CIVIL COURAGE: ITS ROLE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD AND ITS PLACE IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

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/// Introduction: the relevance of civil courage

Events such as the global tributes following the death of the very symbol of the fight for justice, equality and dignity Nelson Mandela and the nomination of Edward Snowden as The Guardian Person of the Year 2013 emphasise the importance attributed to civil courage in the contemporary world. While Mandela's courage and leadership in bringing the South Africa transition from the apartheid underlined „the triumph of hope against all expectation by giving everybody a second chance, even his jailers" (Smith 2014: 19), Snowden's exposure of the scale of Internet surveillance impressed the overwhelming majority of *Guardian* readers because of „his extraordinary and exemplary courage, and the historic value of his daring act" and because they felt that there is a „need people like him" who „have the courage to forget about their own life in the cause of other people's freedom" (Rice-Oxley, Haddou, Perroudin 2013).

The new information technology, however, has also helped in all recent struggles for change: the Arab uprisings, the Greek revolt against austerity, protests in Brazil, Ukraine, Thailand and Russia. From Tahrir Square to Occupy Wall Street, people forged their path to resistance with a help of new communication technology. The surfeit of information flowing around the world makes it practically impossible for anyone to keep a secret for long, yet, conversely, also makes it more difficult to secure broad democratic agreement for wide-ranging reforms in public life. This, to-

gether with the notion of courage's links to historically-bound values and ideas, means that this concept is in need of scholarly rethinking.

While researching the lives of public intellectuals awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Misztal 2007), I noticed that these awardees shared a unique quality, namely civil courage. In my study of contributions made by the courageous public intellectuals to their own societies and the international community, I defined courageous persons as those autonomous individuals who freed themselves of the restrictions that their culture imposed and were capable of either creating entirely new alternatives, defending the past values or standing up against deviation from current values. The twelve public intellectuals who won the Nobel Peace Prize, managed, in different ways, and with a relative success, to combine creative thinking with concerns for justice and human rights. These public intellectuals, while establishing a link between academia and non-specialist publics, courageously upheld and acted upon core civic values. They provided me with evidence of the importance of civil courage because risk was an inherent part of all their activities, including the creative process of constructing the new order, fighting for justice and making important contribution to societal well-being.

The importance of civil courage in modern societies has also been pointed out in Swedberg's (1999) study of Knut Wicksell's unusual public career. Following Bismarck's definition of civil courage as bravery shown in life outside the military, Swedberg (1999: 522) suggests that sociological research should focus on acts of courage „which embody the values of civil society" and explain actors' disinterested and innovative behaviour. The results of such investigations of acts of standing up in defence of civic values and convictions (it can be standing up to a hostile majority or to abusive power) can contribute to a better understanding of the concept of civil society and the conditions leading to its enrichment. Swedberg's argument that civil courage is beneficial for civic sensitivity, helps us realize that it is vital to explore the difference civil courage makes to the functioning of institutions and to the scope and quality of civil society.

More specifically, I argue that there are at least four reasons why it is important to investigate civil courage, understood very broadly, as not only a resistance or rebellion, but also as including disinterested and risky actions for purposes to institutionalise social or cultural change. Firstly, in our so-called „risk society" (Beck 1992), where mistakes are very costly, we need to reduce the risk of harmful conformity and enhance our ability to think independently. In the increasingly complex, technology-based soci-

ety, in order to decrease the probability of a fatal error, we need to foster a willingness to challenge prevailing opinion, and facilitate respect and a willingness to listen to those who do not follow the conventional wisdom (Sunstain 2003).

Secondly, since history shows that a revitalization of public life often happens due to the strength of intellectual and social controversies (for example, the Dreyfus Affair), a call for courage needed to engage in those type of conflicts can be justified by pointing out that such disagreements may inject profound questions into routine discussions of public affairs. Courageous stands, which force people to rethink the very basis of their political allegiances and to re-evaluate the political order, can help to reduce general distrust and the passivity of today's citizens.

Thirdly, in our global world, where the informational and reputational influence of global media increases the formation of enclaves of like-minded people, we need – in order to prevent their exclusion and intolerance of others' views – to encourage groups' openness, self-reflexivity and self-criticism. While it is true that access to greater information is likely to reduce conformity, at the same time parallel processes, such as the progressive monopolization of the media and the expansion of electronic means of communication, with the Internet's customised access to information and news, enhance group polarization and reduce the likelihood of significant social dissent (Sunstain 2003).

Fourthly, as we witness the reconceptualisation of the line between science and society (Nowotny, Scott, Gibbons 2001) and as society becomes a more so-called „knowledge society", the difficulties of reaching consensus on the relevant knowledge and on the principles at stake, demand more than ever courage of questioning. In this new condition of „radical uncertainty", that is, „a situation where not only the means, but also the goals and structure of a problem are ill-defined" (Pellizzoni 2003: 328), a situation which can best be illustrated by the huge controversy over genetically modified organisms (food), we can expect the public's questioning of the centrality of scientific-technical expertise. The problem is not only how to avoid such debates from moving quickly into ineffective and conflictual clashes of uninformed or misinformed viewpoints, but also how to prevent such controversies from reaching a consensus that only reflects „preference falsification" (Kuran 1998). This can only be achieved by enhancing the possibility of potentially productive disagreement that can reduce „preference falsification" and therefore release people's critical thinking and activism (Kuran 1998). Yet, since an agreement on „[d]isagreement is

not an easy thing to reach" (Murray, quoted in Elshtain 1995: XI), we need to strengthen the role of dissent and therefore the courage to challenge prevailing opinion.

In short, when courage provides the basis for civic initiatives that affirm human rights and dignities, it performs a vital social function. Better outcomes can be expected from any system that encourages the upholding of core civic values, creates incentives for individuals to reveal information to fellow-members, and offers resources which enable people to outflank the organisational power. Recognizing the significance of civil courage, as one of the principal elements of civic sensitivity, means going beyond the traditional perspective which stresses the value of consensus and conformity.

Despite these compelling reasons for the importance of courage, its study has not fared well at the hands of sociologists. Indeed, the standard factors/determinants invoked to explain human action – class, education, religious belief, political attachment – do not seem at all easy to apply in the case of displays of courage, dissent and independence. This is probably why, despite the evidence of the importance of the topic for both theoretical and practical reasons, no single major sociological study of civil courage exists.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to argue for a need to re-evaluate the notion and function of civil courage in creating conditions for cohesive, just and pluralistic dimensions of contemporary societies. Since the concept of courage, is still commonly discussed in terms derived from the Greeks, I will delineate this ancient legacy and its contribution to the persistence of various obstacles and impediments in theorizing about courage. This will be followed by discussions of the relevance of the classical sociology' input into today's understanding of this notion, after which I will demonstrate that today, as a result of border socio-political and technological transformations, this notion is in a urgent need of re-evaluation. Finally, I will discuss the functions of civil courage in the contemporary world and its place in social science.

/// Defining the field

Although the Greek philosophers viewed courage as one of the most essential political virtues, they have left us rather a complex, multidimensional and fuzzy notion of courage, as well as the idea that courage „is an impossible subject" (Kateb 2004: 39). In other words, the continuous

existence of contradictory views on the nature of courage, on its role and value in the public realm tends to be attributed, at least to some degree, to this concept's links with the classical Athenian construct . Consequently, despite the richness of the debate and a long history of fascination with and glorification of the idea of courage, this notion is still subject to many controversies. Hence, several aspects of the classical Greek understanding of the value of courage require re-evaluation as they are obstacles to today's theorizing about courage.

The courage to speak up (*parrhesia* or an act of truth-telling truth which involves risk) was an essential element of the functioning of classical democratic Athens. This assertion that courage ensures democratic freedom, that the flourishing of democratic values is associated with the cultivation of courage, was rooted in the argument that the task of awakening civic sensitivity required the cultivation of civic courage (Rossbach 1999: 3–4). Classical Athenians believed „not only that democracy was founded on courage, but also that democracy had special resources to aid in producing courage" (Balot 2004: 83). As Arendt (1958: 186) notes, courage was the fundamental political virtue as only „that man who possessed it [courage] could be admitted to a fellowship that was political in content and purpose and thereby transcended the mere togetherness imposed on all – slaves, barbarians and Greeks alike". Courage is „demanded of us by the very nature of the public realm" because „in politics, not life but the world is at stake" (Arendt 1961: 156).

The classical Greek view of courage, as embodied in Aristotle's account, assumed that the courageous person had to have a noble aim and that courage, the first moral virtue, must not be reckless and should be performed for the sake of nobility. According to Aristotle, the honour of courage is found in deeds that are not subject to necessity or utility (Kateb, 2004: 48). This philosopher's understanding that some situations require courage and others prudence, led him to view courage as the disposition to act appropriately in conditions involving fear and confidence as „a generalized enabling virtue" (Oksenberg Rorty 1988: 305). Courage is a matter of ethical consideration, thus people's responses to fear depend on their degree of virtue. For example, a virtuous man would not fear poverty but would fear dishonour in the battle (Aristotle 1962: 68–70). The link between courage and honour means that courage is inseparable from the choice required for moral responsibility and from the human capacity for deliberation (Miller 2000: 149). Aristotle's discussion of courage challenges the simple distinction between the moral and intellectual virtues and de-

fines courage as a virtue both worthy of practice by morally serious individuals and as emphatically honourable from the perspective of the community's political leaders (Miller 2000: 149). Hence, Aristotle, who insists on the cultivation of the courageous disposition for the sake of the city's political needs, argues that courage, as a kind of „balanced deliberation in a tight situation", requires moderation, which means that the risks we take must be in proportions to the ends we seek; it is admirable to risk your life for a noble cause but unreasonable to do so for out of sheer fascination with danger (Comte-Sponville 2003: 58).

In addition, Plato, through Socrates' conversation with two generals in *Laches*, reworks the notion of courage into a more broadly defined concept. In Platonic dialogues, Socrates defines courage as the preservation of the belief (*doxa*) included by the law through education about what things are to be feared (Kateb 2004). Plato's image of a courageous philosopher, who never confronts any fear, reduces courage to knowledge and assumes the mastery of fear. This concept of courage as a form of moral virtue which involves knowledge of both the self and of the ends for which a danger was faced, exposed the importance of the intellectual elements of courageous action. Although Plato did not offer a positive theory of what courage is, his focus on political and moral courage leads to the proposition that courage is identical to wisdom, that „the extremely wise are the extremely bold, and being extremely bold are extremely courageous" and that the practice of philosophy requires courage (Socrates in *Protagoras* quoted in Hobbes 1991: 116). Such a conceptualization accounts for the relationship between knowledge and courage, and is illustrated by the life of Socrates himself – a life of perpetual philosophical questioning and a life without fear in both the battlefield and the civic arena.

The classical definition of courage also calls for reconsideration because of its masculine overtones, its accent on the physical and military aspects of courage. Today, in contrast to classical Athenian ethical guidelines, which praised physical courage in the service of the political community, we are less sure if personal sacrifices are necessary and if they should outweigh legitimate self-interest. We now think that physical courage is not a necessary element of civil courage, or „behaviour that relies on an individual decision motivated and legitimated by the fundamental value of human dignity for whose protection the courageous individual behaves in a nonconformist manner and takes a personal risk" (Schwan 2004: 113.) We have not only moved away from the unquestionable celebration of a warrior's courage, but we admire people such as Joseph Schutz, a German soldier in

WWII, who, when he had been ordered to execute some captured partisans, crossed over to the partisans and let himself to be shot together with them (Swedberg 1999: 521–522).

Among other obstacles and impediments in theorizing about courage is the historicity of the concept, or in another words the fact that each civilization „has its fears and its corresponding forms of courage" (Comte-Sponville 2003: 44). The fact that we have today given up on the aristocratic search for military glory and do not appreciate the masculine culture of courageous warriors illustrates the changing nature of courage's status and characteristics, which in turn contributes to this notion's complexity and its controversial status. Such a clarification asserts that there are some connections between each civilization's views of good and its chosen heroes, and by the same token, its idea of courage.

This line of argument has been proposed by Machiavelli (1988), who holds that the role of courage, and therefore also its main traits, reflects the main dominant activities of the city. Machiavelli (1988) rejected the classical understanding of courage as too idealistic and not practical enough to ensure political power. For him, the primary activities of courage were those of a prince assuring the glory of a city. When the main preoccupation of the city-state is statecraft, risky and courageous actions of the wise prince were in demand. In the changed situation, when the primary activities of the city become mercantile, courage required a radically different disposition from that required on the battlefield; „an energetic, inventive, bold imagination, a capacity to envision a distant benefit and unexpected means – a whole set of entrepreneurial capacities are required to carry out the exercise of courage" (Oksenberg Rorty 1988: 307). This new bourgeois ethic's valuation of commercial life meant the recession of the aristocratic honour ethic, which stressed glory won in military pursuit (Taylor 1989). The next step in the historical evaluation of the value of courage is illustrated by Tocqueville (1968: 248), who showed how democracy modified courage in a new democratic direction.

Another lingering cause of the complexity of the notion of courage is the existence of two contrasting conceptualizations of the relationship between courage and morality. Here we refer to the difference between the classical view of courage as the most honoured virtue of the greatest importance to a „good life" and an approach that assumes courage is neither moral nor immoral in itself. In contrast to the classical view of courage as „the greatest of all virtues: because unless a man has that virtue, he has no security for preserving any other" (Samuel Johnson quoted in Boswell

1998: 298), sceptics, such as Machiavelli and Hobbes, argue that humans are incapable of acting out of any motives other than self-interest and do not view courage from within a moral framework (Kateb 2004: 39–42). Machiavelli (1988), who was not concerned about courage's indiscriminating capability to serve good or evil, stressed the political significance of a risky courageous action by a wise prince (Oksenberg Rorty 1988: 306). A prince, for whom it is much safer „to be feared than loved", in order to enable a city to rise to prosperity and fame, appreciates courage as a crucial instrument in the building of state power (Machiavelli 1988: 59). In this view, courage is by no means an essentially morally positive quality in itself. Although the term „moral courage", understood as a position associated with socially approved values, did not appear in English until the nineteenth century, the notion of *fortitude moralis,* as „the capacity and resolved purposed to resist a strong but unjust opponent; and with regard to the opponent of the moral disposition with us, such fortitude is virtue" (Kant quoted in Oksenberg Rorty 1988: 300), was employed in early philosophical texts. Today this notion seems to mean „the capacity to overcome the fear of shame and humiliation in order to admit one's mistakes, to confess a wrong, to reject evil conformity, to denounce injustice , and also defy immoral and imprudent orders" (Miller 2000: 254).

The notion of civil courage entered the modern lexicon at the end of nineteenth century. Acts of courage „in the service of others and more or less free of immediate self-interest" (Comte-Sponville 2003: 47) are not the same as civil courage, that is, acts of courage „which embody the values of civil society" (Swedberg 1999: 522). The essential elements of civil courage, which is visible in „situations in which people behave in a nonconformists manner, contradicting or acting counter to the majority of the people who surround them" (Schwan 2004: 109), are reflection on and a strong motivation in preserving the human dignity of a person (*ibidem*: 111–112). Conceptualized in such a way, courage elicits respect as it is a quality associated with socially-approved values (Merton 1968: 418). Courage, which has no civic value in itself, does not enrich democracy. Swedberg (1999: 522), who recognises the increasing importance of civil courage in enriching democracy, gives the example of acts of not civil courage, that is, courage that does not embody the values of civil society. He suggests that racists who stand up to an audience of anti-racists do not show civil courage because racists are hostile to the values of civil society values and want to impose their own values. Therefore, when we describe courage as a civic virtue, we have to speak of „civil" courage.

Even more importantly, modern conceptualisations of the value of courage are not helped by the lack of consensus among political theorists' on the role of courage in public life, with „republican" theorists glorifying courage, and liberal political theorists being relatively silent on the subject. In contrast to the classical argument that the quality that is essential for politics is courage, many liberal theorists „have strived to tame the concept of politics, emphasizing the importance of gentler qualities such as toleration, civility, compassion and reasonableness over the more bellicose quality of courage" (Scorza 2001: 637). For numerous liberals, the traditional political conceptions of courage are outdated as being too anachronistic and solely of aristocratic character. They reject Hobbes' idea that rational fear must be taught because it sustains not only selfhood but also helps to transform civil society into an instrument of the state. Since one of the main assumptions of contemporary liberalism is that fear arises in the absence of laws, education, moral principles and institutions (Robin 2000: 1087), liberal theorists, in contrast to Hobbes (1991) but like Montesquieu (1988), identity fear with undemocratic political systems. They claim that citizens in democratic societies do not need to respond to fear or demonstrate courage. Today's liberals, in similar ways to Montesquieu (1988), who claims that learning fear is the dehumanizing goal of despotic education and who was among the first to prize the allegedly gentler manners and habits of commercial society, assume that fear is predicated upon the destruction of civil society and that modern states have no special need of courage as this virtue impedes rather than promotes commerce (Scorza 2001: 645).

/// Sociological approaches to civil courage

There is no explicit discussion of courage in classical sociological theory. Yet some indirect attempts can be seen in August Comte's labelling of devotions to the welfare of others based in selflessness as altruism and in Durkheim's assertion that no society could exist unless its members acknowledge and make sacrifices on behalf of each other. Although „absolute altruism is an ideal limit which can never be attained in reality"; it is not merely „a sort of agreeable ornament to social life" but instead its fundamental basis (1973: 152–153). Furthermore, Durkheim, like Weber, in an indirect way connects courage with religion as he argues in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that the believer gets strengths from his or her contact with God. It seems that people with courage have more strength than others. „The believer who has communicated with his god is not merely

a man who sees new truths of which the unbeliever is ignorant; he is a man who is stronger. He feels within more force, either to endure the trials of existence, or to conquer them" (Durkheim 1971: 44). Finally, Durkheim was forced to acknowledge that „It would never have been possible to establish the freedom of thought we now enjoy if the regulations prohibiting it had not been violated before" (1966: 71–72). Thus, in order to explain moral innovation, Durkheim introduces, through the backdoor, a functionalist theory of civil courage (Swedberg 1999). This can be illustrated by Durkheim's three remarks on the topic.

Firstly, Durkheim discusses a case of civil courage in his comments on the trial against Socrates in *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Durkheim points out that courageous behaviour of Socrates was perceived by Athenian law as „criminal", although his crime was – writes Durkheim – „his independence of thought" which „served to prepared a new morality and faith which the Athenians needed, since the traditions by which they had lived (up to) then were no longer in harmony with the current conditions of life. Nor is the case of Socrates unique; it is reproduced periodically in history" (1966: 71–72). Secondly, Durkheim comes close to a direct discussion of civil courage while taking a stand in the debate arising from the Dreyfus Affair, which threatened to divide France in the 1890s. Durkheim stressed the importance of the „interest superior to the interests of individuals" (1973: 47) and that in such a crisis situation „courage is required to rebel against public opinion" (1973: 40) and, furthermore, that scholars should „leave their laboratories…. to draw nearer the masses, to involve themselves in life" (1973: 59). Thirdly, Durkheim (1973: 34) also approached the notion of civil courage while talking about the purpose served by „a great man". He proclaimed „a great man" to be „the benefactor of humanity" because such a man, by revolting against injustice, „defends the rights of the individual and defends at the same time the vital interests of society, for he prevents the criminal impoverishment of that last reserve of collective ideas and feelings which is the very soul of the nation" (1973: 53–54).

Max Weber addresses the notion of civil courage, seen as actions motivated by ideal interests, in a more direct way than Durkheim. His writing suggests that those who first showed civil courage were the prophets of the Old Testament, who preached their messages in ancient Palestine and courageously defied public demands in order to impose their own messages. The first courageous people who rebelled or deviated from the religion of their society, according Weber, were charismatic individuals motivated by a combination of ideal and material interests. Weber's „value-

-rational" action, one of his four types of action, well describes courageous conduct since it is defined as the action which is inspired by „a conscious belief in a value for its own sake" and as the action which it is carried out „independently of its prospects of success" (1968: 24–5). Pure value--rational action is determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake, of some ethical, aesthetic, religious or other form of obligation and its examples include „the actions of persons who, regardless of possible cost to themselves, act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be required by duty, honour, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call, «personal loyalty», or the importance of some «cause» no matter in what it consists" (Weber 1968: 25).

Weber's example of courage as value-rational action is Luther's decision to give a truthful account of his teaching, while facing the Emperor Charles V during his second hearing at Worms on 18 April 1521. Luther had a choice when he acted as he did, despite being aware that ultimately he would be punished. His famous words „Here I stand; I can do no other" (Weber 1978: 224) are now proverbial in German. Interestingly, Weber quotes Luther's courageous statement to illustrate the idea of a „mature" intellectual. For Weber, Luther symbolized the man who „feels his responsibility for the consequences genuinely and with all his heart acts according to the ethics of responsibility" (1978) who can give and whose actions demonstrate that the ethics of intention and the ethics of responsibility are not diametrically opposed.

Reflecting on Weber's anxiety connected with a pervasive institutionalisation of the „iron cage", American research in the 1950s and the 1960s focused its attention on the relationship between organizational life and conformity. Investigations of conformity in bureaucratised contexts, as a prime threat to the American spirit, indirectly dealt with the issues of the conditions obstructing civil courage. The de-evaluation of courage and the importance of conformity was further enhanced by Parsons (1951: 249) who, like Durkheim, recognized „the dimension of conformity-deviance" as a „inherent in and central to the whole conception of social action" and put emphasis upon the value of social equilibrium and viewed normative integration as the glue that holds a society together.

In the context of Parsons' structural functionalism, debates of system normal equilibrium were framed in terms of the individuals' experience of rewards for social conformity and related to it the concept of anomie. Recognizing that deviance, as the problem of the system, requires the mechanism of social control to generate efforts against and to ensure con-

formity with cultural patterns, Parsons assigned this function to the institutions of normative coercion. Thus, their role is seen as disciplining individuals and exercising forms of control over everyday life in such a way that people's actions are both produced and constrained by them. According to Parsons, these institutions are „not coercive in (a) violent or authoritarian sense because they are readily accepted as legitimate and normative at the everyday level" (Turner 1999: 180). Claiming that social equilibrium „always implies integration of action with the system of normative patterns which are more or less institutionalized", Parsons (1951: 250) viewed conformity, which presumed such an equilibrium, as a productive feature of all systems.

In the mid-twentieth century, another type of American study was inspired by Tocqueville's warnings about the consequences of mass demo-cracy. Many works written in this tradition, such as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and W.H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), demonstrate that large scale movements are responsible for changes in modes of conformity. Reisman argued that only autonomous individuals can be courageous because only nonconformists can undertake unpopular actions or can stand up in defence of their values. The contemporary ways of rebelling and finding one's own values are much less clear-cut than they were in the past; courageous actions are now becoming more complex. Further debate of the relationship between conformity and courage can be found in Robert Merton's works, which show how dissenting behaviour can be analysed from a sociological perspective, based on reference group theory. Merton defines courage as being „functional for the persistence and development of groups in accord with ultimate values – it elicits res-pect, even in those complex instances where it is apparently being used, not for the group but against it" (1968: 418). Courage, while fitting into a general category of unconformist behaviour is, according to Merton, an unique sociological type because it is driven by disinterested motives and aims at changing the values of society. It cannot be explained by the group an actor is part of but by his or her relationship to some other group. He views the „courageous nonconformist" as somebody who departs from prevailing norms for wholly or largely disinterested purposes. Merton rejects the idea that the notion that civil courage can best be analysed as a form of deviant behaviour and argues that crime and delinquency, on the one hand, and nonconformist behaviour, on the other, represent two different sociological types because the criminal does not have a interest in changing the values of society, and is not driven by disinterested motives.

Discussions of factors responsible for the erosion of civil courage's prominence in the contemporary world have gained some prominence in various theories of postmodern society. One such factor, as noted by several authors, such as Sennett, Giddens, Beck and Bauman, is the shift of a balance between public and private life. According to Sennett (1977), this shift means the fall of public man and the advent of „an ideology of intimacy" transmuting political categories into psychological categories. His explanation of political apathy and thus, a lack of conditions facilitating civic courage, puts blames on the tyranny of intimacy. Sennett argues that the intimate sphere „is growing as the public domain is abandoned", and as the overburdening of intimate life „affects the expressive power of people, obsessed with themselves" (Sennett 1978: 16, 30). A life limited by children, mortgages and the house leads to the erosion of civic engagement and limits the expressive power of people as citizens. In short, intimacy is a tyranny of ordinary life which not only forces the abandonment of civic engagement but it also undermines the incentive for civil courage.

In contrast to Sennett, other sociologists such as Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, while also noticing the shift of a balance between public and private life, argue that with the increase in the value of intimacy, civic sensitivity has been enriched. In a society which lacks a stable frame of reference for identity and a commonly accepted framework for interaction, with the growing importance of pure relationships (Giddens 1991, Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1995), there is more opportunity for autonomy, democratization of relations and the expansion of individual choices. With the increase in the value of intimacy which is able to provide us with „a sense of personal validity and worth, and a way of avoiding being quite alone" (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 191), people are more interested in participation in the process of democratization of democracy, are more confident, and thus more capable of critical stands, often requiring courage.

A more pesmistic view can be found in Bauman's work on features of liquid modernity. According to Bauman, the shifts in the boundaries between roles and identities, and between private and public regulations, enhance fear, anxiety, sense of uncertainty and risk. If the way to success in „solid" modernity was order, conformity, constancy and durability, the road to success in liquid modernity, where networks replaces structure, is flexibility, disengagement and mobility (2011). In a world of high consumerism, the function of culture is not to satisfy needs but to „create new ones"; thus to be „abnormal" is to be a „failed consumer" (Bauman 2011: 17). With a successful consumer defining what it is to be „normal", culture

is subjugated to the logic of fashion (2011). Consequently, „The rise of the consumer is the fall of the citizen. The more skilful the consumer, the more inept the citizen" (Bauman 2002: 114). So, the main characteristics of liquid modernity are a weakened sense of collective solidarity and public interests, the both features known for discouraging community sentiments, including civic courage.

All the social scientists so far mentioned seem to agree that we live in a new global world and that contemporary society's complexity and diversity of values makes it almost impossible to reach agreement on specific values, while at the same time this society is „now exposed to the rapacity of forces it does not control and no longer hopes or intends to recapture and subdue" (Bauman 2002: 25). Without the nation-state's ability to protect society, and with societal distrust of governmental institutions, courageous aspirations to justice and equal opportunity for all need to embrace and cultivate cosmopolitanism, that is the underlying value system of human rights which increasingly replaces citizenship discourse.

/// A new context for civil courage?

Broader socio-political transformations of the world, such as the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the new importance of human rights discourse, the shift of boundaries between private and public and new threats to the privacy brought about by the development of new means of communications, all impact on the nature and scope of possibility for civil courage stands. For example, during the Cold War, when Western states supported pro-democracy civil organizations in the Soviet Bloc countries society, it was easy to identify and prize courageous Eastern European dissidents. The Cold War heroes, Shcharansky, Sakharow, Solzhenitsyn and Havel were known to the international public who admired them for showing civil courage in their attempts to protest against to civil rights abuses in the Soviet system (Ignatieff 2012). However, now, with Eastern European dissidents already a part of the history, it is more difficult to name the courageous men who shaped history.

Still, the role of courage cannot be overlooked in non-democratic regimes, where political dissenters, voices of criticism of policies, values or structures of the government are not tolerated. A broad definition of dissidents says that they are people who „reject the pressures imposed by others, perform valuable social functions, frequently at their own expense" (Sustein 2003: V). Dissidents are more than nonconformists as they are people who

actively oppose an established opinion, policy, or structure, people who embark upon altering society and act out of their convictions. They are contestants, objectors and protestors who confront and challenge the prevailing political and social values. Today's illustrations of dissenters power to undermine legitimacy of repressive regimes mainly come from China. For instance, in 2012 the Western media widely reported the fate of the blind political rights activist and lawyer Cheng Guangcheng, who protested against the power of the Chinese regime. There are courageous individuals in other non-democratic regimes, as illustrated by the recent PEN/Pinter Prize awarded for civic courage to the Belarusian journalist Iryna Khalip, a correspondent in Belarus for the independent Moscow newspaper *Novaya Gazyeta*, recently released from jail but still under constant surveillance by the KGN (Stoppard 2013: 15). In the same way, believing that the outcome of the struggle for political rights depends on the civic courage of people in their respective countries, the international public admires the courage and the persistency of Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's opposition leader.

Presently, the main concern of the international media is broader as they now tend to be focused on strategic challenges to social movements covering a wider range of human rights issues (Ignatieff 2012). Today, civil courage is associated not only with the fight for political justice, but also with courageous actions against abuses of human rights, especially rights of women, gays, lesbians and other groups that are discriminated against. For example, in 2013 the Civil Courage Prize, which is inspired by the example of Solzhenitsyn and is rooted in Edmund Burke's belief that „[t]he only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" was awarded to Dr Denis Mukwege, a physician and advocate for victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (*The Times Literary Supplement* 18.10.2013: 28). The Prize, the human rights award which recognizes „steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk", was in recognition of Dr. Mukwege's fight for humane treatment of women who were gang-raped (ibidem). Another interesting case is the 2013 EU Sakharow human rights prize, which was awarded to Malala Yousafzai, a 16-year-old Pakistani girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban because she campaigned for girls' rights to education.

The case of Edward Snowden's courageous exposure of the scope of United States' surveillance of its citizens' private lives through the publication of secret documents about a National Security Agency program, PRISM, which is said to tap customer data accumulated by corporations such as Google, Apple and Microsoft (Greenwald, MacAskill 2013) – rais-

es two interesting issues, one connected with the problem of courage in the digital era and another with the role of civil courage in whistleblowing cases. To start with the latter, whistleblowers are people who tell the truth about misconduct by an individual or company that is against the law (typically in connection with financial management and/or performance standards). Their disclosure of information can involve risk because, especially in organizations where there are no legal provisions and ethical codes that protect such actions, they frequently put their careers on the line. While altruism, in situations when compassion demands courage, takes on the quality of civil courage, the willingness to defend values is the common denominator of whistleblowers and courageous people. Although whistleblowers are mainly concerned with the truth and the reality of their current employment, while courageous citizens are concerned with a wide range of civic values and public issues, both groups could be assigned the role of dissidents (Donaldson, Werhane 1995). Moreover, whistleblowers' actions, such as, for example, their concern with the quality of public services, can also benefit a wider public and, in turn, enrich civil society (Hunt 1995). Yet, normally it is argued that since the actions of whistleblowers are indications of employees' anxieties over work-related problems, rather than a public concern with the state of civil society, the difference between whistleblowing and acts of civil courage is significant. However, Edward Snowden's whistleblowing case, which revealed that we are moving towards society without privacy, can be attributed to his commitment to civic values rather than his concern with his employer's conduct, and it is why *The Guardian* readers voted for Snowden as the person of the year.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the British public response to Edwards Snowden's revelations about the scale of governmental surveillance was „how little public disquiet there appear[ed] to be about it" (Naughton 2013: 19). The UK public reaction to the Snowden's files seemed to be one of a general apathy; his documents were met with general indifference. This, together with now common general indifference, inaction and minimal responses to humanitarian appeals, can be seen as a result of detachment, apathy, denial and self-justification. However, to what degree this „apathy" has its roots in helplessness rather than indifference and over-exposure (Sontag 2003: 90–91) and to what degree it is a consequence of the contextualized style of representation that human tragedies – is disputed. Some argue that „digital natives", born and raised in an atmosphere of interactivity, are not in denial or indifferent and that their „distaste for participation in dysfunctional political systems" is not

apathy (Zuckerman 2013: 9). Young people now simply participate in civil life in ways where they feel they can have an impact, so often outside of government. The access to and reliance on digital social networks can increase people's power and experience. Technologies, such as Twitter, are increasing the capacity to make people's voice heard immediately and turn „ordinary" people into broadcasters (*The Guardian* 27.01.2016). Some major recent events, such as the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring, were possible because of the digital social networks. Moreover, smaller scale events, which nonetheless do increase people's contribution towards the functioning of social systems, are results of the new technology. Although not every online campaign has an impact, digitally-rooted activism cannot be dismissed as we are „moving from a vision of civics that's party-based and partisan to one that's personal and pointillist'(Zuckerman 2013: 9). Thus, political digital activism is „civics in flux, changing with the people who practise it" (ibidem: 9).

So far, we have established that debates of human rights, privacy and digitally-rooted activism point to a need to re-think the issue of civil courage. It is worth noting that the changes in the global security, especially in the context of the war on terror, also call for re-opening of discussion on courage. One such discussion was triggered by Sontag's remark that the hijackers responsible for September 11 were not cowards since they were willing to die for a cause they believed in, an assertion that has again raised the question as to whether courage is morally neutral or not (Pears 2004: 1–12). The discussion that followed her use of the notion of courage as „a morally neutral value" renewed a general interest in the issue of civil courage and showed widespread confusion surrounding the notion. The realization that we are faced with the existence of contrasting views on whether courage is moral or immoral in itself and this lack of consensus is one of the main obstacles to today's theorizing about courage. The fact that all Sontag's opponents base their disagreement with her on Aristotle's thesis that a courageous person is one who faces fearful things because he or she believes that her/his goal is noble (Ochoa, quoted in Pears 2004: 2), suggests the continuing strength of the Greek legacy.

/// Conclusion: courage's function and social science

If, as Bauman (2001) suggests, one of the main tasks of contemporary sociology is to inform people about the social forces that threaten to reduce freedom and political democracy, it is essential to study the role of

creative imagination in the elaboration of political goals and in the resistance to symbolic domination. It is similarly vital to explore the difference civil courage makes to the functioning of institutions and to the scope and quality of civil society. In today's society, undertaking unpopular actions in order to enhance civil society and stand up in defence of civil values has become more complex because – with so many restrictions and rules gone, and with penalties for unconventional conduct reduced – the lines of division are less clear and it is no so obvious which barriers to break. Yet, there are still several functions for which civil courage is indispensible.

The most traditional function of civil courage is connected with its task of preventing abuses of power and with its role of resistance to symbolic domination. The importance of this function of courage as a civic virtue is supported by statements from such writers as de Tocqueville and Jellinek, who worried that democratic society can silence people much more effectively than an autocratic regime. For example, Jellinek (1912: 33) wrote that „much greater courage is required to oppose vox populi than the order or the a ruler'. Later works, also perceived an increased need for political courage as a result of the tremendous power of both public and mass communication. Moreover, with the end of the Cold War and with the consequent decline of fears related to the threat of totalitarianism and the transformation of politics into a battle over public attention, the power of public opinion to silence a minority arises from the increasing importance of the media and their willingness to please the general public's privatised and consumerist aspirations.

One of the most important functions of civil courage is connected with its role of introducing change to the functioning of institutions. Because of the acceleration of change in today's societies, the significance of courageous innovative actions has grown/continues to grow. Hence, what is needed today is „a thorough discussion of the social and institutional conditions under which individuals can acquire the strength to stand up and defend their rights in difficult social situations" (Swedberg 1999: 523). Such suggestions, that we ought to address questions about the nature of institutions which can nurture people's capacity to display civil courage and the social mechanisms able to further civil courage, resemble Lasch's (1997) idea of the role of common life as capable of nurturing the individual responsibility and courage demanded for democracy. Seeing modern life as too highly organized and too self-conscious, and thus resulting in a shrinkage of people's imaginative and emotional horizons, Lasch calls

for the enhancement of virtues more associated with political life (1997). Believing that „[d]emocracy depends upon the engagement of individuals, not only with the state, but with each other" (Lasch 1997: 289), stresses the importance of the crucial role of courage in ensuring cultural change and social change.

In today's democratic society, which offers many incentives for engagement, undertaking unpopular actions in order to enhance civil society and stand up in defence of civil values does not necessarily require us to be a dissident or, in other words, to be engaged in „oppositional practices; either by choice or (much more commonly) by „forced exclusion from the institutionalized means of opposition" (Sparks 1997: 76). In terms of Hirschman's (1970) analysis of voice, exit and loyalty, in systems which tolerate criticism, voices of criticism, representing civic engagement rooted in people's commitment to the values of democracy and justice, should not be risky. However, when it does not bring results, we can fight back, according to Habermas. For Habermas, civil disobedience is an extension of public deliberation with different means. It is a calculated breaking of rules which is „actualized in civil society in crisis situations to defend the normative content of constitutional democracy „against the systematic inertia of institutional politics" (Habermas 2002: 375). Although civil disobedience transgresses the law, it only does it when the law lacks legitimacy. Moreover, it should be non-violent, demonstrative and symbolic in its nature and it should seek to advance public interest. However, according to Habermas (1985) it should not require courage, as it should be a normal type of action in every constitutional democracy. Civil disobedience should be a necessary, thus, normalized, component of democratic political culture. Habermas' (1985: 101) notion of civil disobedience as „a normal part of mature constitutional democracy" – is often criticised for being nothing more than an idealist aspiration. However, this aspiration is probably now less utopian as the Internet, Twitter and other new social media increasingly make people's voices heard. Nonetheless, a real major change requires „boots on the ground", as Castells (2013) claims, so courage is still part of modern political movement at the intersection between urban space and cyberspace.

Thus, despite Aron's (1957) observation that in Western democracies criticism could not any longer be regarded as a proof of courage, it still can be argued that courage is needed. If we want to have an educated public and educated politicians, we need people capable of disinterested,

nonconformist behaviour, motivated by ideals of just society. In order to guard against division and hierarchy, we need to cultivate appropriative sentiments (Nussbaum 2013: 3) and here there is a role for social scientists. Doing social science means focusing attention on the particular elements of reality we consider to be important and framing them in ways that we feel have the potential to be enlightening and informative and capable of helping people make strides in addressing the concerns they have in their own lives and in society broadly. It is crucial for social scientists to realize that when they do their work, they are making claims about social reality, in which there are many ongoing conflicts and tensions; so doing social science unavoidably means getting involved in these struggles. Following Bourdieu (2004), we can say that sociology cannot but care about the reality its investigates. However, some sociologists think that „the engagement in the domain of public affairs is a matter of choosing, at least until they have achieved tenure" (Aronowitz 2012: 85).

Still, many social scientists view science as an inherently politically progressive force and actively try to engage in the public life. One of them was C. Wright Mills, who criticized American academia for being „effectively locked in the wall of academe" and called for „taking it big", by which he meant that social studies must be bold enough to grasp the whole social world and critically engage and promote public reflection on significant social issues (Aronowitz 2012: 149, 239). By consciously adopting the role of political intellectual, understood to be „a thinker who persists in writing, speaking, and teaching unauthorized ideas" (ibidem: 188), Mills aimed to address the main societal problems, including the power structure. Such actions require courage and often lead to marginalization. Mills's „refusal to join his ideological peers in participating in the American celebration" (ibidem: 83) and his intellectual courage was possible because of his scholarly reputation and authority in the field. In other words, it was his scientific credibility that gave him the authority to engage in the public sphere (Misztal 2007).

Thus, while bearing in mind the importance of scientific rigour and the fact that good sentiments do not produce good sociology (Bourdieu 2004), sociologists should be aware of social science's interpretive dimensions and have a sense of how their topics of study relate to the larger social whole. „Taking it big" and critically analysing the major issues of the day require both professional expertise and a concern with the wellbeing of the whole of society. Such courageous social science can provide an important contribution to knowledge and to the future direction of modern societies.

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/// Abstract

The aim of this paper is to argue a need to re-evaluate the notion and function of civil courage in creating conditions for cohesive, just and pluralistic dimensions of contemporary societies. It will assert that courage can perform a vital social function by providing the basis for civic initiatives that affirm human rights and dignities, enrich the functioning of institutions and quality of civil society and enhance social or cultural change. Since the concept of courage is still commonly discussed using terms derived from the Classical Greece, I will delineate this ancient legacy and its contribution to the persistence of various obstacles and impediments in theorizing about courage. This will be followed by a discussion of the relevance of classical sociology's input into today's understanding of this notion, after which I will demonstrate that currently, as a result of border socio-political and technological transformations, this notion is in urgent need of re-evaluation. Finally, I will discuss the functions of civil courage in the contemporary world and its place in social science.

Key words:
civil courage, democratic society, human rights, Classical Greece, sociological theories