Introduction

I first met Radovan Karadžić in a war crimes courtroom at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). He was there to defend himself against a litany of accusations. I had been called by the prosecution to testify as an expert historical witness to provide background and context to wartime events, having assumed that role in a dozen previous cases before the ICTY. In most other trials, I testified for a few hours under questioning by a prosecutor and was then cross-examined for a few more hours by defense attorneys.

This case was different. In choosing to serve as his own defense attorney, Karadžić gained the opportunity to confront personally each witness, in the presence of three judges who would decide his case. Standing at the defense lectern, he cross-examined me with a barrage of barbed and loaded questions.[1] For a total of twenty-four hours, from June 1 to 10, 2010, he and I engaged in a strange kind of dialogue – testy, impassioned, or sometimes surprisingly cordial – about his rise to power and whether he had led Serb nationalists to commit mass atrocities in Bosnia during the war of 1992–95.[2] Despite the contentiousness of our encounters, with each passing day of the trial I gained new insights about him and the movement that he had led in the 1990s.

Karadžić's trial thus granted me unusual access to an accused war criminal that shaped many of the insights in this book. My encounters with him also helped me define the book's central purpose: to view, through the prism

[1] International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (hereafter ICTY), Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadžić (IT-95–5/18-I) (hereafter PRK), Transcripts, May 31–June 10, pp. 3067–3731, accessed from //www.icty.org/case/Karadžić/4#trans, viewed December 6, 2013.

[2] Although Karadžić knows and speaks English well, and I read and speak his language, we each spoke in our native tongue – he in the language now known as BCS (Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian), I in English. Through the earphones worn by everyone in the courtroom, we each heard the translation of the other's words.

of Karadžić's biography, the causes, the course, and the consequences of the Bosnian Serb national movement in the 1990s. In examining his political career, one can identify conditions that led Karadžić and his followers to carry out mass atrocities to achieve their political ambitions. The examination of his life also suggests some lessons about nationalism, mass atrocities, and genocide in our time, to which I return in the concluding chapter.

Karadžić clearly relished his return to the global spotlight after a decade and a half in flight and seclusion. Rather than defending himself against criminal charges, he devoted his time in court to burnishing his image before history, showing no remorse for his previous actions. Three months before my testimony, in his opening statement at trial, he described himself as a martyr for the long-suffering and deeply-misunderstood Serb people. "I stand here before you not to defend the mere mortal that I am," he told the judges, "but to defend the greatness of a small nation in Bosnia-Herzegovina which, for 500 years, has had to suffer and has demonstrated a great deal of modesty and perseverance to survive in freedom."[3] He claimed that defending his own actions was synonymous with justifying the conduct of the Bosnian Serbs. "I will defend that nation of ours and their cause, which is just and holy," he said, "and in that way I shall be able to defend myself, too, and my nation, because we have a good case."

On hearing his opening statement in March, 2010, I thought it was merely a prelude to a conventional criminal defense. But by the end of my two weeks in the courtroom with him, I had concluded that he was utterly sincere in identifying his personal fate with that of the Bosnian Serbs. He saw himself as their champion and savior. From the day in July 1990 that he became president of the SDS, he believed that he bore their burdens and shared their destiny. He even viewed his ascent to the leadership of the SDS as a sacrificial act, since he relinquished his comfortable life as a Sarajevo professional to lead the nationalists' cause. His stature as their martyr-in-chief, in his view, gave him license to speak not only *for* the Serbs of Bosnia, but *as* the Serbs of Bosnia. His arguments in court were meant both to define his personal legacy and to justify the actions of those he called collectively the "Serb people."

In court, my recollections of the documentary record helped me to craft careful and sometimes extensive responses to Karadžić, despite the vehemence with which he pressed some of his questions. On occasion he would select passages from a document in BCS to prove his point, reading them into

[3] Opening Statement of Radovan Karadžić, March 1, 2010, ICTY, PRK, p. 808, www.icty.org/case/Karadžić/4#trans, viewed July 4, 2010.

ILLUSTRATION A.1. Radovan Karadžić in his first appearance at the ICTY, July 31, 2008. Getty Images.

the record or offering an English translation of only the excerpts favorable to the point he was making. Often I was able to contest his interpretation by explaining the context that surrounded his self-serving soliloquies. But when he cross-examined other witnesses who did not know BCS, he often used similar tactics to gain their assent to the accuracy of a misquotation and thus to distort its meaning. Even when he won a witness's concurrence, he rarely took "yes" for an answer but insisted on reiterating his point before moving on.

As a questioner, he relied on tenacity, conviction, and energy rather than finesse. Whenever he failed to win assent from me on the first try, he would press the same question relentlessly, perhaps with a slightly different wording each time. He could be adept at crafting specific questions, but in his eagerness to make a point, he often elaborated a simple question into a complex and open-ended one. Sometimes he lost track of his intended point as a well-conceived question turned into a monologue resembling testimony. These are the traits of a man accustomed to success in persuading those around him and wearing down those who refuse to agree: a bully with a brilliant

ILLUSTRATION A.2. Headquarters of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, The Hague, Netherlands. Photograph by author.

mind, a sharp tongue, and great dexterity in exercising his impressive skills of persuasion.

Karadžić regularly employed the royal "we" in his questions and pronouncements, but in so doing he seemed to refer to different groups. Occasionally, Karadžić's "we" referred to a small cadre of senior SDS leaders; sometimes, it referred to the party as a whole; or most frequently, to all Bosnian Serbs. In what seemed to be an effort to put himself at the heart of the Bosnian Serb nationalist movement, he often referred to himself in the third person. "We're going to have to throw light on the conduct and mind set of Radovan Karadžić first of all, and then his conduct and behavior, and then the conduct of the whole SDS party and other Serb parties," he stated, emphasizing his self-identification with the Serb cause.[4]

Karadžić used documents extensively in cross-examining me, and he questioned me about each one, always with the aim of exonerating himself and the Bosnian Serbs from blame for war or war crimes. To the judges' dismay, he often read verbatim and at length from documents he hoped to put into evidence. Karadžić thus revealed a command of the written and printed records he had reviewed in preparation for the case. This was unusual: few other ICTY indictees had availed themselves of the right to review the reams of documentation pertinent to their cases.

[4] Karadžić, cross-examination of Donia, June 9, 2010, ICTY, PRK, p. 3,533.

He revealed himself in court as a man of rage. His wrath typically rose slowly and simmered long, rather than exploding unexpectedly, but its arrival was unmistakable. Sometimes I could hear it building from the lectern to my left. His questions would become more penetrating and accusatory. His distinctive, even-toned voice gave way to a resounding bellow that scorched the ears even through the earphones I was wearing. Anger seemed to transform him into a larger, more dominant physical being. I became convinced that his anger was genuine most of the time, but Karadžić also seemed able to modulate and channel his rage, selectively employing it as a tool of persuasion or domination.

As we sparred verbally in the courtroom, I came to understand how he had used his wrath to dominate and humiliate adversaries on several occasions in his political career. I watched him repeatedly reach a crescendo of anger in an effort to get the answers he wanted from me. Occasionally, his anger seemed to flare out of control. Working himself into a volcanic rage, he would lose focus on his line of questioning, reverting instead to a topic where he seemed more confident. But such disabling anger got the best of him only a few times during our encounters. Most of the time, he was able to modulate and harness his own anger, an ability that was one of his assets as a leader.

As an interlocutor, he proved swiftly adaptive, seamlessly shifting among moods and types of behavior. As the days of my cross-examination wore on, the judges asked Karadžić to ask only relevant questions and to end his cross-examination soon. After one such admonition, he feigned shock. "It was a real surprise when I heard that I won't even have 20 of the 40 hours I had initially asked for," he said. When Presiding Judge Kwon informed him on June 10 that he had only fifteen minutes more for cross-examination, he turned sarcastic. "Our 40 hours was a conservative estimate," he told the judges. "So I am giving this time back as a present."[5] Presiding Judge Kwon, taking him literally, asked, "Dr. Karadžić, do you need that fifteen minutes at all?" Karadžić instantly became despondent. "No," he said, "it is pointless for me to raise any subjects without dealing with them properly." Then, after pausing a few seconds, he changed his mind. "Actually, I can ask him," he said, casting off his subdued persona to became again an animated and pugnacious questioner.

I came to see this as Radovan Karadžić's signature character trait: he could instantly mutate his personality and mood to suit the needs of the moment. When I returned to my research of his life in documents, I found such shifts

[5] Ibid., p. 3701, for quotations in this paragraph.

again and again, lasting anywhere from a minute to a month. Karadžić was a chameleon, adaptable in ways that would be comedic had not his words and deeds proven so consequential for so many human lives. Nothing would be more important in understanding him than appreciating his capacity for instant transformation for maximum effect.

At times in court, when we found ourselves concurring on some aspect of his life experiences, he would briefly flash a slight smile and nod of approval. To be sure, we did not bond. I could not forget the atrocities over which he had presided in the 1990s. He displayed unalloyed disdain for most of my testimony, and his contempt seemed to grow with each court session. However, we communicated and understood one another more than I had anticipated. Hoping to understand but with little expectation of agreeing, I listened attentively to his views of his own life and deeds.

As he questioned me, Karadžić confirmed my earlier impression that he possessed a formidable and wide-ranging intellect, and I learned that his intelligence was imaginative as well as analytical. From twenty-four hours in dialogue with him, I saw how his brilliant mind, intellectual versatility, carefully-modulated rage, and instant adaptability were enlisted to justify his every act, magnify the historical significance of his deeds, and promote his utopian vision for the Bosnian Serb nationalists. A narcissist in the courtroom no less than in public life, he projected his own personality and behavior onto those for whom he presumed to speak. According to his narrative, he had lived, acted, and fought for the Serb people, and he would suffer in their name as well. He believed passionately in his cause and in himself as its primary protagonist.

We found surprising agreement on one issue: the nature of his life in prewar Sarajevo. He sought confirmation that neither he nor his family had shown malice toward those of other nationalities before the war began. I readily concurred. In one of his many attestations that masqueraded as a question, Karadžić boasted that he had selected his barber, a man called Meho, regardless of the fact that he was a Bosniak, simply because he was reputed to be the best barber in town. From all the information I had acquired about Karadžić, it appeared that in the first decades of his life he had enjoyed good relations with Bosniaks, Croats, Jews, and others in Bosnia. Examining his life prior to his entry into politics in 1990, I found no significant nationalist leanings in either his writings or his conduct. His rhetorical question about his barber Meho suggested his vanity – he required the best barber in town to trim the unruly mane that he tossed back so ostentatiously – and further confirmed my sense that he showed a Sarajevan's typical pride in associating with those of

other ethnicities and faiths. If he harbored any hatred or resentment against non-Serbs prior to the dawn of the democratic era in Bosnia, he had not shown it publicly. However, he also contended in court that he had never abandoned his positive prewar feelings toward members of other groups. I expressly disagreed with that proposition, since I had observed in the documentary record his evolution into a Serb nationalist with low regard for the Bosniaks and their political leaders.

Karadžić was not alone in devoting himself to the Serb nationalist cause in the 1990s. He had a wide following among Serbs in Bosnia, many of whom fought as soldiers in the war, and some of whom participated in organizing and leading the SDS and the Republika Srpska. One of those was Nikola Koljević, whom I too had known, many years before my courtroom encounter with Karadžić. A professor of communications at the University of Sarajevo, Nick (as he was known to his American friends and colleagues) spent the academic year 1972–73 teaching at my alma mater, Hope College, in Holland, Michigan. He loved the place; there he was known to students as a devoted teacher and to colleagues as an able Shakespeare scholar and speaker. I met him soon after, during my one-year stay in Sarajevo on a Fulbright scholarship doing historical research in 1974–75. We shared our memories of Michigan and reviewed our common acquaintances. In Sarajevo, I saw that Nick was esteemed at the university there no less than he had been at Hope College. A warm, caring person and a marvelous teacher, the Nick I knew in those days was widely liked and admired.

To my surprise, Nick later became one of the founders of the SDS in 1990 and vice president of the Republika Srpska in 1992. Like Karadžić, with whom he had become close, he had not previously expressed an interest in politics or political nationalism, although he had always been an admirer of folk culture and a rural lifestyle. His life trajectory, from compassionate literature professor to key leader of a nationalist party that sanctioned mass atrocities, suggests that Karadžić was not alone in making the leap from political indifference to impassioned nationalist conviction. In this biography, I seek to understand how that could happen. I cannot ask Nick himself, since he committed suicide in a hotel room in Banja Luka in January 1997. I mourn the loss. I found some comfort in discovering during my research a few occasions when he tried to curb some of the extreme measures of the Bosnian Serb nationalists, but I wish he had done more to restrain them. From what I have learned of his political career, he underwent much the same transition as Karadžić from national indifference to avid proponent of the utopian nationalist dream.

THE MAKING OF A FRAGILE FEDERATION

Radovan Karadžić is a South Slav, meaning he belongs to one of several different Slavic peoples inhabiting much of southeastern Europe (an area often called the Balkans after a small mountain range there). Migrations, religious conversions, and linguistic differentiation have defined and shaped the identities of South Slavs for more than a millennium. In the fifth through eighth centuries, several tribes of Slavic speakers migrated from a part of what is now Poland to Southeast Europe. These settlers were preliterate polytheists when they migrated, but toward the end of the first millennium CE they were Christianized by missionaries from Rome to the west and from Constantinople to the east.

With the Great Schism that split the Christian world in 1054, the South Slavs divided into Catholics and Orthodox. Catholicism and the Latin alphabet prevailed among most South Slavs in western lands (present-day Slovenia, Croatia, and much of Bosnia), while Orthodoxy and the Cyrillic alphabet took hold mainly in the east (present-day Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bulgaria). However, the Orthodox and Catholics mingled in many central parts of the region, most notably in Bosnia, which was also home to its own independent Christian group called the Bosnian Church. After the Muslim-led Ottoman Empire conquered much of the area in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, some Catholics and Orthodox voluntarily converted to Islam, adding a third religious community to the area. A fourth religious group appeared when Jews, fleeing oppression in Europe's Iberian Peninsula (today's Portugal and Spain), migrated to the relatively tolerant havens of Ottoman cities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

For many centuries after these conversions, religion was the most important differentiator among groups in the region. But whereas most national movements in Eastern Europe distinguished among peoples primarily based on language differences, the national identities of the South Slavs were shaped by a lattice of both language and religion. As national movements took hold between the 1770s and the 1960s, groups of South Slavs came to be differentiated by secular national consciousness and minor linguistic differences as well as religious affiliation. This produced several different peoples, or nations, in the central areas of the former Yugoslavia.[6] Among these groups were the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians,

[6] The term "narod" in the local language, normally rendered in the singular to denote that the group has a personality and character of its own, may be translated either as "nation" or "people" in English. I have used them both in this work.

and Bosniaks (the group known until 1993 as the Bosnian Muslims).[7] They shared, and share today, the territory of the former Yugoslavia with smaller numbers of non-Slavs, including Albanians, Hungarians, Jews, Roma, and several others.

South Slavs in the present-day areas of Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, and Montenegro speak languages so similar that through much of the twentieth century they were commonly considered a single Slavic language, Serbo-Croatian. Today the language is identified as Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS), a term that is widely used by foreigners and international organizations but is not universally used by native speakers, many of whom refer to their language as "Serbian," "Croatian," or "Bosnian." One recent study described BCS as "the common core underlying Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian" and concluded that "the language is simultaneously one and more than one."[8] Building on differences in religion and religious tradition, as well as minor linguistic distinctions, leading intellectuals promoted a distinction among three peoples: Serbs (Orthodox in faith and tradition, Serbian in language), Croats (Catholic in faith and tradition, Croatian in language), and Bosniaks (Islamic in faith and tradition, Bosnian in language).[9]

By the 1970s, most South Slavs in Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia identified themselves as Serbs, Croats, or Bosniaks (at the time known as the Bosnian Muslims), but others in lesser numbers identified themselves as "Yugoslavs" to indicate their rejection of the three dominant identities.

Yugoslavism, the belief that South Slavs should unite in a single state, was a revolutionary ideal in the nineteenth century. Turning that ideal into reality would have required overthrowing or radically reorganizing the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. The two empires thwarted Yugoslavism for all of the nineteenth century, but they were swept away when Europe's map was redrawn at the end of the First World War (1914–18). With the disappearance of Yugoslavism's primary opponents, Crown Prince Aleksandar of Serbia

[7] Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 6.

[8] Ronelle Alexander, *Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian: A Grammar with Sociolinguistic Commentary* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 379.

[9] In September 1993, during the darkest days of the Bosnian war, intellectuals and political leaders of the nation gathered in Sarajevo and voted to change their name from "Bosnian Muslims" to "Bosniaks." They did so to end the tendency of many, both within and outside their group, to dismiss them as members of a religious rather than a national community. The new name elevated the group linguistically to the same stature as Serbs and Croats. The Serbs were the secular embodiment of the religious community called the Serbian Orthodox; Croats had formerly been Croat-speaking Catholics; similarly, Bosniaks preferred that name over the Bosnian Muslim designation that had been used in federal Yugoslavia (1945–92).

proclaimed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes on December 1, 1918; in January 1929 it was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.[10] Although most political leaders of all South Slav peoples had displayed enthusiasm for that idea before Aleksandar's proclamation, the hard realities of state-making soon led to discord, particularly between Serbs and Croats. Most Croat delegates intermittently boycotted the Kingdom's assembly to protest Serb domination of the Royal Yugoslav Army and bureaucracy.

Only in August 1939 did leading Serb and Croat politicians agree to resolve their differences, chiefly by dividing the historical territory of Bosnia between them.[11] Like other nationalists in Southeast Europe, Serb and Croat leaders supported, respectively, a "Great Serbia" and a "Great Croatia," projects to expand the boundaries of their core polities to encompass all members of their nations. With the division of Bosnia in 1939, both projects partially came to fruition and would later be cited by Serb and Croat nationalists as admirable precedents to be replicated.

The agreement of 1939 came too late to save the country: the Yugoslav Kingdom had been weakened by internecine struggles and by the crippling economic crisis of the 1930s. In April 1941 German and Italian invaders conquered all of Yugoslavia in a matter of days and carved it into several occupied territories ruled by their puppets or by Germans or Italians directly. The Germans brought from exile in Italy a small group of Croatian fascists known as "Ustasha" (rebels) and helped them create a new state, the "Independent State of Croatia," that governed most of Croatia and Bosnia. Almost immediately upon assuming power, the Ustasha slaughtered thousands of Jews, hundreds of thousands of Serbs, and some Bosniaks and Croats who opposed their rule. The Ustasha recruited some Bosniaks to join their ranks, both in high leadership positions and in their armed forces, but most Bosniaks remained distant from their movement.

Ustasha atrocities spurred two movements to oppose them. Colonel (as of 1941, General) Draža Mihailović and other former Royal Yugoslav Army officers organized the Chetniks, a loosely-organized coalition of Serb nationalists who wanted to restore Royal Yugoslavia. Josip Broz, a communist organizer of mixed Croat and Slovene parentage, headed the Partisans, a group which supported national equality and a federal socialist state. After protracted fighting and much bloodshed, the Partisans emerged triumphant

[10] John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), tells the story of both royal and socialist Yugoslavias.

[11] Christopher Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse: Causes, Course, and Consequences* (London: Hurst, 1995), pp. 39–42; and Ljubo Boban, *Sporazum Cvetković-Maček* (Zagreb: Institut društvenih nauka, 1964).