

CIVIC

Scars

By: Daliborka Uljarević

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Civic society is made up of citizens, and citizens are defined by the freedoms, rights and duties an individual has within a certain political community. And what is this society making of its individuals?

A son of a friend of mine trains basketball every day after school. He is playing for a private club in the youth league. His results are impressive. Just last weekend he scored more than 20 out of 40 points during the game. Recently, the Basketball Association selected national representatives in the category of pioneers, i.e. in his age group, and they already started training. This child and his parents don't know how the representatives were selected, but they did not see the selectors in any games or trainings. The kid, although hurt by being left out, says this was to be expected because he doesn't have "backing", his parents aren't among the sponsors, they have no connection to the decision makers or people who could put in a good word. The mother says that they have chosen a less classy team on purpose, to make sure the kid gets a chance to play instead of just sitting on the bench, which would have inevitably happened had he been in the team with the kids of more influential parents. He also plays with the selected national representatives in the neighbourhood playground. They know, and he knows too, that he is better than them, and that this wasn't the most important criteria when making the selection. The question is just what each of them does with that knowledge...

Perhaps this story sounds banal compared to the problems we are constantly and (in)directly facing. But put this story in the context of the educational system which has been in the red alert corruption zone for quite a while now, and where this kid can also see that the effort he puts into studying often fates before somebody's surname when it comes to the grades. And the feeling of injustice, which for him is already built into the very foundations of the society, transposed into activities outside of the school which he takes seriously, leaves deep, although to the naked eyes invisible scars on the boy who should still be indulging in the wildest dreams. I'll admit it, at his age I believed that the world is mine and that there are no limits. Surviving remnants of that conviction still make me get up every morning. I wonder what will keep him going by the time he reaches one of the universities here where allocation for printing diplomas is larger budgetary item than the one for the libraries, further education of the staff or scholarships for the talented students. What can they learn from those who have been rising through the educational system on the same negative selection!?

Without an overview of these little/big problems that help us to diagnose the development of the polity and citizenship and identify solutions it is pointless to talk about civic courage or disobedience, because they cannot come on their own. These are the results of the dynamic of the system, its ability to adapt and metamorphose, and its counterpart is the apathy which reigns supreme in Montenegro. It was partly caused by the confusion originating in the current political cabaret, where nobody knows who are the actors and who are the protagonists, who should say or sing which text, who are the allies and who the enemies...

In California, a group of psychologists studying information models claimed that the greatest share of miscommunications amongst people originates in the so-called double-direction messages. You ask somebody if s/he loves you and s/he answers, angrily – I love you! Two simultaneous messages of similar weight are sent. You remain confused, unsure what to believe: the words or the way in which they are said.

This is precisely the kind of system in which we live and in which our citizens are being shaped.

At the political level we have the Government which says it is pro-Europe and adopting the best European standards and practices. At the same time, every nerve of ours is telling us that it is impossible to be leading Montenegro into EU while at the same time defending the overall system of values which is contrary to it and which deprives 12-year old boys of their dreams.

Such messages are also sent by the opposition which never succeeded in establishing a genuine dialogue with the civil society as its natural ally and infrequently demonstrated inclination to undemocratic methods in sorting out problems within its own ranks, which does not promise it to be any more open for otherness unless it is in its immediate interest.

And so we end up in Krleža's ancient storm, knowing that a crowd stinks but keeps you warm and that it's better not to stir things up.

Can societies rest on the foundations which corrode them from inside? Of course they cannot. And it is important that even one 12 year old boy does not lose faith in himself and his surroundings, not to extinguish, before they have even flared up properly, those fires which only the young people have inside them and that ought to keep him going for the rest of his life. It can sound like a utopia in the Montenegrin environment where entire generations of young people never got to be young, were never overwhelmed by genuine rebellion or swamped by a need to react to injustice did to them personally or to somebody close to them. I am afraid to think of their aged middle-agedness, and I fervently hope that at least some new kids on the block will not give up their dreams so easily under the scars inflicted on them by this system.

Civic courage begins with readiness to prove that you dare to live your own life.

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