

Vuk Drašković
SCARS OF LIFE



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Guide to Pronunciation

Serbian is strictly phonetic, one letter representing one sound, with the following exceptions.

- c – is always pronounced like ts as in hats.
- č – like ch in church.
- ć – close to č, but softer, like t in future.
- dž – like j in judge.
- đ – close to dž, but softer, like d in verdure.
- j – is always pronounced like the y in yellow.
- š – is always sh as in sharp.
- ž – is always pronounced like the s in measure.

PAIN IS ALSO THE MEMORY OF PAIN

I approach the door that no one enters.

All the years behind me seem like a moment. Even now my childhood days seem to go by.

But when memory brings back what I lived through, the people I was with, the places I stayed at, it seems to me that it cannot fit into three human lives.

The pages that follow are of scars, scars which hurt endlessly, and the imprint of quiet and cherished days, before I stared at Evil, and Evil at me.

Reminiscing happiness is not happiness, and pain is every memory of pain.

Author

Publisher's Introduction

DO YOU SPEAK DRASKOVICIAN?

It took some time to explain to Vuk Drašković the reasons why his political autobiography *Scars of Life* needs to be published in English, and not only in Serbian. Everything he wrote and spoke about was in Serbian. Even when he spoke fluent English, it was just his native language converted into a code that the whole world could understand. And not only that, all of Drašković's political ideas and his entire life as a politician equally deserve to be "dressed" in the English language, in addition to the Serbian language in which they were originally spoken and written.

The English language is the environment in which Drašković's ideas and politics feel at home – like in the Serbian language. It is an environment consisting of not only Britain, America and Australia, but the whole world which has adopted their language as a universal way of communication. However, Drašković had a problem throughout his political journey for his ideas to be properly understood, the way he presented them. Language was never a barrier, be it Serbian or English.

The barrier was at the core of his ideas, which were understood, although with difficulty or no acceptance at all. Drašković demanded Serbia in the West, unconditionally and immediately. A Serbia ruled by laws, democracy, law of market and human rights, and not by myths transformed into political programs, socialist or national from the 19th century.

Just as Vuk was often misunderstood (although he was understood by everyone) in Serbia, he was misunderstood in the West – even though they also understood him well. His policy was too much for both Serbia and the West, who were used to dealing with Serbia halfway, never decisively and towards one goal, unconditionally and immediately, as advocated by

Drašković, moving towards the EU and NATO, as a natural family for Serbia.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs he did "the job of a futile man" as he described in this book. In the summer of 2005, he signed, on his own accord, Serbia's agreement with NATO on the free movement of Alliance's troops through the territory of Serbia. His bosses at the time, the president and the prime minister, were "surprised and shocked". The agreement is still in force today, and no government has withdrawn it in the meantime, no matter how "surprised and shocked" they were. Both Serbia and NATO refer to it when they want to say that they cooperate well.

Drašković's politics is full of such moves ahead of time. He talks about all of them in detail in his political autobiography. Now also in English, because everyone who deals with Serbia today or has had some connection with it in the past three decades, needs to get a first-hand account of what that former Serbia really looked like, where it wandered, and where Serbia could have actually been.

Drašković's political biography in English is, therefore, a text without which it is impossible for anyone not living in Serbia, and for anyone who wants to deal with it, to really understand what they are getting into. Even more, it is a written proof of what those who once dealt with Serbia failed to notice, making bad compromises with wrong people and ideas. Some future generations of English-speaking children will be able to be read Drašković's *Scars of Life* as a first-class testimony of the writer and politician, who dedicated his life for his homeland to finally "miss the opportunity to miss the opportunity" to become a part of the democratic and developed world.

Belgrade, December 2022

Dr Orhan Dragaš

FOREWORD

The book by Vuk Drašković, the most popular Serbian writer of the second half of the 20th and the first two decades of the 21st century, at first glance, could be classified as an autobiography. Similar danger hovers over the English edition of this book, particularly for readers who are not familiar with Serbian history, Serbian politics and tragic events from the end of the last and the beginning of this century.

For us, who lived during the era that Vuk Drašković wrote about, witnessed the horrors that Serbia went through, this book is much more than a mere autobiography. I experienced the *Scars of Life* as Vuk's confession, first of all to himself and then to history, of which he was a witness and creator. The confession that is before us is multi-layered. One layer of this story informs or reminds us of events that had an important, and often tragic, impact on the lives of people and entire nations living on the territory of the murdered Yugoslavia. The second layer is a historical analysis attempting to understand the roots and nature of the evil that has been suffocating Serbia for two centuries and killing any hope of Serbia becoming a modern and free European democracy, living in peace according to Vuk's deep conviction. The third level is a personal confession, an introspection in which, at times, Vuk has no mercy on himself. Evaluating his own actions from time distance, through the political and historical circumstances that shaped them, Vuk does not justify himself. He tries to explain and understand.

When he talks about himself and others, Vuk is open-minded. He doesn't spare anyone, least of all himself. There are few people whose personal and political fate can so pre-

cisely reflect the fate of the entire nation as the fate of Vuk Drašković. His personal sufferings, the suffering of his family and friends, the destruction of the party he created, the gruesome hatred for everything he did as a politician and writer, coincide with one of the greatest suffering of the Serbian people in history. Throughout history, Serbs have suffered much greater losses than in the nineties of the last century, but they have never experienced such humiliation and shame. From the very beginning, Vuk Drašković recognised the madness that would engulf Yugoslavia and tried to oppose it. "I struck at Evil, and Evil struck at me", are the words from last chapter that best reflect the entire political struggle of Vuk Drašković. Vuk faced that Evil before he became a politician. His novel *Knife* was the first reason for that Evil, embodied in the ruling ideology and the security services, to strike at him as a young writer. Even then, Vuk and his family were aware of what the guardians of madness were ready for. The people who were the creators and executors of Slobodan Milošević's crazy policy, committed terrible crimes in Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, enabled the expulsion of Serbs from Knin Krajina, were responsible for imposed sanctions, NATO bombs and branding Serbia a villain, are the same people who committed the crime on Ibar Highway and assassination attempt on Vuk in Budva. These non-humans exposed Vuk and his wife Danica to terrible torture, which horrified the whole civilised world. Vuk Drašković, and his SPO were the only barrier to Evil, for which they had to pay a price.

With the fall of Slobodan Milošević, evil did not cease to exist. On the contrary, it became even more dangerous and destructive, because it killed any hope that Serbia would find its way out from such a regime. It seems that the cause of Serbian misfortune does not rest in one regime, but in Evil, which is archetypal and older than all Serbian regimes and rulers. After all these years, it seems that Slobodan Milošević and his en-

tourage of academics, intellectuals, Udba officers, journalists and other “public officials” were not the cause, but the consequence of Evil. Today, it seems that Slobodan Milošević was just a spokesman for Evil.

Scars of Life are not a finished confession, because the madness that Vuk talked about is more alive than ever, even though protagonists from the nineties are either no longer alive or too old to act seriously.

Vuk ended his confession in May 2022, during the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine, and while Serbia is being “Putinised” to the point of extreme national humiliation. Today, Serbia, along with Belarus, is the only European country that has not imposed sanctions on Russia. We are the only ones in Europe celebrating Putin’s crimes. The rhetoric of the nineties is back, more poisonous and crazier. The military defeats of Vladimir Putin’s criminal policy do not sober anyone up in Serbia. Every evening, on various televisions, some new faces distorted by evil and hatred pour out lies and poison that people accept with pleasure. Anti-Western sentiment and hatred towards everything healthy and normal has become the ruling policy in Serbia. We are further from the EU than ever and we don’t want to join NATO.

Vuk writes about all this in the *Scars of Life*. It seems that the future brings new scars to Vuk or someone similar to him. The question that Vuk asks sounds frightening: is Serbia heading towards new Ibar Highways, new Fruška Gora limestones, new Srebrenica, new Operation Storm...?

Time will tell. If Serbia does not find its own De Gaulle, Evil will continue to rule.

Belgrade, December 19, 2022

Prof. Dr Zoran Dragišić

RED SWEATER

I stepped out of the line of elementary school students, knelt down and buried my head in the snow. The pain was unbearable. Throbbing pain inside my temples. It felt like a hammer blows to my head. I whispered, "Dear mother, please help me die!"

I was ten years old. In the past, when I was faced with various misfortunes, children's apparitions and fears, I would often call on my mother, but never as desperately as that day with my head buried in the snow. I called her, but I knew she wasn't there.

When I started elementary school, my grandmother Stana, my father's mother, recklessly revealed a secret to me. She said, "My son, Stoja is happy today." She bit her tongue, as the saying goes. She sat down, held me to her chest, caressed me and, cautiously, word by word, from afar, then more and more quietly and closer, led me to the truth that I was only a baby of six months when my mother died.

In the days that followed, I ran away from my grandmother. I didn't want to; I couldn't even imagine that Dara wasn't my mother. Ever since I can remember, I have remembered her. She held me on her lap, hummed me to sleep, fed me, protected me from my father's scolding, dressed me, bathed me, and changed my clothes.

They couldn't show me a photo of my mother because they didn't have one. I found out that I was not even born in that house and in that village, but far, far away, in Banat, in a village Međa, on the border with Romania. My father Vidak and uncle Todor told me that our house, in Banat, had five rooms and a well in front of the house, in the garden. There were no lanterns or kerosene lamps in the house; there was light, it turned on and off, came and went, via a switch on the wall. I listened in a daze and wonder. In our house, in the village of Slivlje, in the hills of Herzegovina, between Gacko and Nevesinje, there was only one room, and when the sun went down, kerosene lamps and lanterns were lit. Far from any road, in the valley around the river Točak, my village resembled some outlaw's den. Because of the wild climate, nothing domesticated could grow.

Why did we leave our house in Banat? That house was owned by Germans and its owners were exiled to Germany. "What was stolen is damned!" Grandma used to say. They returned in April 1947, and in May my mother died. They say she held me in her arms until her last breath. And she died in a red sweater.

Could that red sweater of hers explain my fascination with the red colour? In the novel *Knife*, Alija Osmanović does not remember his mother Ljubica. He does not even have a photo of her, and he does not know and will never know what his mother looked like. He is comforted by hodja¹ Halil Barbarić, the wise Sikter Effendi². He tells

¹ Translator's note: Used to refer to those who have "wisdom" as well as "knowledge"

² TN: It is a title of respect or courtesy, equivalent to the English Sir. It was used in the Ottoman Empire and Byzantine Empire. It follows the personal name, when it is used.

him: "From the moment a child comes into this world, it sees everything, remembers and writes it down... You saw your mother when she nursed you... you saw everything. All those images are stored somewhere deep into your subconsciousness and it is not excluded that, suddenly, one of them jumps out and you remember..."

While I was writing the novel *Knife* in 1982, I had no idea that what Effendi was saying would happen to me. In Belgrade, in solitary confinement, in the Central Jail, in June 1993, almost immobilized from police beating, I dreamed of a house, a garden, a well and a table with a large jar of honey on it. And a woman, with a baby in her arms, by that table. Oval face, chin dimple, brown hair, twisted in braids, red sweater on. I'm standing opposite her; that big table with a jar of honey is between us. She is smiling at me, and I, somehow, know that it is my mother and that she is holding me, the baby, in her arms. I want to approach her, but I'm scared, I don't know why. She steps towards me, hits that table, the jar falls over, and the honey spills... Then I wake up.

After leaving prison, I told my father about this dream. "That was her, that's what she looked like," he said. Four years later, in October 1997, I would visit the village of Međa and see the house where I was born for the first time. It was the house from my prison dream! But there was no jar of honey on the large garden table. It was covered with various goodies that the owner of the house where I was born in wanted to treat me to.

My village is mysterious. When I went to school, close to a thousand souls lived in it. Seventeen surnames, all Orthodox ones. Some surnames are very rare. Hrnjez, Píkula, Njeguš, Ajkalo, Prorok. There was no church in the village. But on one bank, near the river Točak, lichens and

moss hid the ruins of the mosque. That part of the village is called the Mosque. There is also a “Turkish cemetery”. The hill with the house I grew up in is called Dokara’s hill. People say that it was named after the former Dokar Pasha.³ No one in the village knew when the “Turks” lived there, how they disappeared, when the mosque was demolished and who did it. In the novel *Via Romana*, I would try to figure it out through literary imagination though lacking the evidence.

I grew up in that village, in the shadow of the genocide, with chilling stories and fiddler songs about Pridvorica, a village at the source of the river Neretva, which was exterminated and burned by the Ustaša⁴ “Turks” on Christmas Day, January 7, 1942. Pridvorica of my childhood, and Jugovići in the novel *Knife*.

I grew up in a village intoxicated with Kosovo epic and myth. “I swear on Kosovo wounds,” was the frequent oath of those illiterate or semi-literate poor people; none of whom had ever even seen Kosovo.

“Grandpa, where is Kosovo?” I asked Grandpa Dušan. He didn’t know, but he knew something else: “In Kosovo, my son, one emperor, three dukes, eight pashas and nine Jugovići⁵ died!”

³ TN: The title of a Turkish officer of high rank.

⁴ TN: Croatian fascist and ultranationalist organization active, as one organization, between 1929 and 1945. Ustaše were mainly Croat and Muslim supporters of the Independent State of Croatia.

⁵ TN: The Jugović brothers, or Nine Jugović, commonly known as the Jugovići, the nine sons of Jug Bogdan, are popular mythological characters of Serbian epic poetry. In poems, the Jugović brothers and their blood brother Miloš Obilić fight to their death in the Battle of Kosovo (1389), dying as heroes. This is based on mythology, in which Miloš Obilić and other knights lost their life “in glory as martyrs”.