

ZULFIKARPASIC'S PASSING: A TIME TO REFLECT ON THE IMPORTANT BUT Difficult Role of the Hyperintellectual

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Bosnia, Kosovo, and the other countries in the Balkans have no shortage of intellectuals. In fact, intellectuals are given a prominent place within their respective civil societies. But the passing of Adil Zulfikarpasic, one of Bosnia's more prominent intellectuals and founder of the Bosniak Institute, gives us pause to reflect on how some intellectuals choose a different path from the rest, with Zulfikarpasic having been one of them.

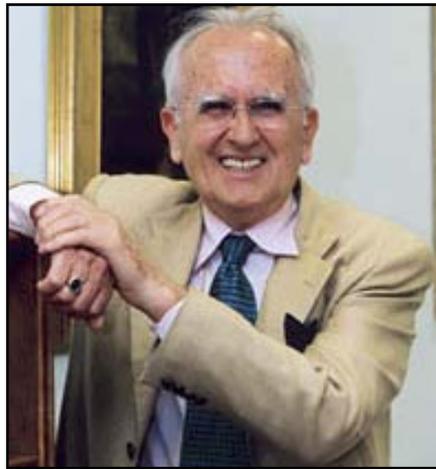
The word "intellectual" is not a recent construct, for it dates back to late-19th century France. Coined during the Dreyfus affair, it came to refer to those thinkers who were willing to intervene in a public forum even if meant risk to them. Since that time, many theorists have contributed to the discussion about intellectuals: the intellectual is viewed as a critical outsider by Edward Said, as a political educator by Paul Ricoeur, as a man of action by Jean-Paul Sartre, and as a caring insider by Michael Walzer.

The intellectual as social critic is someone who is more interested in speaking the truth than in being a "professional" concerned with promoting special interests and a career. Truth telling requires the readiness to disturb the status quo. It through this disruption that the hyper intellectual breaks down inherited ways of viewing the world, those stereotypes and categories that often hamper our dealings with others. Questioning patriotic nationalism; corporate thinking; and class, racial or gender privilege is the responsibility of the intellectual.

The intellectual is also a political educator who attempts to motivate people through "good counsel" so that they become responsible citizens who can work and live together within a democratic society. Creating responsible citizens, however, requires bringing about change. Thus, the intellectual is also a person of action. If there is to be change, such as the elimination of prejudice, the intellectual must not only modify his or her thinking and the thinking of others by offering convincing arguments, but the intellectual must also modify his or her sensibility, as well as that of others, for prejudice is also an attitude. However, these modifications alone are not sufficient to eliminate the problem, for the intellectual's most valuable contribution in challenging a problem like prejudice occurs on another level. Since prejudice is not simply an idea, but an idea that is actualized in events that are dated and localized, the intellectual must produce concrete events that serve to reject prejudice on the level of events.

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Last, the intellectual is an insider, that is, someone who exhibits a certain mindfulness and commitment to the society in question. So the intellectual takes a critical stand and a caring attitude toward a society, but from within his or her own subjective situation within that society. Being empirically informed about the society is crucial to being engaged, but it is also important for the intellectual to be some-



Adil Zulfikarpasic

one to whom others need to listen, who touches their moral sensibility so as to force them to look at what they would rather avoid, the wrongness within their society as well as themselves. Courage, compassion, and a good eye are moral virtues for the intellectual. To be in command of these virtues is not easy, for it requires the ability to continue criticism when one's fellow citizens are silent or complicit, to touch the human suffering of others, and to be open to the world in order to be honest about the presence of oppression, exploitation, and injustice.

This description of the intellectual, however, does not highlight the fact that the intellectual works within civil society. It is within this space of human association and relational networks that a culture of dialogue, tolerance, moderation, and the mutually beneficial resolution of conflicts can be promoted. It is the sort of culture that embodies the attitude and values of democratization.

Political institutions like "free, fair, and frequent elections" and "freedom of expression" are crucial for democracy, but they are only as effective as the culture that holds them together. It is civil society that provides the space within which culture shapes how people behave politically, regardless of whether it is

supportive of democratization.

The intellectual has for some time played an important role in sustaining well-developed democratic civil societies, like those found in the United States, France, and Germany. However, it is within post-conflict societies, such as those found in Bosnia and Kosovo, that there arises a urgent need for an intellectual who is more than simply a social critic, an educator, a man of action, and a compassionate individual. Enter the hyper intellectual.

What is perhaps most distinctive about the hyper intellectual is the degree to which this intellectual conducts social criticism, political education, action, and insiderism not as an ideologue, but as a non-partisan. Indeed, the social criticism and political education are conducted in a way such that what is objectionable and defensible within each opposing camp is given voice. The hyper intellectual is not aligned with any one side, and so is portrayed as someone who is sincere about reducing the divisiveness between peoples.

Perhaps the hyper intellectual described above is simply an idealized model, one that intellectuals can only mimic as best they can. Even so, it is still important to highlight individuals who have come close to the archetype of the hyper intellectual if only to show others that it can be done. Adil Zulfikarpasic was such an intellectual.

One can hardly read about Zulfikarpasic and his work and doubt that his career reflected the defining characteristics of the hyper intellectual.

Zulfikarpasic was the consummate embodiment of the oppositional figure. His dedication to promoting liberal thinking in Bosnia and Hercegovina and the open Bosniak identity made him the subject of attack and ridicule, whether from within the ranks of the party that he helped to found, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), or from some segments of the expatriate community in Europe.

To be sure, not everyone was so accepting of his open Bosniak identity, a notion that disturbed the status quo by breaking down stereotypes. Zulfikarpasic's emphasis of that which is Bosniak also showed how he was a political educator who strove to inform people of the possibility of a democratically united Bosnia and Hercegovina. The key for bringing about such a unity was Bosniak nationhood, which was instrumental in solving the ongoing problem of Bosnia and the Bosnian Muslim.

His work in founding the SDA and the Muslim Bosniak Organization (MBO), as well as his being the driving force behind *Bosanski pogledi*, a bi-monthly periodical launched in 1955,

shows him to have been a man of action. And his insiderism and virtuous being were shown in his concern for the future of the people of Bosnia whether Muslim or not. This is no better expressed than in the following passage: "The times and our situation require us to forgive one another, to rise above the level of insults and offence, if offence there has been, and to transcend all the regrettable things that have happened to us, for it is only in this way that we shall succeed." In short, fraternalism, reconciliation, and cooperation were a part of his caring attitude toward Bosnia and its people. No doubt his absence will be felt within Bosnia and its intellectual community.

Regardless of whether a strong case has been made for Zulfikarpasic the hyper intellectual, there is much work for such an intellectual within Bosnia and Kosovo, and elsewhere in the Balkans, given the degree of divisiveness that continues to be generated by ethnic nationalism and the strong interventionism employed by the International Community (IC). Since democratization is about inclusively, entrenched divisiveness between peoples will tend to fragment groups in terms of, for example, class, gender, ethnicity, and religion, leading people to extreme political movements and parties, and anti-democratic forms of political participation.

Although people in every society can choose labels that parcel out group identities to individuals around them, thereby causing a certain degree of divisiveness and disharmony within their communities, some identities may be more troublesome than others. This is especially true when identities such as ethnicity and religion have become internalized within competing ideologies that have been linked to past violence. When group identities are formed to secure communities from their competitors, the formation of this communal cohesiveness often creates, for example, disdain for the ethnicity and religion of the other. This disdain is exhibited in the xenophobic psychology and chauvinistic morality that is sometimes prevalent within communities.

In the cases of Bosnia and Kosovo, however, the antagonism generated from this fear of and moral superiority over the other that played a part in the civicide of the 1990s and that continues to polarize Bosnian and Kosovar societies is also colliding with efforts from within those societies as well as from the IC to promote democracy building. Those with nationalist leanings see these attempts as incursions that weaken their self-determination and undermine their ethnic identity. On the other hand, those supportive of democratization view the meddling of nationalists as an attempt to undermine formal agreements and institutions that have been set in place to bring about peace, civil society building, and democratization.

It is in such an argument rich environment that we find intellectuals who are ideologues for their respective sides. Clearly, there is no shortage of social criticism and willingness to educate the public about the shortcomings of their opponents. But the continuous tension between, for example, ethnic nationalists and cosmopolitanism interventionists, has created an opening for the hyper intellectual as a transformative agent between these apparent rivals. It is the hyper intellectual, who through a reciprocating critique and defense of both the nationalist enterprise and strong interventionism, as well as being a man of action and a compassionate and empathic insider, strives to create a climate of understanding and an enlargement of moral space so as to reduce the divisiveness between opposing parties. Unlike the chauvinistic morality that shrinks or closes the space within which people navigate in respectable ways, the morality of the hyper intellectual is one that enlarges moral space by finding empathy (and hospitality) to be more important than simply tolerating the presence of the Other.

It might seem odd that empathy should be accentuated, especially since we seem to be living in an age of tolerance. But without the emotion of empathy, our moral norms and principles remain impotent. For our moral deliberations to come alive, we must "see" someone's situation as a morally relevant one. Empathy allows us to put ourselves in the place of the other, to develop an appreciation of how the other experiences his or her situation.

Unfortunately, a person's inattentiveness or indifference to the moral circumstances of another's situation will have devastating results for passing moral judgments. This is particularly true when hatred and anger have overwhelmed the empathetic response. Perhaps those who are ideologues of ethnic nationalism fall victim to this worst kind of inattentiveness, a malevolent form that inhibits empathy and turns them against the other.

Of course, even the combative nationalist can regain a moral connection with the other through the reinvigoration of attentiveness or empathy. Becoming empathic allows the person to once again recognize the Other's moral significance and well-being. However, societies suffering under the weight of the xenophobia and chauvinism of ethnic nationalism inflict on their members situations in which moral space may be compressed, if not closed. So how is it possible to expand or open moral space that will eventually allow people to see the morally relevant circumstances of others' situations? Of course, practical measure of intercultural education, storytelling, and moral imagination all play a role in expanding moral space. NGO's such as the network of Nansen

Dialogue centers have been successful at bringing together different peoples in order to deconstruct stereotypes and to enhance understanding between them. Their investment in civil society building is in terms of re-establishing relationships on the interpersonal level. But the question remains, how is attentiveness to be triggered so that the programs undertaken by the Nansen Dialogue centers can stir up the empathic responses of its participants? Perhaps it occurs by an individual risking hospitality toward another. Hospitality is the receiving of a stranger, someone who may be disliked or even hated. This occurs to some degree when Nansen centers invite persons to participate in their programs, but more so when those same individuals apply what they have learned in their own communities. It is when they stray from the protective workshop and offer hospitality to others that they face the difficult challenge of re-establishing relationships with their neighbors.

However, this could also be the hyper intellectual's most important contribution. By not taking sides, the hyper intellectual is behaving courageously and taking a risk of extending an invitation to everyone as other. It is through defending and criticizing positions of all parties at some point that the hyper intellectual offers the gesture of hospitality. It is risking hospitality in its broadest sense that the hyper intellectual contributes to democracy building. Of course, I do not presume that the hyper intellectual can be the cure of all the political and social ills of the Balkans. In fact, the heavy price to be paid by the hyper intellectual is none other than estrangement. It is when colleagues do not respond to emails and return phone calls, producers cancel television interviews, editors ignore submissions, and officials of a university or other institutions question their loyalty and, thus, their usefulness that the impact of the hyper intellectual within civil society begins to shrink. Perhaps at some point a threshold is reached whereby the hyper intellectual is silenced.

This was not the fate of Zulfikarpasic. Zulfikarpasic was unique insofar as he was able to establish an institute and a loyal following that supported his efforts through the years. In doing so, however, he may have become less the hyper intellectual and more the ideologue, albeit one that crusaded for a united Bosnia and Hercegovina. Perhaps the effectiveness of any single hyper intellectual, including Zulfikarpasic, is short-lived, but the collective impact of a growing number of hyper intellectuals may have long-term consequences for democratization efforts. If enough of the right people within Bosnia and Kosovo become convinced by the hyper intellectual that the world is not black and white, these troublesome places may become more democratic and humane.