

PEDAGOGY FOR UNDERSTANDING KOSOVO SOCIETY (I)

From the Plural Monoethnic to the Multiethnic

Sometimes the constraints of disciplinary thinking, including bias, are so great that it is difficult for some to grapple with claims (or propositions) that they find too foreign.

Take, for example, the claim that Kosovo is not a multiethnic society

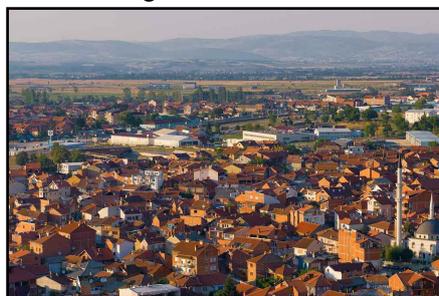
For many Kosovo Albanians, the fact that there is a plurality of ethnic peoples within Kosovo is enough for them to believe in their country's multiethnicity. Why would they believe otherwise? After all, if a multiethnic society is defined as one that includes two or more distinct ethnic groups, then cities like Pristina, Zubin Potok, and Strpce provide ample evidence for multiethnicity. However, there is more. All the censuses taken since 1948 have indicated a diverse ethnic population of Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Romani, Gorani, and others. And these demographics have been in place for most of the current generations of Kosovo, since approximately 85% of the population was born after 1948. For many Kosovo Albanians then, their country's multiethnicity is a fact.

Kosovo's Multiethnicity: Fact or Fiction?

Within the broader international community, however, this claim of multiethnicity has been discredited as fiction rather than taken as fact, at least for now. For instance, UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari implied as much in the opening sentence of his 2007 proposal: "Kosovo shall be a multi-ethnic society." This was followed by explicit denials of its facthood in statements made by officials from Belgrade (Bogdanovic) in 2007 and the OSCE (Guldimmann) in 2008, for example, when they noted that multiethnicity is a "non-existent category" in Kosovo and "Kosovo cannot be called a multi-ethnic society," respectively. These responses to Kosovo's supposed multiethnicity, however, were not in any way a rejection of the diversity claim (estimated to be 92% ethnic Albanian, 4% ethnic Serb, and 4% ethnic other), but rather a reaction to an incorrect definition which stipulated that diversity is both a necessary and sufficient condition for multiethnicity. Of course, one can define

By Rory J. Conces
Departments of Philosophy and Religious
Studies, University of Nebraska at Omaha

"multiethnicity" in any way one pleases, including treating multiethnicity as mere diversity of ethnic peoples. But it would be remiss of us not to take seriously the common usage of the term as it is found



Defining a multiethnic society solely in terms of diversity and then identifying Kosovo as multiethnic leaves "much to be desired"

within nation building and human rights discourse, for it is within that discourse that the future of Kosovo is being charted. Fortunately, the dispute is merely verbal, the result of a confusion over the meaning of a single word. Disclose the correct definition to the Kosovo Albanians, or whomever, and the verbal problem will disappear. Or, if that is not enough, perhaps some creative pedagogy can smooth the way for those who remain overly disciplined in their thinking. But is this switch of definition simply a matter of using a term in the way the powerful use it or is there something more to it? I believe there is a rationale for its common usage.

Taking Definitions Seriously

Let me be more specific. Defining a multiethnic society solely in terms of diversity and then identifying Kosovo as multiethnic leaves "much to be desired" on two counts. First, this definition is deficient insofar as it includes only one of two necessary conditions for a multiethnic society as embraced by various international governmental

organizations (IGOs) like the UN and the EU. For there to be a multiethnic society, there must be diversity or a plurality of peoples. This captures the literalness of "multi" in "multiethnicity," albeit without the slightest hint of how much diversity is required. If this were all there was to the concept, even the most homogeneous countries of Europe (which is most of them) would be multiethnic in the way touted by Kosovo Albanians. Kosovo and Denmark, for example, would stand side-by-side in this regard. This does not seem to be quite right, however.

What the Kosovo Albanians have done is to assume an incorrect definition of multiethnicity, and then finding that their own society answers to this definition, have declared their society to be multiethnic. Moreover, since Danish society meets this definition, the Kosovo Albanians can say that their two societies are alike, and so they should be talked about in the same way. The problem with this is that they are not talked about in the same way, nor should they be. Differences sometimes do matter!

To be honest, with approximately 90% of the population of Denmark being of Danish descent, Denmark is not exactly a land of immigrants. Ethnic groups tend to be rather small, with Turks comprising the largest group, followed by Germans, Bosnians, and Lebanese and others. Yet Denmark, like Kosovo, meets the minimal standard of diversity—there are ethnic Others. One significant difference between Denmark and Kosovo, however, is the historical nature of their current diversities. Whereas Denmark has undergone continuous immigration for six centuries, much of the present-day ethno-scape dates back only to the 1960s, there being a variety of immigrants including guest workers, family dependents, refugees, and asylum seekers who arrived during that timeframe. Much of Kosovo's present diversity, on the other hand, dates back to at least the

Ottoman Empire. Moreover, rather than being a place for new immigrants, Kosovo is undergoing a significant emigration (and a brain drain), perhaps to places like Denmark. In each case, however, the concern was never to simply create diversity where there was none, but rather "what to do" with the preexisting, and sometimes growing, diversity.

Toxic Environment

This leads to a second difference, one that is most pertinent to the concept of multiethnic society itself. It deals with the kind of relationship that exists between the majority and the minorities. Denmark is a country that tries to integrate and, in some ways, assimilate its immigrant population. The cornerstone of this effort is the Integration Act of 1999. To create a citizenry loyal to Danish values, culture, and language - who can contribute economically, politically, and socially to Danish society - is of great importance to the Danes. In order to achieve this, the Danish government has implemented a variety of programs, some of which counter the tendency for ethnic Others to live in enclaves, such as the geographical dispersal of refugees and strengthening neighborhoods from ghettoization.

It is true that Denmark's immigration policy has come under fire, partly due to the traction gained by the anti-immigration stance of the Danish People's Party (DPP). Yet it is difficult to imagine a Denmark that denies entry to all prospective immigrants (including refugees and asylum seekers), individuals who will then be integrated to varying degrees into Danish society. Why? Perhaps, it is because a multiethnic society inspires to become something greater than its members. Ethnic diversity is not valuable in and of itself, but only insofar as it raises the possibility of events not typically found in ethnically homogeneous societies. These are the meaningful and productive interactions that result from integrating neighborhoods and workplaces, government offices and green spaces. Integrated interaction, then, is the second necessary condition for a multiethnic society. Integrated interaction may begin with simply acknowledging the Other's presence and exchanging pleasantries, but it is hoped that more substantive interactions, like full-blown dialogue, soon follow, as is often the case in Denmark.

So the core idea of a multiethnic society seems clear enough. To say of a society that it is multiethnic is to emphasize its integration and interaction, rather than the truism that there are ethnic Others. It is an enriched definition that sets its sights well beyond the uninspiring and impoverished life within the enclave. It is a definition of commitment, rather



*A woman views the art installation **Thinking of You in Pristina***

than one of disassociation.

The antithetical definition, one of disassociation, is expressed when there is diversity without integration and interaction, a situation that is especially troublesome in post-conflict settings. Although integration and interaction remain a possibility in such situations, what we find is more or less a plural monoethnic society in which ethnic groups generally live and work in distinct enclaves and devoid of much, if any, meaningful interethnic relations. Enclave living perpetuates the sources of antagonism, including ethno-nationalist identities that exclude and mobilize; ignorance about and stereotypes of the Other; selective use of history and memory; and manipulation by elites. Within this toxic environment, deliberation among like-minded people can further group polarization to the point of fanaticism. No wonder it is important to design institutions that help to dissipate enclaves, including programs to assist displaced persons and refugees to return to their homes, making it easier for ethnic Others to intermingle face-to-face and to reduce the sources of divisiveness.

This brings us back to Kosovo. Identifying Kosovo as multiethnic leaves "much to be desired" because once the definition is enriched to include integration and interaction, it becomes clear that Kosovo is not multiethnic. It is a case of diversity without the rest; a commitment of disassociation. The sort of integration and assimilation measures that are found in Denmark are absent in Kosovo. Skeptics need only ask a few questions: Where do most Albanians and Serbs live, work, and attend school? Who do they typically befriend in their pri-

vate lives? Who do they date and eventually marry? The answers to these questions are the same for each group: with members of their own ethnic group and in their respective enclaves. These enclaves are bounded by evocative objects, clear indicators of domains of ethnic dwelling. Members of the various ethnic groups know full well where they are: flags are a dead giveaway-including the double-headed eagle flag of Albania and the flag of Kosovo and Metohija (also the state flag of Serbia). These objects are symbols of their respective ethno-nationalisms, which remain an important part of many peoples' identities and a source of continued antagonism. If the goal is to create a multiethnic society in Kosovo, then the integration-interaction paradigm needs to be implemented. Of course, interactions will not always be affirming from the start, but are sometimes unsettling, even hostile. Yet it is hoped that over time the social dynamic will reach an expression of tolerance (a matter of "enduring" the differences of the Other) and then beyond to acceptance, respect, and finally, the amalgam of affirmation, solidarity, and critique. The dynamic will be slow to change, expressed in increments from one generation to the next, each being embedded in greater and greater integration, and expressing more and more interaction all in the name of improving peoples' lives.

Tools to Loosen Constraints

No doubt any challenge to the diversity only definition will be greeted with a fair amount of disdain and ridicule. But if a multiethnic Kosovo in this enriched sense is ever to become a reality, the idea must somehow first take root in the minds of its peoples. How is this to be done? Are there pedagogical tools that are so disconnected from ideological and historical "baggage" that they may loosen the constraints of disciplinary thinking by positioning Kosovo Albanians and others to understand the difference between a multiethnic and plural monoethnic society, and to be open to the possibility that they are living in the latter? I believe there are and they can be found in the mathematical field known as topology. Take the cylinder and the Moebius strip, for example.

Tomorrow: Pedagogy for Understanding Kosovo Society (II) - Greater Than Its Parts