

Complex of inferiority in Serbia in 2021: A problem and some possible solutions

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No need to dig out the reasons hidden in the complex history of the Serbian people: it is easy to observe that our men in 2021 have an unstable image of themselves, which sometimes goes hand in hand with feelings of inferiority.

The good news is that feelings of inferiority are a natural companion of one's childhood and youth; the bad news is that Serbia, eight hundred years distant from the beginnings of its statehood, is still an adolescent in terms of collective maturity. It is also positive that the Western civilization – with a piece of world population bewitched by its superiority – has been showing for a few decades the features of a narcissistic society with the feelings of overly visible inadequacy. Again, it is the good news that our society, young in soul, shares these feelings with the rest of the modern world, but in a way that is less pathological and more physiological – hence easier to overcome with an adequate “therapy” and through the process of natural growth.

We can try to guess why our fellow citizens feel immature: why we need a Father figure; why we feel relieved when leaning on someone other than us, stronger, cleverer, richer; why even our intellectual élite still wears sackcloth and ashes. There are quite a few reasons for this.

Personally, I do notice that, throughout our past, we did not bring up enough individuals – conquerors, philosophers, scientists, artists – influential at a level broader than ourselves, who could have secured for us a place in the world's, or Europe's, gallery of great men who wrote human history with their lives.

We have Saint Sava: his extraordinary talents left profound traces in the Serbian lands of the Nemanjić dynasty but not much abroad.

Vuk Stefanović Karadžić shaped the immense legacy of the Serbian language and alphabet, but from a Viennese desk and with a Slovenian mentor.

Petar Petrović Njegoš: is he a Serbian or a Montenegrin, ruler, poet, and philosopher?

Nikola Tesla, a genius famous worldwide but claimed by the Croats too, and sowing his scientific fruits on the American soil.

Mihajlo Pupin: a great inventor and supporter of the Serbian interests, but from the USA.

Milutin Milanković finalized his astronomical climate theory only after completing his studies in Vienna.

So we have some glorious names, but the problem remains that most of those who could represent us worldwide are not entirely our own. All the world being a stage, the Serbian leading roles are only a few and we have no members to speak for our interests in an assembly of European nations.

Why so? The political instability brought about by a privileged and trampled setting on the East-to-West-and-back route appears to be one of the reasons why our heritage does not put down roots and proliferate over centuries but only appears in glimpses of a few decades. And then we start anew. No chance to ground and multiply by inheritance our knowledge, expertise, material and cultural wealth.

And it is not all about circumstances; everyone uses them as they find appropriate. In 1389, Tzar Lazar chose the Kingdom of Heaven; two centuries earlier, Saint Sava, together with his father and brother, gave birth to the spirit of the Serbian nation in a symphony of the State and Church, both of them important in the life of the Kingdom, with the latter seemingly – from its monuments, still stunningly beautiful – more important.

Here we go once more with the good news: we are people with a soul. And, again, young souls. Insecure about ourselves like every human being who is growing up and never had a chance of proving itself by carrying out the tasks deemed very easy in the parents' world. Often overwhelmed with doubt, apathetic in relying on fate, clumsily trying to please and gain appreciation. Nurtured by faith in a wonder which, one day, will prove that we are people cherished by God.

Were not 2020 transformed by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic – which tore off our masks, individually and collectively – my heart would not be filled with hope while writing these lines. The very first observations on *Serbia in 2020*, recorded a few days “before the corona virus”, were full of bitterness and grumpy resignation in front of what seemed both inevitable and unchangeable. My assessment of the situation in the country has not changed since that time: we still have the Father of the Nation, whose narcissistic shows (morbidly swaying between a servile attitude and that of the *Übermensch*) reflect the unhealthy, looming image that most of our fellow countrymen have of themselves. Exposed to inclement weather, without a real hope of self-realization, men delude with unreliable material wealth while women standardize their appearances to a sexy doll model. The native intellectuals living in the fancy neighbourhoods represent themselves as an élite resentful about the uncultured “outlanders”. The cultivated outlanders are upset by the ignorance of the newcomers. Party membership is a smoke screen that surrounds men and women who seem to lack any personal quality other than being Party members. Devout Christians practise phobic hatred towards anything different from their conventional standards. Intelligentsia keeps quiet, unconfident about being capable to make any difference.

These are all signals of a collective feeling of inferiority, fed on a daily basis by many circumstances we are unable to control but that affect us causing a profound dissent and an impotent anger. A megalomaniac momentum reflecting the “faster, stronger, better” motto is in the air that we breathe, it goads and, unavoidable, enrages us. We fashion our own bios, so tiny and yet so pompous, for what we have is nothing like what we would wish for ourselves – and what we believe we deserve.

In psychiatry, narcissism, closely related to feelings of inferiority, is a disorder considered hard to work with; a standard approach is based on the corrective parenting provided by the therapist: the patient experiences the healing power of trust and a truthful encounter with his own weaknesses and virtues. As a community with the lack of self-confidence, let us have a good look inside ourselves, than gaze among and around us, and find ourselves the help we need. Only when we acknowledge all the layers our personality is made of – those we are

frightened by as well as the reinvigorating ones – we can hope for respect that we would enjoy from and give to others. In the year of SARS-CoV-2, Serbia is a complete failure in the game of honesty, but its people – our people – won the race of solidarity, empathy, and good will. Health workers, teachers, pharmacists, shop assistants, elders, ... have displayed commitment, cooperative attitude, selflessness, resilience. And a big heart.

Can this be a basis for a possible future community, in a world that craves for kindness? You might well agree that what matters above all is that our growing up kids gain solid characters. In these harsh times, the Serbs showed that they are decent people, willing to tame their traditional “in spite” behaviour and organize themselves wholeheartedly for the sake of the common good. That is our core value, that can fill the vacuum created by the vain effort to belong to a brave, rich, and powerful world. In a way, we might be leaders in a common struggle against the ephemeral values, with these young souls of ours. Let us take advantage of that gift and offer it to the West tired of accumulating growth percentages, and let us look out in the East for brethren in soulful awakeness open for a loyal partnership. Made one by our mediterranean blood with South Europe, let’s warm up those in the North with its heat. That could be our role in a new Europe – reshuffled by the pandemic not merely at a practical level but because of a key transformation it revealed within us: the knowing of what makes life worth living, of the very heart of our existence as opposed to worshipping masks of wellbeing. “Look at me!”, we still shout at each other from the top of one’s hill, dressed up in the emperor’s new clothes even with veils, mirror-gazing in convenient comments of the people who more than anything need us to envy them, us that yearn their envy in order to be worth more, the most. But that kind of conditional worth lasts no more than a breath. So we collect successful careers, happy marriages, photogenic kids, expensive clothes, exotic travels And what would really fill these empty vessels of ours?

It happened by coincidence that while some authors perceived the emergence of a narcissistic breed [Christopher Lasch, 1979], one of the founding fathers of the European Union coined the term *gross national happiness* [Sicco Mansholt, 1972]. In 2011, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the resolution *Happiness: Towards a holistic approach to development*, defining the pursuit of happiness as a “fundamental human goal”, whereas a year later the United Nations held the first ever high level meeting on *Happiness and wellbeing: Defining a new economic paradigm*, calling on all nations to adopt Happytialism over Capitalism.

By the way, the Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, “good spirit”, is a concept closest to my feeling of “happiness”: a pinch of fairness, a measure of wisdom and truth and, above all, the freedom and delight of practising common sense in a community. That kind of comprehensive joy sticks close to the soul and is hard to be taken away. The happiness of each individual, not the profit, is the highest purpose of the new global economic order. We ought to strive to gross national happiness.

Serbia, shed off its complex of inferiority as a false shadow, with the people with warm personal attachments weaved in their nature, have a lot to share. Let us face our own part of responsibility for bad things of the past and recognize our merits for the good ones in order to finally leave behind the vicious circle of guilt and meet the future revealing ourselves for what we are: worth of respect, capable of making a difference. Let us begin gathering up, within ourselves and with one another – that’s what will heal us.

The most difficult thing about overcoming feelings of inferiority is facing that demon inside oneself. And that's where the nightmare turns into a fairytale.