

Genocide in Bosnia: The Case of Dr. Radovan Karadzic

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From 1992 to 1995 the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina experienced a war of genocidal proportions between the Bosnian Serbs, the Bosnian Croats, and the Bosnian Muslims. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia has indicted Dr. Radovan Karadzic—former President of the Bosnian Serb Republic, psychiatrist, and poet—as a suspected war criminal for his role in war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Karadzic remains enigmatic and poorly understood. Psychological profiling highlights in Karadzic’s case the complex coalescence of the psychology of a genocide perpetrator with that of a charismatic narcissistic political leader. Such a profile may possess usefulness in forensic psychiatric investigations and legal proceedings.

From 1992 to 1995 the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina experienced a war of genocidal proportions, between the Bosnian Serbs, the Bosnian Croats, and the Bosnian Muslims, with deaths among the warring parties ranging from 150,000 to 250,000 persons killed and over one million refugees displaced.¹ The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia has begun its first war crimes trial, based upon the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council Commission of Experts April 1994 report to the U.N. Secretary-General, which concludes that

“grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other violations of international humanitarian law have been committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia on a large scale,” and that the “practice of so-called ‘ethnic cleansing’ and rape and sexual assault, in particular, have been carried out by some of the parties so systematically that they strongly appear to be the product of a policy” perpetuated by the Bosnian Serbs to “ethnically cleanse” Bosnia of non-Serb populations, notably the Bosnian Muslims.²⁻⁶

A unique aspect of the Bosnian conflict lies in the fact that Radovan Karadzic, the former leader of the Bosnian Serbs, is a psychiatrist.⁷ In 1995 the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia indicted Karadzic as a suspected war criminal for crimes against humanity and genocide.^{8,9} The nature of the alleged war crimes has led to comparison

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with the Nazi Holocaust.^{10–12} The indictment of Karadzic as a war criminal—the first physician to be so indicted since the 1946 Nuremberg Doctors’ Trial—has rekindled interest in the role of other physicians in contemporary genocides.^{13, 14} Both the Nazi Holocaust (as well as the Nazi T-4 euthanasia program) and the Armenian genocide of 1915 involved the participation, on a political, bureaucratic and medical level, of medical professionals.^{15–19}

Karadzic has been portrayed as one of the most misunderstood men in the world.^{20–29} Until his political involvement began in 1990 when he became the leader of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, he had had a career as a psychiatrist and poet. Psychological profiling approaches may offer clues to his motivation and personality, and such approaches to the study of political leaders encompass a rich tradition.^{30–35} This article expands upon our earlier psychological profile of Radovan Karadzic, highlighting in his case the coalescence of the psychology of a genocide perpetrator with that of a charismatic narcissistic political leader and emphasizing aspects of such a profile that may prove useful in forensic psychiatric investigations and legal proceedings.^{36–39}

Childhood and Youth: 1945 to 1968

Data about Karadzic’s childhood are scant. He is the eldest of three children born to poor peasant parents in 1945 in Montenegro, a fountainhead of Serbian nationalism. Media accounts describe Karadzic’s father as a poor “tramp” and

itinerant journeyman with a history of incest and theft. Karadzic grew up following a war in which over one million Yugoslavs perished, and allegations have been made of the elder Karadzic’s imprisonment for war crimes committed under the guise of Chetnik military campaigns in eastern Bosnia during World War II.^{40–44}

Karadzic’s adolescence and young adulthood were colored by a variety of formative experiences. At the age of 15, Karadzic moved to Sarajevo; he later joined the Communist Party and in 1965 began the study of medicine at the University of Sarajevo, specializing in psychiatry. In 1968, he became involved in local student politics, was ousted from the Communist Party, and later ostracized—many believing him to be a police informer—from the student movement as well. During this time, he married Ljiljana Zelen, with whom he has a daughter and a son. Karadzic’s wife speaks of him as “a poetic soul” who wooed her with his lyrical poetry. Other accounts note his penchant for drinking, gambling, and spending thousands of dollars over the years in casinos. These data are intriguing in light of his propensity for risk-taking as a political leader in the 1990s.^{45, 46}

Migration, Identity, and Discontinuity: 1968 to 1975

Speculations have arisen regarding Karadzic’s status as an outsider, a peasant Montenegrin Serb, struggling to gain acceptance in urban, cosmopolitan Sarajevo society. Sociologic interpretations emphasize the notion of a Dinaric social character (referring to Montenegrins,

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Bosnian Serbs, Herzegovinan Croats, and Serbs of the Krajina region in Croatia) and its associated xenophobic fear and loathing of cities such as Sarajevo and their urban sensibility.^{47, 48} One sees hints of change and discontinuity in Karadzic's life—a sense of wanderlust—in his leaving Montenegro, his new beginnings in Sarajevo, his complex relationship with Communism and the Communist Party, his role in the 1968 student movement, and in his specialty choice of psychiatry. In addition, Karadzic interrupted his psychiatric career to study poetry at Columbia University during 1974 to 1975, an unusual hiatus suggesting doubts about his chosen profession and identity as a psychiatrist. While Karadzic has fostered the notion that he was enrolled in a program of postgraduate study, Columbia University shows no record of Karadzic's attendance at a formal program during the year. Psychoanalytic theories illuminate the creative aspects of such self-definition and emphasize how migration may represent a way of working through earlier separation anxieties surrounding childhood and adolescence.^{49, 50} His dark poetry provides intriguing glimpses of the man beneath the political mask, conveying his life-long search for self-definition.

Poetry: 1968 to 1971

Little examination of Karadzic's creative writings has occurred in the English-speaking world.^{51–54} A contemporary referred to Karadzic as “among the most gifted of a younger generation of poets in Sarajevo,” although the same critic later tempered his praise, describing Karadzic as a “nickel-and-dime poet.” Karadzic

(who has received several literary prizes for his poetry) is well known as a troubadour, singing his poems to his own accompaniment on the *gusle*, the Serbian lyre.

During the Bosnian war, some of the greatest poets of our time, including the Nobel laureates Joseph Brodsky and Czeslaw Milosz, wrote elegies for Sarajevo. But in his poem “Sarajevo,” written in 1971, 21 years before the Bosnian war began, Karadzic writes of a calamity wherein the imagery of death, plague, and sickness abounds:

I hear that a calamity really falters toward
Its transformation into an insect—as if fated:
It pulverizes the insect like the ruinous bard,
Transforming silence into his self-same voice.

The city lies ablaze like a rough lump of incense
Wherein the haze of our awareness twists.
The city implodes in latent emptiness.
A stone's crimson death
Bespeaks the house's blood-soaked tide. Plague!

Tranquillity. A squadron of white poplars
Marches in formation. The tempest
Lifts up the chariots of our soul
At times human, at times breathtakingly divine.

I speak of the dawning of a tempest's roar:
What shapes the metal in the forge?
That's it—like fear transformed in its web,
It searches its memory for a clue.

Karadzic's poetry is shaped by his search for a sense of reflective awareness and agency, where each element is part of the poet's arsenal, a tool of transforming power. Karadzic speaks of his early work as prophetic and “out of the range of my awareness,” arising from his sense of being “trapped in the depth of historical mire,” and representative of his vision of confusion, plague, and torment.^{55–57}

“The Seasons of a Man’s Life”: 1975 to 1985

Following his return from Columbia University in 1975, Karadzic settled down, tending to the business of building his career as a psychiatrist. He and his wife (also a psychiatrist) worked in various inpatient and outpatient settings in Sarajevo, both counting many Muslims among their friends, colleagues, and patients.⁵⁸⁻⁶¹ He had Tavistock Group training, not surprising given his interest in group psychotherapy, but ironic given his later political role.^{62, 63} The decade from 1975 to 1985 appears to have been a period of career consolidation, financial stability, and vibrant intellectual life. This period of emotional growth, the mid-life, is critical to longitudinal adult development, and we concur in highlighting the importance of the Dream as central to adult development and to the consolidation of the life structure.^{64, 65} Karadzic’s life during these years, including his home in a mixed neighborhood populated by Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, symbolizes his role in the unique ethnic and cultural tapestry of Sarajevo.

Watershed: 1985 to 1990

In 1985, the 40-year-old Karadzic was convicted in Sarajevo of fraud and misuse of public funds, for which he served 11 months in prison. He has claimed that he was a political prisoner, framed by the “Muslim secret police,” and that he emerged psychically strengthened following this experience. Allegations have also been made of Karadzic’s corruptibility, of his selling fake prescriptions and

providing false medical diagnoses to help people collect insurance or pension benefits. Since his rise to power, allegations of corruption and nepotism have dogged not only Karadzic, but also his wife (in her role as head of the Bosnian Serb Red Cross) and his daughter (in her role as director of the Bosnian Serb International Press Center), as well as members of the inner circle of power in the Bosnian Serb Republic. After 1985, Karadzic became politicized and dabbled in various businesses and political ventures, including a stint as the head of the Bosnian Green Party in 1989. In 1990 Karadzic was invited to become head of the SDS in Bosnia. His shift into politics and the emergence of his political persona parallels that of the remainder of Yugoslavia in 1990, a reaction to internal disorganization, and a projection of his internal conflicts onto a larger political stage.

Redemption: 1990-1992

In 1990 Karadzic published his fourth major book of poetry, *Crna Bajka (The Black Fable)*, which had a different tone than his earlier work, revealing an obsession with themes of blood and violence. Karadzic’s poetry in this volume possesses a richness of Homeric themes, which become fused with traditional Serbian epic themes. In “The Morning Hand-Grenade,” he invokes a protagonist whose world has shattered:

At last I am bereft
Of all benefactors.
I glow like a cigarette’s ember
Touching neurotic lips:
While others search me out—
I await, in dawn’s hiding-place
The glorious opportunity

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To suddenly forsake all
That this epoch has bestowed upon me
And I hurl a morning hand-grenade,
Armed with the laughter
Of a lonely man
With a dark character.

In *Crna Bajka*, other poems reveal a combination of myths of Greater Serbia, of Homeric return, and of spiritual regeneration. But these themes of glorious, nostalgic return belie the violence that such deliverance entails. Such premonitions of violence are present not only in his poetry, but also in his psychotherapeutic work: in a 1987 Congress of Psychotherapists in Yugoslavia, Karadzic presented a paper discussing an analysis of a poem involving a “bizarre fantasy of body mutilation.”⁶⁶

Karadzic’s appointment as SDS leader in Bosnia surprised many of his acquaintances. The 1990 election platform of the SDS was shaped by the agenda set by the Milosevic regime. Karadzic identified with Dr. Jovan Raskovic, highlighting Raskovic’s role in the radicalization of the Serbian “diaspora.” Dr. Raskovic was the founder of the SDS in Croatia in 1990 and had been the director of a major Sarajevo psychiatric hospital; the composition of the SDS included large numbers of health professionals, especially psychiatrists.⁶⁷ Raskovic (who also influenced the founding of the SDS in Bosnia) was the author of *Luda Zemlja (The Crazy Nation)*,⁶⁸ a discussion of the psychodynamics of various ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia. Cherif Bassiouni speaks of how “the level of violence [in Croatia and Bosnia] is due in great part to the psychological manipulation of the combatants . . . whose hatreds have been

fanned by the psychobabble of the Bosnian Serb President, Radovan Karadzic”; such rationalizations have found their way into propaganda used by the Serbs to incite feelings of victimization leading to genocidal violence.^{69–71} It may be precisely in this realm that psychiatrist-politicians such as Drs. Raskovic and Karadzic fit into the political landscape of the Yugoslavia of 1990-1991.

Power: 1992-1995

Karadzic stands accused of war crimes including ethnic cleansing, genocide, mass rape and sexual assault, and the destruction of the Bosnian Muslim culture.^{72, 73} In 1995 he was indicted as a war criminal by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and in 1996 international arrest warrants were issued against him following a Rule 61 evidentiary hearing.^{74, 75} In 1993 the American Psychiatric Association’s Board of Trustees stated that “Dr. Karadzic’s actions as a political leader constitute a profound betrayal of the deeply human values of medicine and psychiatry,” citing his “brutal and inhuman actions as the Bosnian Serb leader,” and castigated him as “accountable for the policy of ethnic cleansing, organized rape, mass murder, and the establishment of concentration camps.”^{76, 77} In addition to the above condemnation, disturbing suggestions have emerged that Karadzic deliberately used his psychiatric training to create military and political policies that would create fear, terror, and extensive posttraumatic stress disorder in civilian populations. Allegations have been made of Karadzic’s direct, personal com-

plicity in acts of violence and torture, including claims that Karadzic has participated in and witnessed tortures at various Bosnian Serb-run concentration camps.⁷⁸

Central in Karadzic's indictment for war crimes and genocide are legal doctrines relevant to command responsibility and superior orders. The U.N. Security Council's Commission of Experts 1994 Report addresses several important questions of international law with regards to the above, noting that "questions of command responsibility and superior orders are well established in international law," and stating explicitly that "a person who gives the order to commit a war crime or crime against humanity is equally guilty of the offense with the person actually committing it. This principle . . . applies to both the military superiors, whether of regular or irregular armed forces, and to civilian authorities." The report also states that "superiors are moreover individually responsible for a war crime or crime against humanity committed by a subordinate if they knew, or had information which should have enabled them to conclude, in the circumstances at the time, that the subordinate was committing or was going to commit such an act and they did not take all feasible measures within their power to prevent or repress the act."

A key feature of the indictments against Karadzic involves the July 1995 massacre by the Bosnian Serb Army of thousands of Bosnian Muslim civilians at Srebrenica.⁷⁹ The presence of numerous mass graves at Srebrenica offers the opportunity to obtain forensic evidence linking Karadzic definitively to this

massacre, especially when such data corroborate eyewitness accounts, intelligence data from satellite reconnaissance photos, and Karadzic's statements to the media. The mass graves have provided forensic anthropologic data as well as forensic DNA data that may illuminate the cause and manner of death as well as the identity of the victims, a critical portion of this aspect of the investigation. The investigation of mass graves at Srebrenica has begun, and utilizes forensic techniques similar to those used in investigations of war crimes and human rights violations in Argentina, in Guatemala, and in Vukovar, Croatia.⁸⁰⁻⁸⁹ Karadzic has made statements that suggest his command responsibility for the July 1995 attack on the safe haven of Srebrenica: "We have orders which the commander-in-chief [i.e., Karadzic] gives from time to time in which all actions for a specific period are included . . . I gave my approval for the immediate task [i.e., of attacking the safe zones] directly to the General Staff and even directly to General Krstic, and was very satisfied with how quickly he managed to take Srebrenica."⁹⁰ He has also stated (in August 1995 when he attempted to remove General Ratko Mladic from his position as commander of the Bosnian Serb Army) that his powers as such were vested in his (e.g., Karadzic's) authority as President of the Bosnian Serb Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Bosnian Serb Army. The above-mentioned issues of command responsibility are central to the legal case against Karadzic at the International Criminal Tribunal at the Hague, and such issues will undoubtedly build

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upon legal precedents established at Nuremberg and Tokyo following World War II.⁹¹⁻⁹⁴

Karadzic refutes allegations of genocide by making inflammatory statements about the Bosnian Muslims. He speaks of Sarajevo as a "Serb city," and of his vision of Sarajevo—the 1984 site of the Winter Olympics—as "like Berlin when the Wall was still standing." When news reports of concentration camps emerged in August 1992, Karadzic challenged the international community to prove the existence of a single concentration camp or of a single case of organized rape.

Karadzic has exhibited the ability to adapt Bosnian Serb military and political tactics to external political circumstances, suggesting elements of rationality and calculation in his political thinking and actions, rather than a pure destructiveness, collectively suicidal in nature, for its own sake. Such actions also provide further evidence of his command responsibility. Karadzic has made tactical blunders at times, but has shown the ability to compromise, making him appear more reasonable and rational. The recent changes in the military balance of power in Bosnia, and the Dayton peace agreement (which mandates Karadzic's absence from postwar Bosnian political life) have underscored Karadzic's diminished legitimacy.⁹⁵⁻¹⁰⁰

Dreams of Narcissistic Glory

Karadzic's politics represented a revival of age-old Serb nationalist dreams, and Karadzic's political realignment paralleled that of his Serb countrymen.¹⁰¹ His political voice resonates with echoes

of collective Serb nationalist themes espoused particularly by Serbian academic "Orientalists" and by Orthodox Church leaders in the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences 1986 *Memorandum*, which gave legitimacy to the age-old Serb dream of uniting all Serbs under the banner of one state. Karadzic's language bespeaks his grandiose sense of destiny, imbued with a collective sense of myth and sacrifice. Karadzic speaks of being "a servant of the people," and his language of myth merges with that of sacrifice: "I am willing to sacrifice this entire generation, if it means that future generations [i.e., of Serbs] will live better." Karadzic rediscovered a mythical, primordial language (identifying with Petar Petrovich Njegos, Montenegro's 19th-century prince-bishop-poet) in which he evokes themes of blood-soil and hallowed ground.¹⁰²⁻¹⁰⁶ Group therapist to his wounded nation, Karadzic—as someone "who [according to his wife] understands the depths of person's soul"—set himself the task of healing the collective sorrow of the Serbian people, helping him to "play [his] splendid role."¹⁰⁷⁻¹⁰⁹ The existence of Sarajevo and its pluralistic, multi-ethnic *civitas*¹¹⁰ contrasted with Karadzic's specter of Sarajevo (and by implication, all of Bosnia) as part of a Greater Serbia.

Concepts of narcissism and the narcissistic personality are useful in understanding the lives of political leaders.^{111, 112} Karadzic possesses several attributes of the phenomenology of narcissism: extreme self-centeredness, egocentricity, self-absorption, grandiose fantasies, object hunger, rage, and uncertainty about identity. A par-

ticularly striking feature of many narcissistic leaders is their life-long sense of being impelled by boyhood dreams of glory. Karadzic manifests evidence of such a life-long messianic destiny, especially in his poetry, and his darker, more destructive life trajectory suggests Karadzic's criminality as part of a constellation of "malignant narcissism," with its attendant psychological and political implications.

Many theorists stress the creative and reparative aspects of narcissistic fantasies, reflecting psychic attempts to heal narcissistic defects in the self's sense of agency and reflective awareness. Karadzic's story highlights the unconscious, covert dimensions of his personality, and its developmental, epigenetic trajectory incorporating the poet's search for his audience and his muse; the psychotherapist's search for empathic attunement with his patients; and the politician's search for power, dreams of glory and redemption, embodying a personal myth and changing self-concept. While one finds elements of a mythology of Greater Serbia in many of his speeches and interviews, the stronger myth, the one embodied in Karadzic's poetry, possesses a more Homeric quality.¹¹³ Part of Karadzic's initial political success lay in his ability to wed these above two myths.

Outlook

Karadzic's vision represents a pyrrhic victory obtained at great human cost.^{114, 115} Karadzic, as an international war criminal indicted in war crimes in which universal jurisdiction applies, has had to cope with his own isolation and with the attendant wound to his messi-

anic, narcissistic, grandiose self-concept. The 1995 Dayton peace settlement has had profound implications for Karadzic's political future. Karadzic showed cunning and staying power in defying both the international community's and the Belgrade government's subsequent attempts to limit his power or to remove him from office prior to the 1996 Bosnian elections, although he agreed—pressured by Milosevic—to relinquish his titles and power as President of the *Republika Srpska* and head of the Serbian Democratic Party; he continues to exercise behind-the-scenes influence, remaining "a force of evil and intrigue."^{116–123} Given Karadzic's prior intimate political relationship with Milosevic, and his knowledge of the military intricacies of the Belgrade-Pale axis, Milosevic can be expected to treat him with caution and circumspection, and it is unlikely that—short of being arrested by NATO peace-keeping forces—Karadzic will be extradited to the Hague to stand trial.^{124–129}

This profile of Dr. Karadzic suggests that part of his unique importance lies in the coalescence of features of a genocide perpetrator with those of a charismatic narcissistic political leader.¹³⁰ The themes of his poetry seem to have presaged those of his political leadership, and Karadzic acknowledges, ruefully, a prophetic and uncanny quality to his writings. His themes of exile, death, destruction, and nostalgic return to a forsaken homeland pervade his poetry from his earliest literary musings, suggesting a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the poet-physician turned political leader inscribed

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his inner conflicts onto the pages of Bosnia's tragic and tormented history.

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