

Clark, Christopher. *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*. Penguin Books, London and New York, 2012. xxix + 697 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Index. £30.00.

THIS bestselling study of the outbreak of the First World War has been received with great acclaim by the British and American press. It has, however, also caused some consternation with its labelling of Gavrilo Princip and Franz Ferdinand's Sarajevo-based assassins as terrorists, and their comparison with those responsible for the attack on New York's World Trade Center in 2001. Consequently, this tag was adjusted in the book's German edition although no attempt was made to address the meaning of either term. The way in which Clark sets out thus to alter our perceptions of the origins of the Great War, whilst offering a new interpretation of Serbia's role, will be discussed in this review.

Clark's book is a highly readable account, in the style of traditional diplomatic histories, that charts the realignment of the European great powers in the light of Balkan politics in the years immediately preceding World War One. Clark traces the actions and ideas that guided monarchs and ministers, the military and diplomatic corps, along with the party politics of all the major European players, including the Balkans, and weaves them into a coherent narrative which proposes, essentially, that Europe sleepwalked into war. Clark's shift away from the conventional emphasis on the Great Powers to a minor Balkan country — Serbia — is innovative. Rejecting long-held British (and also French) triumphalism, Clark argues that the European powers' aggression, paranoia and readiness to engage in global warfare in order to defend their own interests were to blame for the onset of the Great War, and criticizes the marginalization of the Balkan dimension which up to now has been treated largely as a pretext in the historiography. Clark claims that after the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, it became clear that Serbian nationalism was a force in its own right, enabling him to reconsider the unfolding of the years leading up to the First World War from a new perspective. While it is of course accepted that the tragic legacy of Balkan nationalism was responsible for much of what occurred in the conflict over Yugoslav dissolution during the 1990s, it is, however, highly problematic to deploy the same reasoning to the various factors that brought about the First World War,

since these involved forces that were far greater, more powerful and at quite a remove from Europe's south-eastern states.

Although Clark is to be commended for attempting to integrate Balkan history into the wider European domain, he is not an expert on the region, and his account is, unfortunately therefore, littered with inaccuracies and misreadings. Apart from the absence of any order applied to the spelling of Slavic names, there are a number of geographical and factual errors. For example, the journey that Prague journalist Egon Kisch made on foot in 1913 from Cetinje in Montenegro to Rijeka, was to the town on the shores of nearby lake Skadar, not to the coastal city in Croatia, several hundred kilometres away (p. 92). A lack of a deep understanding of Balkan politics during the first two decades of the twentieth century is evident throughout the book, and is made plain by instances where details are introduced seemingly ad hoc, without explanation. For example, Clark uses the term 'New Serbia' (p. 389) to locate a speech given by Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić in June 1914, but offers no definition of the term. At the same time, in attempting to bring greater focus to the Balkan context, Clark's account features a wealth of redundant detail about Serbian and Balkan politics and an undue emphasis on disparate episodes of unrelated, and often gruesome, violence that are overwhelming, irrelevant and serve to reinforce negative and stereotypical conceptions of the region that have long been disproved by scholars.

Austria-Hungary's record of governance over a multitude of ethnic and confessional groups certainly deserves to be reappraised, but the book glosses over the Empire's annexation, occupation and rule of Bosnia. There is no mention of the initial armed resistance, the mass emigration of the Muslim population, the deep dissatisfaction over the country's unresolved agrarian question or the Bosnian peoples' long-drawn-out struggle for autonomy that followed. In light of this, it is hard to accept Clark's contention that the Habsburg Monarchy was unjustly viewed as a doomed, anachronistic construct on the brink of collapse. Clark's revisionist stance not only romanticizes the Empire's role, but undermines the right to self-determination on which modern Europe is based.

Clark's portrayal of the major players of the period is also 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, it is surprising that Mlada Bosna is assigned just

two paragraphs, reduced to a tool of the Black Hand, a secret but well-established organization based in Serbia which aimed to expand its frontiers to include all Serbs (and South Slavs) living in the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. Clark fails to mention Mlada Bosna's Yugoslav ideology, its anarchist leanings and motivations, or the fact that most of its cohort were mere teenagers. Reference to studies by Robin Okey and Predrag Palavestra would have provided useful detail for a more nuanced account of Mlada Bosna's precedents in La Giovine Italia, for example, or the idealism that drove Bosnian Croats and Muslims, such as Ivo Andrić, Ivo Kranjčević, Mustafa Golubić and Muhamed Mehmedbašić into their ranks. Rather than explain the nature of early twentieth-century Yugoslavism and anarchism, Clark instead turns to recent events — the rejection of the Rambouillet Agreement that brought about the Kosovo War or Al Qaeda's acts of terrorism — to illuminate the past.

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