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**SLEEPWALKERS:
HOW EUROPE WENT TO WAR IN 1914**

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Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by thanking Sir Richard Evans and Valerie Shrimplin for inviting me to present this lecture this evening, and I would like also to thank all of you for coming along, and I would like to thank, and also apologise to, the people who are standing outside, and one hopes perhaps watching this from home in the form of a podcast for the fact that they could not get in.

It is indeed a matter of great pride to be succeeding Sir Richard as Regius Professor, though I want to reinforce his comment about the duties of the professorship – that are rather moderate and that is one of the key attractions of that post.

I wanted to begin by taking us back to the 28th of June 1914, which I think is the right place to begin, we should begin at the very beginning, the very best place to start, in the words of the famous song, especially since this is the first lecture in a long series on 1914, and of course it does all in a sense start - not everything, not all the back stories of 1914 start on the 28th of June, but certainly the sort of short history of the causes immediates, the immediate causes, “les causes prochaines”, as Pierre Renouvin called them, they do begin on the 28th of June, and there is a dramatic drama and identity to the events of that day, which I think repays revisiting them.

I wanted to start with this picture here of a couple who are about to have what I think can only fairly be described as a very bad day. That photo was taken a couple of days before, and as you will see, they were wearing different clothes on the day in Sarajevo, but that is certainly them. He is Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian throne; she is Sophie Chotek, the descendent of a very distinguished Bohemian lineage, not distinguished enough to rate in the eyes of the Habsburg family as of appropriate standing to be a member of Habsburg royalty, for which reason she was never allowed in Vienna, for example, to sit beside her husband in the royal carriage with its beautiful gilded wheels. That, of course, is one reason why, on the 28th of June in Sarajevo, she insisted on being beside him in the car. This was a rare opportunity for the couple, and they were a very tender and close couple by the standards of dynastic familial culture of that era. That was one reason why she insisted on sitting beside her husband on that day. The other reason was that the 28th of June was a red-letter day. It was, of course, a red-letter day in the Serbian national calendar – I will come back to that in a moment – but it was also a red-letter day in their own private history because it was the anniversary of their wedding, and that is one reason why she was beside him in the car on that morning.

Here, we see a couple of final images before the assassination. This is one which shows the Archduke and his entourage waving to various military individuals near the Sarajevo Railway Station and, as you can see, their headgear is adorned with gaudy green ostrich feathers. You cannot tell that they are green because this is a black and white photo, but they are, take my word for it, and I will come back to those ostrich feathers in a moment.

That is a map of the Balkans because I think that one can never look enough at the map of the Balkans... It always repays inspection. These are the “faraway countries”, as Neville Chamberlain called them, “of which we know nothing or little” and it is important to re-familiarise ourselves with the map. I made this comment once when I was giving a similar lecture

to this one in Zagreb in Croatia and I said, you know, “It’s terribly important to familiarise oneself with the Balkans,” I just said it automatically, and then suddenly I realised I was in the Balkans, and my Croat audience was looking at me with puzzled expressions! But I have chosen these two maps because it is like two almost identical images on the back of a cereal package where you have got to identify the eleven differences between image one and image two, and I wanted to draw your attention just to a couple.

One is that, with no further ado, Albania suddenly appears between 1911 and 1914 – it is suddenly there in 1913, a new nation-state appears on the Balkan Peninsula. Another is that Serbia greatly increases in its extent, and both of these events are the consequence of the two Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, today largely forgotten conflicts, but actually very bloody and traumatic conflicts for the societies involved – Bulgaria, Serbia, and in the case of the second Balkan War, Romania, Montenegro and of course the Ottoman Empire.

So those are two important differences, and all of this has to do with the receding, the withdrawal of Ottoman power, the collapse of power, of Ottoman imperial power on the periphery of the Ottoman Empire, the loss of most, not all, but most of Islamic Europe.

The other point I want to make is about something that both maps have in common and that is the fact that Belgrade – in this map here, because of a printing error, Belgrade almost looks as if it is inside the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Of course, it is not. It is the capital city of the Kingdom of Serbia. But it is a few minutes’ drive by carriage from Belgrade to the border with Austria-Hungary. When the Austrian representative in Belgrade packed up his bags and broke off diplomatic relations and left the city of Belgrade, having received the Serbian reply to the Austrian ultimatum on the 25th of July, it took him a few minutes to get back onto his own native terrain. This tells us something about the intimate relations, the intimate character of this relationship between Serbia and the sprawling, multi-ethnic commonwealth of Austria-Hungary, a relationship which was toxic and poisonous, but also very close, two countries that watched each other with a sort of perspicacity driven by mutual hostility.

Now, this is the closest thing that the early-twentieth century got to Google Earth. It is an engraving from the Baedeker Travel Guide and it shows the city of Sarajevo. Sarajevans will all tell you it is a kind of cliché in the city that the city is a cupped hand, like this, and that, between the two hands, between the two cupped hands, runs the River Miljacka, which you can see crossing the city from the west to the east, and it is along this river, on the Appel Quay, along this river that the cars passed, bearing various people, but including of course the Archduke and his wife, in car number two, making their way towards the building marked here as the Rathaus, the City Hall.

The next image, I am very fond of because it conveys with such brutal simplicity the narrative of that morning – I mean, you cannot ask for simpler than that. As the cars pass the bridge, just here, a young man called Nedeljko Cabrinovic, a young Bosnian-Serb and one of seven young men who have gathered in the city to attempt to assassinate the couple – not to assassinate the couple, an important distinction, they want to assassinate him, though, in the case of Cabrinovic, he was willing to take the risk of assassinating her as well because he threw...well, we call it a bomb. In fact, it was a bit more like a grenade, with a chemical fuse. He broke the detonating cap against a lamp-post, and that made a loud bang. It is thought that the driver, hearing this bang, thought that somebody had fired a shot, and hit the accelerator and that is why, instead of landing inside the car, where it would have killed or very seriously maimed the Archduke and his wife, it landed behind the car. It may also have been swatted away from the car by the Archduke – the eyewitness testimony is confusing or is conflicting on this question. But, in any case, it rolled under car number three, exploded under the car, gouging a hole in the road, injuring the people inside the car but not seriously – a lot of superficial cuts, a lot of blood everywhere, but nobody in serious danger. The people in the third car were carried off to hospital and the third car was a stricken hulk. The other cars picked their way around the third car, and at this point, you might have thought it might have been time to call off the visit to Sarajevo...

Indeed, this point was made to Franz Ferdinand. It was suggested things are not going well, a bomb has been thrown, should we not be leaving, upon which the Archduke replied, “Absolutely not – don’t be ridiculous! The man is clearly insane – have him taken to an asylum!” He was suffering a syndrome for which the technical term is “grumpy old man”. It is something that happens to a lot of us – we get more and more irritated by less and less. But, of course, having a bomb thrown at you is no small irritation. But, in any case, he was having none of it, and he did not like to be given advice, he did not like security details, he did not like all the fuss with that, and he insisted on business as usual, carrying on as planned, even though his wife – there was a sort of trickle of blood down his wife’s cheek. She had been struck by one of the metal splinters from the bomb that had exploded under car number three. And so it came about that the cars continued their progress along the Appel Quay, alongside the River Miljacka, towards the City Hall, which you cannot see on that map.

The next picture, I am particularly fond of. It is actually a still from a film, and it shows them coming out from various meetings that took place at the City Hall. I mean, the arrival at City Hall was in itself something to behold because, of

course, by the time they got to the City Hall, the Mayor, Mayor Curcic, to whom fell the unenviable task of welcoming the couple, of course the noise of the bomb had already been heard, he had been informed a bomb has gone off, it was going terribly badly. He was a nervous man at the best of times, he did not like giving public speeches, and now the speech he had and had prepared to give, which had been glued onto a paddle of wood for him to read from, was woefully inadequate to the situation because it began with – but he was too nervous to change the text. It began with the words, which he then proceeded to read out, in a trembling voice: “It is with sentiments of the deepest joy that the citizens of Sarajevo welcome Your Highnesses to our beautiful city.” Halfway through this sentence, he was interrupted by grumpy old man, with the words, “Deepest joy? Welcome? Is this how you welcome your visitors, with bombs?!” I mean, he had a point. At this point, his wife, Sophie Chotek, was seen leaning towards him and whispering something into his ear. It is not known what it was, but it was probably something along the lines of, don’t...you know, “Let him get on with it, dear, it’s not his fault.” There are moments like this in every marriage. And he said, “Very well, you may continue!” and Curcic continued with his talk, and then it was time for the Archduke to reply, whereupon it turned out that the text of his speech in reply had been in the pocket of the adjutant who had been in car number three, so it was now covered in blood, and a lot of wiping and scraping had to be done so that he could read the text. I mean, things were going really horribly wrong.

At this point, they then met – she met with Muslim ladies, he went up to the balcony and took a last look at the city, chatted with various dignitaries, at which point, by this point, there were signs, according to eyewitnesses, that he was starting to get nervous. He was starting to get jumpy and his voice was getting higher and higher, and he was clearly keen to be off. They came back down, got back into the car, and of course, what happened next, you all know.

This is a fanciful French rendering of what happened next. This is the front page image. They really were fantastic pictures. Of course, this does not give you anything like an accurate rendering of what actually happened on that day. The shot is being fired from the wrong side of the car. Princip in fact was standing on the other side. They did not rise up like figures in opera. Here, it looks as if he is singing “I die! I die!” In fact, nothing of that kind happened. The shots were both so effective – one struck him in the jugular vein and the other struck her deep in the abdomen – that they remained seated exactly where they were, and it was not clear even to the bodyguard, Count Harrach, who was standing on the running board of the car, though of course, in very Austrian fashion, on the wrong side, it was not clear even to Count Harrach that they had been struck by the shots fired by the assassin. It looked as if the shots might have got wide, and Governor Potiorek, who was sitting in the jump-seat, the spring-seat opposite the couple – you cannot see him in that picture, he has been left out – he recalled in his deposition before the court, at which these young men were arraigned, before which they were arraigned, he recorded in his deposition that it was not clear to him that the shots had actually met their mark. He had not even managed to hear the shots. He saw the young man step forward and hold the gun up to eye level and fire from point-blank range, but he did not hear any reports. He saw flags of smoke, and the next thing he knew, Harrach was shouting to the Czech driver to get back onto the Appel Quay and to drive back towards the Konak, the Palace, where they were going to see what should be done next. It is only as they were driving back down the Appel Quay that it became clear, as some blood began issuing from his mouth, Sophie Chotek sort of tilted sideways until her head was resting in his lap, and at this point, Harrach heard the Archduke say to his wife words which very quickly became famous throughout the monarchy. They went viral – I mean, they really went global very, very swiftly. He said to her, “Sopher! Sopher! Sterbe nicht! Bleibe am leben fur unsere kinder!” – “Sophie! Sophie! Don’t die – stay alive for our children!” This was an extremely, as I say, unusually tender family, with a very intense familial life, and that was a very typical sort of moment, and Harrach recorded that. In fact, the letter in which Harrach reports these words to his wife was just the other day auctioned, I think at Christie’s, for a vast sum, an undisclosed sum, as far as I know. In any case, that is what happened next.

Here, you see an image that was sold worldwide at the time as a photograph of the arrest of Gavrilo Princip, the most active commander and the man who took the two shots outside Schiller’s general store on the 28th of June, the man who killed the two people in the car, and of course, if, given the state of photography, its technological development in 1914, somebody had managed to get a snapshot like this of the arrest of Princip, it would be nothing short of a miracle. In fact, this is not the arrest of Princip. The photographer who took this picture had been warned in advance that an arrest was going to take place. It took place a couple of days later. It is the arrest of a man called Theodore Behr, who was picked up along with a lot of other suspects during the sort of police dragnet that inevitably always follows political assassinations of this kind. But I have included this picture because, I mean, firstly, it is a marvellous example of journalistic resourcefulness and wit, because the photo journalist who took this picture subsequently captioned it as the arrest of Princip and made an absolute fortune from its syndication, although that was of course the last time, the last occasion on which a journalist has behaved like that...

The picture is also interesting because what you can see – and of course, all images, even if this is...this image is false in as much as it purports to show the arrest of Princip, it is true in the sense that it shows the arrest of someone, and what it also shows us is that this young man is not just being arrested, he is also being protected by the Austrian officials who were arresting him, and he is being protected from local Bosnian Muslim. You can tell because they are wearing fezes, and that is a reminder of two things: first, that Sarajevo was a very Bosnian Muslim town – the Muslim elite ran the sort of

machinery of city administration, the Mayor, Mayor Curcic, was himself a Bosnian Muslim, and as you may recall from that image showing the couple issuing from the City Hall, a lot of the people standing there waving them on, or welcoming them rather, saying goodbye to them as they leave rather, as they leave to get back into the car, are wearing fezes in the Bosnian Muslim fashion, and so, what that tells us is something about the extreme emotion that was triggered by these two assassinations. There is a lot of Bosnian Muslim violence against Serbs in Sarajevo and other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also violence by Croats against Serbs. So, in other words, this assassination awakened inter-ethnic tensions, which were always fairly alive in the region in any case.

This is an image of the young man who took the two shots. As you can see, he is slender and rather sallow. He was already quite ill by the time he took these two shots – not mentally ill but suffering quite seriously from tuberculosis, of which he subsequently died in the Theresienstadt Prison. One of the many sort of ironies or tragic resonances of this story is that he died in Theresienstadt, later of such evil fame due to the role it played in the Holocaust.

The interesting thing about Princip and his friends is simply a couple of points to bear in mind... They were not terrorists in the sort of twenty-first century sense – they did not rejoice in indiscriminate carnage. When the words of the Archduke, “Sopher! Sopher! Sterbe nicht!” and so on, were read out at court, Princip visibly wept, he was upset. He had not intended to kill the Archduke’s wife. Several of the boys were shocked to see that she was riding beside him – this worried them, and in a couple of cases, it may be the reason why they failed to take their shots or to throw their bombs. They did not want to kill a lady. They wanted to kill him because he was a representative of political power. So, they were carriers of State terrorism, which was narrowly focused on the carriers of power. The second shot fired was not aimed at her, but in all probability, it is true that, as Princip claimed, he was aiming at Governor Potiorek, a very hated figure in the province, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but that he missed because his arm was probably already being grabbed by someone in the crowd or he was being jostled by someone in the crowd, as you can imagine, as people would, once the first shot had been fired.

The other thing to bear in mind is some of his collaborators, [Ciganovic, Cabrinovic], Illic, and Grabez, is simply that these seven men, six of them were Bosnian-Serbs, and they were not subjects of the Kingdom of Serbia. They were Bosnian-Bosnians – in other words, they were subjects of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, although of course six of them were Serb Nationalists. There was a young man who was a Bosnian Muslim, but not a religious man, a man who was effectively a radical socialist. Why he was recruited to the group is not clear, but one reason may be he was not actually recruited in Belgrade, he was recruited by Danilo Illic, a local operative working within Sarajevo itself, and he may have done that because he wanted to de-Serbianise the group – it is not clear. He had a record of failed political actions. He had already failed to carry out an assassination on another occasion, so it is rather mystifying that he should have been chosen for this task. In any case, of the group of seven young men in the city, the three most active ones Kavonovi, Grabez and Princip, had all been – and this was quickly established by the Austrians – had all been supplied with their guns and bombs in Belgrade, they had been trained in marksmanship at a park outside the capital city, and they had made it across the borders – this was also quickly established – across the Serbian borders with the assistance of members of the Serbian border force, in other words, the Serbian border troop.

What the Austrians did not succeed in demonstrating was direct involvement by the Serbian State, and in fact, we can say now with confidence that the Serbian State as such was not complicit in the carrying out of this assassination. The President, Nikola Pasic, had foreknowledge of the movement of bombs and guns and young men across the border from Serbia into Bosnia-Herzegovina shortly before the arrival of the Archduke in the province, but he was unable to prevent it because these movements were taking place under the control of an underground network that was operating with the support of part of the officer corps of the Serbian Army, a movement known as Ujedinjenje ili Smrt, “Union or Death”, or also, famously, in history, as the Black Hand, and it was Pasic’s inability to control this movement which gave rise to the problems, in a sense, allowed the assassination to happen, not his direct complicity or the intention of the Serbian Government as such to carry out an assassination of this kind. Pasic recognised perfectly clearly that this form of ultra-violent irredentist activity posed a very grave security risk to his State.

Well, there are the events of the 28th of June 1914, and I just want to start really the more formal part of what I want to say by reminding you of something you all know already, which is that, on the morning of the 28th of June, when this couple arrived at Sarajevo Railway Station, Europe was at peace. In fact, if you had asked the statesmen, the best-informed statesmen – they were all men in this era – of Europe whether they believed that a major Continental conflagration war was imminent or highly probably, then the great majority, probably all of them would have told you that, in the last twelve to eighteenth months, war had been becoming less likely, not more likely. After all, one had made it through the two Balkan Wars, these two major wars in the Balkan Peninsula, in an interstitial space between the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire, and the failing or receding Ottoman Empire, without there being a broader conflagration. Margaret McMillan has written very persuasively and spoken very persuasively of the deadening drumbeat of crisis in the pre-War era. We tend to think that people are warned by crises, that each crisis makes us more acute, more acutely aware of the dangers to come, but actually, repeated crises can have the opposite effect: they can deaden our awareness of danger, and

in some ways, that seems to have been happening in 1911, 1912, and 1913. And we have the very eloquent testimony of Sir Arthur Nicholson, a senior functionary in the British Foreign Office, who wrote to a colleague in May 1914: “In all the years I have been at the Foreign Office, I have never seen such calm international waters.” So, not a starry hour of diplomatic prognosis...

In any case, 37 days after the visit to Sarajevo, only 37 days later, of course, as you all know, a European war had broken out, and out of this European war, there evolved a global war and this war I think has rightly been described as “the primal catastrophe”. The term is Kennan’s, George F. Kennan’s, originally “the primal catastrophe of the 20th Century”. It has been widely taken up in the German language historiography, a hairy-scary sort of feel to it, which “primal catastrophe” doesn’t, but in any case, it consumed – and this term “primal catastrophe” is now controversial. The point has been made that this War was not a primal catastrophe for everybody. It was not for the Baltic States or for Poland. It is a painful moment of birth for those states. I had a very interesting conversation with a Polish journalist, and he made the point, he said, “You know, I cannot possibly be asked to lament the First World War – that is the birth hour, the hour of birth of the Polish nation state. How are you supposed to have a modern Poland without this War?” There is no other conceivable way to unlock the Polish nation from the control exercised over it by Russians, Germans and Austrians. So, for Poland, clearly, it is not a primal catastrophe. It probably is not for Australians either. For Australia, of course, it is a very bloody War, the sacrifice in terms of blood and treasure is great, as it is for so many other countries, but Australians all fight as volunteers, they all go to war willingly, and the war becomes a mythopoeic moment. It is a very important constituent in the myth of Australian nationhood. It is the first major political act of the Australian nation state after confederation in 1901. This is the first war that Australia chooses out of its own free initiative. So, it is not a primal catastrophe for everybody, but it is I think if we think about the amount of poison released into the European political system by this War, about its destabilising effect on global politics, about its long-term consequences in the Middle East. It is, I think, right to think of this War, in its global frame, as a primal catastrophe. It consumed four great empires – the German Empire, the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and of course the Austro-Hungarian, all consumed in the cauldron of this War. More importantly, it caused the deaths of between ten and thirteen million young men – these are just military deaths on its numerous fields of conflict. The global statistics about wounded men are not very reliable, but the estimates sort of oscillate between fifteen and twenty one million wounded men, and I am not talking here about lightly wounded men who were treated in theatre or in field hospitals just behind the front, but men who carried serious wounds, many of whom felt the effects of these wounds right through until the end of their lives, and certainly people of my generation in Australia, and it is no different in Britain or in Germany or in France, remember from their youth elderly relatives and elderly friends of the family, elderly men of course, who were still carrying around with them the effects of wounds that they had got in that conflict.

So, I think that Fritz Stern, the German-American émigré, Jewish-German American historian, wonderful historian, is right when he says that this is the disaster out of which all the disasters of the 20th Century sprang. It is very difficult to imagine the rise and seizure of power of fascism in Italy without this War; it is difficult to imagine the October Revolution in the Russian Empire without the First World War. Everybody predicted something like the February Revolution, the collapse of tsarist autocratic authority and seizure of power by a middling coalition of political entities, right-wing social democrats perhaps, constitutional democrats, nationalists and so on, but no one had foreseen the coup-like takeover of power by the Bolsheviks and the creation thereafter of a one-party state under Bolshevik control, which, of course, was attended by a further Russian Civil War that consumed yet another five to seven million lives. There, again, we do not have very good statistics. And of course, it is difficult to imagine German history taking the disastrous and appalling turn that it took in the direction of Nazism and of the Holocaust without the titanic pressures brought to bear on German society and, above all, on German political culture by this vast conflict. So, I think that my former colleague in Cambridge, now teaching at Yale University – I think he is about to move to Columbia – Adam Tooze, is right when he speaks in a book that he just finished writing called “The Deluge”, about the long-term legacy of this War, he is right I think to speak of this War as “unhinging” the global political system, and the book goes into great detail – we do not have time to do that today – on the various ways in which it did and the consequences that they had.

So, from all of this, it follows that the question of how this War came about possesses a certain intrinsic interest. I do not want to disappoint you, but I am not the first person to have noticed that. This is an old debate. In fact, it is as old as the War itself. It is even slightly older than the War because the argument about who was responsible, who was guilty of bringing this War into the world began before the first shots were fired. It is amazing how many of the theses and arguments, including some of the most sophisticated ones that you can find in the secondary literature, you can already find on the lips of those who themselves helped to bring this War into the world. So, it is an old debate. According to John W. Langdon, the American historian, who published a book called “The Long Debate” in 1991, he counted 25,000 books and articles in English that you really ought to read in order to be in control of this subject matter, and we have the more eloquent example of Rebecca West, the author, in my view, of one of the deepest and most sophisticated reflections on the place of the Balkans in twentieth century history, a person who loved the Balkans and its peoples, and I am thinking of her book “Black Lamb, Grey Falcon”. She travelled to Sarajevo in 1937 to see the place where the fuse was lit, and she walked up the stairs, with her husband Paul, to the balcony and they looked out over the city, and she turned to

him and she said, “I shall never understand how it all came to pass. It is not that we know too little, it is that we know too much.”

That was 1937, and of course, today, we know a hell of a lot more, so the question then arises: why add yet another book to this pyramid of paper?! As you can imagine, my colleagues were not slow to ask this question. “Surely this has been done to death?!” I remember a colleague in my college saying to me for about the ninth time once at lunch, one of those moments where you feel like just dumping your cutlery and walking away, and I think that colleagues often have a sort of genius at this. You know, just as you are struggling with the cruelties of a really difficult problem, they come up with excellent reasons why you should just curl up and die! But of course, you have to find an answer to these taunts, and I did find an answer, and the answer is this: that, yes, the debate is old, there is no doubt about that, but the subject is still fresh. In many ways, the subject is fresher now than it was 10, 20 or 30 years ago. When I first encountered the problem of the First World War, it is an absolutely essential problem in history teaching at Australian schools. I grew up in Sydney, Australia, and when I first encountered it in my high school in Sydney, a kind of period charm had accumulated around the events of 1914. This was Europe’s last summer – there was a lot of gin and tonic and tennis.

If you read the marvellous books of Barbara Tuchman, which, I recommend to everyone – I think they are fantastic pieces of historical reflection on the problems of the world that brought this War into existence – but if you read these books, one notices now, the loving detail with which uniforms are described, eccentric personalities. You have Lord Salisbury riding to the House of Commons on London’s first pneumatically-tyred tricycle, pushed by his valet James. He has to be pushed because there are no pedals on this thing - it did not occur to him to put any on. There is a lot of detail on the menus at gala dinners and on details on Habsburg court precedents, on this extraordinary late flowering of courtly excess which was characteristic of Europe in the last couple of decades before the outbreak of the First World War. And as one is acquainted with the panoply, the vista of the ornamentalism of this world, then gradually the assumption stealthily asserts itself that these must be the inhabitants of a bygone world, that if their hats had gaudy green ostrich feathers on them, then perhaps their dreams, their thoughts and arguments also had gaudy green ostrich feathers. Perhaps these are people who are utterly uncontemporary, they cannot speak to us, we have lost touch with them.

And yet, if you take another look at the events of the 28th of June, not from the perspective of the 1970s but from the perspective of today, as people of the early not quite beginning 21st Century, and you think of what happened on that day, the cavalcade of automobiles on the Appel Quay, you cannot help but be reminded of Dallas in November 1963. It is the raw modernity of the events that strikes you. The story starts with a squad of suicide bombers, exotic figures when they first appeared, when they populated the historiography of the First World War in the 1970s, but much less exotic figures now – they are a very familiar part of our historical landscape. And of course, behind these young men were underground networks, only obliquely linked to any kind of sovereign structure. I mentioned before the very oblique connections between the Serbian State and the underground networks that were driving this kind of violent irredentism.

And I think our compass has shifted in other ways as well. If you think about the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, one of the extraordinary features of the literature on the outbreak of the First World War, and the literature on the origins of the First World War, was that, in large parts of this literature, with a few distinguished exceptions, the Balkans are almost entirely airbrushed from the scene. It is as if they are not there. This is all about relations between the Great Powers. The periphery zones are simply not visible – they are not in the field of vision. But I think, since the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, it makes less sense, or it is less obvious that we should dismiss or disregard the power of Balkan nationalism, its role as an historical factor in its own right.

And then there is the fact that 9/11, the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, reminded us of the power of an event, the power of a terrorist event with symbolic meanings. By that, I do not wish to suggest a cheap comparison or an equivalence between the extraordinary carnage in New York and the murder of two people in Sarajevo, but nevertheless, the effect of this event, in particular on the Austro-Hungarian polity, on the political mood, the chemistry of politics and decision-making in Vienna, is absolutely beyond doubt, and I think it is worth remembering this because the event, as an analytical category, has sometimes fallen out of favour with historians. There was a time in the 1970s and 1980s when it was very trendy to cite and re-cite the beautiful comment by Fernand Braudel, I mean, wonderfully eloquent, the great doyen of the Annales School of History in France, who commented that events were the sort of “...soft contemptible foam that rides on the back of the great waves that are history’s structures,” so that historians who worked on events were just barking up the wrong tree – that was not the part of history that mattered. What mattered was the deep *longue duree* of structures changing slowly over many generations. But of course, it can be the other way around. I mean, there is certainly a lot in what Braudel says, but it can be the other way around: sometimes events can be hard and structures can be soft. We need to think more dialectically about the relationship between these two categories.

And finally, there is the fact that we are no longer in the era of bipolar stability that we used to call the Cold War, and we are still scratching our heads and trying to work out what that means. I went to an interesting paper in Belgrade by George Friedman, the American political scientist, and he commented that, we had the Cold War, then we had the post-Cold War

– that was the period from 1989 till about 2007, and that was an era of total uni-polarity. There was only one great power left and everybody was watching Washington and there was talk of full spectrum dominance and so on. That era has now passed and we are now in what he calls the post-post-Cold War. It gets more and more unwieldy – I was hoping he would come up with something a bit more handy, but no, the post-post-Cold War. And this is an era when it is no longer uni-polar. We are back in a period which is authentically multi-polar, with numerous centres of power, a world populated not just by, on the one hand, a weary Titan – that was the term sometimes used about Britain before 1914, and some might like today to describe Washington as a weary Titan. It is not in decline in any kind of metrically provable sense, but it is certainly wearying in some respects, subjectively at least, of its world role, or parts of it are. On the one hand, we have that, and on the other hand, we have rising powers, one in particular which is rattling at the cage of the geopolitical system in ways which unsettle many chancelleries and I am not of course referring to Russia.

So, these shifts in perspective, which, I mean, this is of course a world which in many ways resembles 1914 more and more, rather than less and less, so we have a paradoxical situation where, even as 1914 recedes further away into the past, it actually in some ways feels more relevant. It speaks to us more intimately and more urgently. These shifts in perspective prompt us to re-think the story of how war came to Europe in 1914. Accepting that challenge does not mean embracing a vulgar presentism which re-makes the past to suit the political preferences or demands of the present. Rather, it means acknowledging those features of the past, of which our changed vantage point can afford us a clearer view.

Bearing all this in mind, how does one go about refreshing the narrative? How do you develop a distinctive approach to a question like this one? In the last part of what I want to say today, I want to touch on some of the ways in which I have tried to do that.

The first was, and this is something – all historians have to earn our keep by coming up with something new to say, and one way you can do that is you can try and think of a new answer to an old problem. But in the case of 1914, that is really difficult because, in a way, all the possible answers have already been given: it was nobody, it was everybody, it was Germany, it was Russia, it was France. We even have Niall Ferguson, who, in a sort of perverse moment of brilliance, blamed Britain for the outbreak of the First World War. So, the point is not to find a new answer. I thought it might be more interesting to find a new question. In other words, instead of asking the question which is at the heart of the origins literature – “Why did this War come about?” – I thought it might be more interesting to ask the question “How did peace become war?” Why does that make a difference? After all, “how” and “why” questions are intrinsically linked – they are like Cathy and Heathcliff. They are entangled at the root and you cannot pull them entirely apart.

And yet, they do lead us in different questions, because “why” questions lead us in the direction of categorical causes or of categories that are deemed to be causes, like, for example, nationalism, the rise of imperialism, the spread of social Darwinism, and as you trawl the last few decades before the outbreak of war, looking for causes, you start to fall prey to an optical illusion. As you pile the causes onto the scale, the tongue of the scale tilts from a possible war to a likely war to a highly probable war to an inevitable war, and as it tilts, the agency of those individuals, those statesmen who chose this War, because this War was not a natural event, it was not a volcanic eruption, it did not have to happen, it was a war, like all wars, was chosen by the individuals who made it. The agency of those people who chose and decided for this War is squeezed out of the field of vision; they become mere executors of forces beyond their control. So, that was a sort of optical flaw, for which I wanted to correct in this book.

The second problem about “why” questions, I was alerted to that by a Bulgarian historian of the two Balkan Wars, who makes the interesting comment in the introduction to his book, and I quote: “Once we ask the question “why”, guilt soon becomes the focal point.” In other words, when we ask the question “Why did this War happen?” what we really mean is “Who did this? Who brought this War into the world?” In fact, that question has been at the centre of the literature on the origins of the First World War, and it is hard to imagine how it could not have been, given that the Versailles Treaty at the end of the First World War named a guilty party. It did not use the term “guilt” or “should” in the actual text of the treaty itself, but the accompanying documentation made it clear that Germany was the power, Germany and its allies, but Germany in particular was the power responsible for the outbreak of the War. So, since then, the question of who brought about this War has been at the centre of the origins’ debate. The problem with a blame-centred approach is of course that it tempts us into identifying a suspect. We identify a likely suspect and then we draw up a charge sheet. We collect proofs, we collect evidence. That is exactly what the most influential single utterance on this problem, the historian Fritz Fischer wrote several books on this problem, “Germany’s Drive for World Power” and then, much more importantly, “The War of Illusions” and various other books that followed, in which he argued that it was Germany that caused this War. It did not only cause it, it planned it in advance, and so Germany alone, in a sense. I mean, he never used the term “sole culpability” but that is, in effect, what his books were arguing because he took no interest whatsoever in any other state. So, one consequence of the blame-focused approach is that you zero in, you narrow the field of vision to examine the behaviour of one supposedly blameworthy state, at the expense of thinking hard about how the behaviour of this state interacts with the behaviour of other states.

By contrast, the “how” approach does something different. It aims to draw a line, plot a track through the events and the decisions and the behaviours and the developments that allowed risks to accumulate within the European system before 1914. This does not mean excluding questions of responsibility or guilt. You have to face them in the end. But my objective was to try and answer the “how” questions first and then answer the “why” questions, rather than deciding to answer the “why” or rather the “who” question first, and then find out how that particular state did what it did, which is effectively the way that Fritz Fischer proceeded and people who worked in that tradition.

Now, of course, there are other things one has to do as well in order to refresh this debate, or to try and refresh the debate. One was to capture trends from the literature, and this is, it is sometimes claimed that we have a consensus in the literature on 1914. I would be very wary of accepting that claim. This is an extremely interesting literature. It is in very rapid transition right at the moment, and one of the most interesting recent developments in writing on the First World War has been a globalisation on the field of vision. We do not anymore think of the origins of the First World War as a solely European matter, in terms of a Anglo-German antagonism or the tension between France and Germany. There have been recent studies by Thomas Otte, for example, of the China question, showing how the rising importance of China creates tensions between the Great Powers. Increasingly, it has become clear, in recent writing on the international system before 1914, that this was a world in which each of the Great Powers had more than one enemy. The new school on British naval history, for example, has shown that the Empire of Great Britain, faced or lived within what they perceived in London to be a threat-rich environment. It was not just about Germany. Russia was also perceived as a very serious threat. There was deep hostility to Russia in London.

One has to complicate these narratives which, like the one that I was told at school by a teacher, a fantastically effective teacher, who was a pupil of Fritz Fischer – he was very excited by the Fischer thesis that was then, in the 1970s, the absolutely fresh orthodoxy on the question of the origins of the War, and I still remember him standing up in front of the class with his hand held up like this and saying, “Boys, if you get a question on the outbreak of the First War World, just remember the five German provocations: ships, they built ships, and that upset the British – you should never build ships because it upsets the British; Morocco, the Moroccan crisis, they challenged the French in Northern Africa, and they should never do that – the French get very upset when you do that; there is the Bosnian annexation – they support Austria over Bosnia and that upset the Russians, and you should not upset the Russians; they challenged the French in Morocco again, in the second Moroccan crisis, and they issued a blank cheque of support to Austria on the 5th of July 1914.” Now, that is an inspired piece of teaching, and I still remember every single one of those points, though I no longer agree with them, but there you are. Well, they are all true, but they just have to be embedded in a larger picture. So, the idea was to get away from – I mean, clearly, once you think about the sort of multi-polarity of the system before 1914, it becomes harder and harder to think in terms of five German provocations.

And then there are just a couple of other points before I close... The first is that I was very struck when I worked on the background to 1914 at the chaotic quality of decision-making in the executive structures of Europe at that time. I do not have time to dwell on this in any detail, but suffice it to say that power was buzzing around in these systems, from one node in the structure to another, and one of the questions that diplomats are constantly being asked to answer in their various stations, in their various embassies and missions, is “Who is actually running the show – who is determining foreign policy?”

The answers coming from Russia are constantly changing: it is the Czar, the Czar is intervening directly; no, it is not, he has now disappeared from politics – now it is the Ministry of War; no, now it is the Foreign Minister again; no, now the Prime Minister, Stolypin, has taken over, and so on.

So, there is a sense in which there is a Heisenbergian uncertainty about where power actually is, and this applies to all of these systems, including the British one, where we have a constitutionally very powerful Foreign Secretary in the person of Edward Grey, but this is a person whose own support for a policy of entente with France is not sustained, is not backed by the majority of his Cabinet colleagues, let alone the majority of British Parliamentarians or the majority of his own Liberal Party. So, there too, you have confusion about what can Grey promise and what he cannot promise – how much power does he have to make engagements vis-à-vis France?

And the classic example, I think, and you can capture it statistically, is the fact that, during the tenure in office of Sir Edward Grey, in Paris, sixteen Foreign Ministers came and went from office, and two of them came and went twice. In France, you had a kind of guerrilla warfare between the permanent functionaries of the Foreign Office, the Quay d’Orsay, the senior ambassadors in places like London and Berlin, the brothers Cambon, and you had the ambassadors themselves were great independent decision-makers. You have the case of Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, who famously commented in a letter to a colleague, he said: “Look, when I don’t like the instructions I get from Paris, I burn them!” Of course, you could do that in those days because they had open fireplaces in the offices and there were no smoke alarms.

One last point before I close, and that is I tried to highlight links in the chain of events before 1914 that I thought had been under-exposed, and one of these was the Italian attack on Libya in 1911. Now, this is today an almost entirely forgotten war. It is even forgotten in Italy, and yet, it was a very traumatic war for the Northern African societies affected by it. The Italians launched this war without any provocation. It was simply an imperial war of annexation. They wanted to make Libya – we call it Libya, it was not called Libya then. It consisted of three integral provinces of the Ottoman Empire, Fezzan, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. But the point about this war is it is very interesting in all sorts of ways. This is the first war ever to see the use of aeroplanes, for reconnaissance and bombardment. It is the first war ever to see air strikes. Now, these air strikes were primitive by today's standards. They involved hand-thrown bombs, which had to be primed by hand. The fuse had to be screwed into the back of the bomb by the pilot, who had to grip the bomb between his knees, screw the fuse in, while controlling his machine, so it was a fairly adventurous business. But of course, it was much more comfortable on-board the airships that the Italians also deployed, which had racks that could carry up to 250 of these bombs, which were thrown by trained bomb-throwers, and the effect on the Turko-Arabic troops on the ground, the people we today call ground troops, was predictably drastic. The head of the Serbian political section of the Serbian Foreign Office in Belgrade, a man called Miroslav Spalajkovic, commented in an interesting interview after the First World War to a French journalist. He said, "This Italian war on Libya, "Ca, c'était la première aggression," – "That was the first aggression." From that folded all that came thereafter – the two Balkan Wars, the Great War. It all started with the Italian attack on Libya. It is interesting that you can find many other voices saying this as well, including the French Foreign Minister, Stephen Pichon, who was in charge of the Quay d'Orsay at the time in Paris.

So, that is an interesting moment in the backstory of this War, because it is a moment that simply does not remotely fit into the Fischer view of the world, which is a world of quiet and calm, Great Powers quietly and peaceably getting on with their business, until one very aggressive and psychopathic power disturbs the peace. It reminds us of how complex, how multi-vectoral this system is, how many disturbances are occurring from how many different sources, and the Italian War on Libya is just one of many other examples that one could give.

So, I want to close by saying that, once one walks these paths and thinks about the "how" rather than the "why", it becomes very difficult to return to the blame-game so brilliantly expounded by Fritz Fischer, and by calling it a game, I do not wish to belittle it, any more than game theory is a belittling of what people do when game theorists talk about them, but I simply want to suggest that you cannot – it becomes very difficult to return to the uni-polarities and the certainties of a Fischer-style view, or, for that matter, to those studies that blame Russia or France for the outbreak of War, which I think is an equally serious misprision of how this War came about. There is no question about the appeal of the blame-game. There is a moral payload, when we can finally point our finger at a guilty party. But it is not that kind of narrative. This is not a James Bond movie script in which, at the end, we find velvet-jacketed villains in a sort of mountain hideaway lined with flashing LEDs, stroking a white cat with a prosthetic steel hand and planning world Armageddon. It is not an Agatha Christie murder mystery in which, at the end, we find the vicar with a blood-stained swordfish standing beside the prone body of Lady Carrington in the conservatory. This War was the consequence of decisions made in many places, whose effect of course was cumulative and interactive, decisions made by a gallery of actors, who shared a fundamentally similar political culture. It was genuinely complex, not just complicated, but complex. It was genuinely multi-polar, and it was genuinely European, and it was to highlight or to illuminate these aspects of the story of how this War came into the world that I wrote this book.

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