-1914*. Belgrade: Udruženje za Društvenu Istoriju, 2003; Idem, *Iza zavese. Ogledi iz društvene Istorije Srbije 1890-1914*. Belgrade: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2013.

on last year that most Bosnian Serbs lived in Belgrade as 'the Irish in London'; alienated from home and willing to radicalize for a greater cause. It was exactly in this ambience that Princip decided to take up arms against the Austrians. In the gloomy bars of the Zeleni Venac quarter his path crossed those of frustrated war veterans, malicious criminals and corrupted army officers. The tuberculosis, the miserable living standards, the war-like atmosphere and Princip's vain attempts to become part of the Serbian army all added up to the feeling of social marginalization and, eventually, failure. Very likely, the teenager got lost in Belgrade's urban jungle, as was demonstrated by a postcard he sent to Sarajevo in 1913 that said: "I flunked, Princip, Gavrilo".<sup>12</sup> Later, in court, he claimed that by killing Franz Ferdinand he wanted to do something good for the nation. However, it can be assumed his violent act was not only inspired by ideology or nationalism, but by personal frustration and social alienation as well.

### Primitive rebels?

Saunders wrote: "Gavrilo Princip was giving violent expression not only to the tortured politics of central Europe but also to the dismal failure of many European governments to comprehend or manage the expansive new communities of former villagers forming within their cities".<sup>13</sup> While the urban planning strategies of the Austrian local government and the Belgrade city council are outside the scope of this paper, they both can be understood within the concept of the Arrival City as a 'transitional urban space.'

Broadly speaking, there are two views on the European Arrival City of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, one being optimistic and the other pessimistic. The latter view, made famous by novelist Charles Dickens and economic philosopher Friedrich Engels, depicts the Arrival City as a place of pure misery. The former, however, stresses the fact that most of the people who left the countryside for the city weren't passive victims, but motivated migrants, willing to invest in a better future. Sarajevo offered the Principis a chance to raise living standards above the level of perpetual rural poverty.

Both perspectives can be useful in understanding the circumstances under which Gavrilo Princip radicalized in the years he lived in Belgrade. Although a place of endemic diseases and chaotic urban planning, the capital of Serbia was a place of dynamic bustle, attracting a lot of fortune-seekers. Unlike their older brothers and fathers,

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<sup>12</sup> Vojislav Bogičević, *Mlada Bosna*. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1954, 143.

<sup>13</sup> Saunders, *Arrival City*. London: Windmill, paperback edition, 2011, 159.

most young pupils such as Princip felt part of a larger urban European youth movement, not only striving for better living conditions and a reasonable wage, but also for bigger ideals such as freedom, national self-determination and social equality. The fact that they reached for the sky reflected the speed of life, the *Zeitgeist's* vertigo, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I claim, however, that another part of their ambition was triggered by their status as migrants. Their high hopes strikingly contrasted with the reality that they faced in the cities. This theory also extends to the few Bosnian students who went abroad to universities in Vienna, Prague, Rome and Paris. "I am going to Bosnia, to see the countryside's disgrace" one Bosnian student in Vienna wrote to a friend in a letter. This student was Bogdan Zerajic, the first would-be assassin of Bosnia, who failed in his attempt to assassinate the Austrian governor in 1910. I suggest that the Arrival City's insecurity haunted ex-villager Zerajic and made him choose the path of violence.

The generation of Gavrilo Princip was born in poor conditions, raised in good circumstances and had the prospect of a bright future. It must therefore be stated that many representatives of the first generation of the Sarajevo gymnasium pupils became the frontrunners of modernization in Bosnia. Some of them became respected politicians in interwar Yugoslavia, others became famous writers, such as Ivo Andrić, the 1961 Nobel Prize Laureate. The Arrival Cities of Bosnia and Serbia, and in some cases also those of Vienna and Prague, offered great opportunities. However, such opportunities may give birth to both great and tragic men.

In conclusion, I argue that scholars need to question Vladimir Dedijer's notion that Princip and his accomplices were 'primitive rebels' who gave expression to an ancient desire to stand up against alien oppressors.<sup>14</sup> While Dedijer's 1966 study is impressive in many ways, it is framed within a nationalist tradition of writing about the 1914 assassination. I instead claim that Princip was not a 'primitive rebel' from the rural tradition of the Balkans, but rather an urban and modern activist whose problems and ideas were developed in the particular 'in-between-space' of the Arrival City.

Most certainly nationalism, socialism, and other 'isms' of Europe's *fin-de-siècle* all played a role in his radicalization. However, the emphasis many historians have put on the ideological background of Princip is too strong. From a Yugoslav socialist perspective, Princip was the embodiment of dialectic struggle; from a nationalist perspective, he was the Serb or Yugoslav hero and, additionally, from a western Bal-

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<sup>14</sup> Dedijer sees the Young Bosnians as 'primitive rebels' but does not refer to the famous study of Eric Hobsbawm with the same title (*Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*). Hobsbawm's book came out in 1965, one year before the first edition of *The Road to Sarajevo* was published.

kanist perspective, he was the naïve protagonist in an orientalist-flavored narrative about Balkan hotheads. I suggest shifting the emphasis from macro-level understandings of history to the individual level, to look at Princip as a Bosnian student discovering his own social context. Radicalization, as a social question, can best be understood as a process, rather than a state of disconnection.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Princip's radicalization it is therefore crucial to study the process of his coming-of-age alongside the process of his social migration.

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<sup>15</sup> M. Taylor and J. Horgan, 'A Conceptual framework for Addressing Psychological Process in the Development of the Terrorist' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18:4 (2006), 585-601.

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