

## Project Final Report (275297: 28 June 1914)

Studies of the Sarajevo assassination typically focus on one issue: who was behind the conspiracy to murder the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand; and, specifically, was the Serbian government complicit? Yet as the historian Lawrence Lafore wrote: “The learned and interminable investigations of the plot...have high interest, but it is the interest of a tragic drama or a detective story. The real facts did not at the time matter much...”<sup>1</sup> That’s because the leaders of Austria-Hungary decided upon war against Serbia within days of the assassination, despite the lack of evidence of the regime’s direct involvement. And since that hoped-for localized war became the First World War—“the great seminal catastrophe of [the twentieth] century”<sup>2</sup>—Sarajevo came to epitomize what the historian Pierre Nora calls a “founding” or “spectacular” event, one “on which posterity retrospectively confers the greatness of origins, the solemnity of inaugural ruptures.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the political murder itself, just as the physical space in which it transpired, constitutes a “*lieu de mémoire*,” a site of memory on which to explore how this tragic past has been re-read, re-used and, even, re-imagined through different time periods and in diverse political, cultural, and social contexts.

This is the original aspect of my work—to illuminate and interrogate the manifold ways the assassination has been conjured and construed since it first entered human consciousness as an event of world historical significance. The project culminates in a broad-based book entitled *28 June 1914: A Day in History and Memory*. I completed several chapters of this work during the Marie Curie fellowship, and will publish them for the 2014 centenary (thus I cannot yet specify all these articles under Template A—List of Scientific Publications). They are: “Yugoslav Eulogies” (examines the assassination’s memory in the two Yugoslavias and former Yugoslavia, 1918 to today); “Forgetting Franz Ferdinand” (memory of the Archduke in Austria, 1914 to the present); and “Mental Lapses: The Sandwich that Sabotaged Civilization” (critically examines the inaccuracies, mythologies, and clichés used to evoke Sarajevo, and was the basis for my podcast for Oxford University’s series “New Perspectives on the First World War”). Other chapters explore themes including the varying ways the

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<sup>1</sup> Lafore, *The Long Fuse* (Westport, 1965), p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck’s European Order* (Princeton, 1979), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989), p. 22.

assassination has been narrated (“History Unleashed”); the historiography of the culpability question (“Writing History: Whodunit, and Why?”); the assassination in film, art, and literature, including literary and scholarly counterfactual accounts (“Manifest Memory: Re-composing the Past”); and the politicization of Sarajevo via, for instance, analogies to contemporary terrorism (“Past Experience”).

This project has been highly research intensive, incorporating sources including newspapers, literature, film, art, textbooks, museums, monuments, memoirs, and folklore. In amassing this eclectic material, I have worked in the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia); Austria; Germany; France, and the UK, and relied upon research assistants for languages including Russian, Romanian, Polish, Czech, Italian, and Hungarian. A significant outcome of this wide-ranging project has been the expansion of my expertise into new areas both in my own field of modern European history and in cultural/memory studies. Trained in the social history of Western Europe, I have articles appearing in journals/books specializing on memory, Eastern Europe, Austria/Habsburg Monarchy, and the First World War. In the past two years, moreover, I have given papers at eleven different conferences and other forums. During the coming centenary of the assassination, I will present my outcomes at two international conferences, and publish my work on Yugoslav memory in the Serbian journal *Književni list*. I have also done interviews for several radio/film documentaries being made for the World War I centenary; and I am now in the process of writing newspaper/magazine pieces on my findings.

Taken together, my work demystifies the “first shots of the First World War”—setting Sarajevo more firmly in its historical context by critiquing the excessive language regularly used to describe it, as well as the problematic ways the assassination has been misrepresented, stereotyped (the “Balkan backwater” where this “fateful” event took place, for example), and politically manipulated. Austrians remember Franz Ferdinand as “the first victim of the First World War,” though there was no war when he was assassinated and Austria-Hungary herself bears much of the responsibility for World War I’s outbreak. Many Serbs, meanwhile, still celebrate the assassination as the act that liberated and unified the Yugoslav peoples, though Yugoslavia does not survive as a state. If these two examples directly affect contemporary Yugoslav and Austrian national identities, the larger project takes aim at traditional ways of presenting the assassination, shedding new light not merely on how we process this particular tragic past, but by extension on how history itself is construed, conveyed, and assimilated.