# Italy Remembers Zygmunt Bauman: The Voice of Modernity

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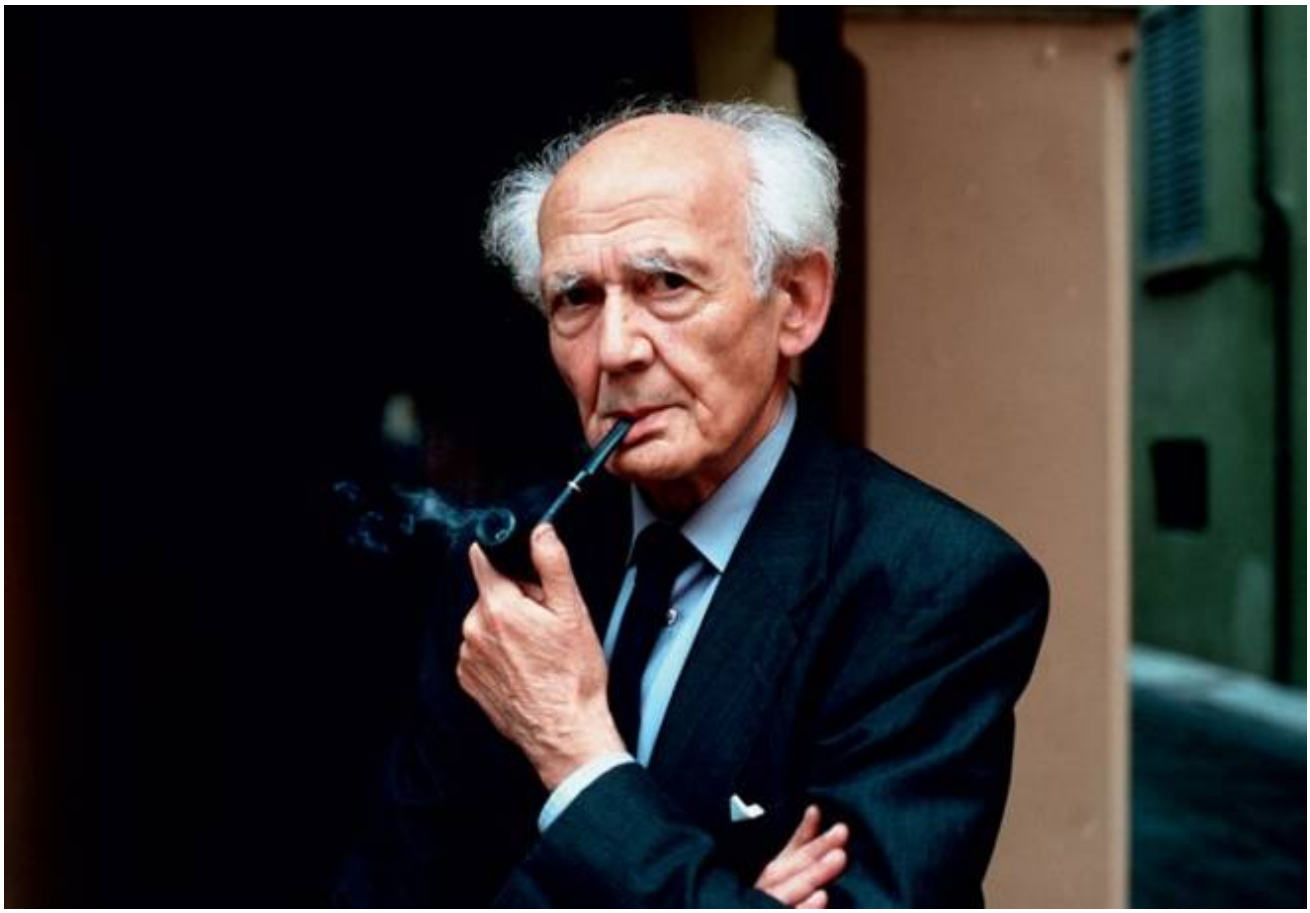

The renowned Poland-born left-wing thinker recently passed away, leaving behind an influential ethical footprint throughout the world, including the likes of Italy. In just this last year, he graced several festivals and conferences across the country, sharing with others his life testimony on what would be some of his very last days.

Zygmunt Bauman [2] (1925-2017), one of the 20th century's most prominent sociologists, has died at the age of 91 in Leeds, England, surrounded by his family. He is survived by his three daughters with his wife of 62 years, Janina Bauman [3] (1926-2009), along with several grandchildren.

A left-wing thinker, he published more than 57 books and well over a hundred articles, addressing a wide range of issues, including globalization, the Holocaust, modernity and postmodernity, consumerism, and mortality. He is renowned for incorporating philosophy and other disciplines into his approach and won several international awards for his exploration of ethics. Furthermore, he was

regarded as a strong moral voice for the poor and dispossessed in a world upended by globalization. Regardless of what he was writing about, he always remained his focus on how humans can live a dignified life through ethical decisions.

In his most famous book, Modernity and the Holocaust [4], a 1989 release, he argued that the Holocaust was not a breakdown in modernity but rather the outcome of pillars of modernity, such as industrialization and rationalized bureaucracy.

“It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable,” Bauman wrote.

A strong critic of globalization, he coined the term “liquid modernity” in the 1990s to describe a contemporary world in a state of such flux that individuals are left marginalized and rootless. In fact, his theories had a major influence on the anti-globalization movement beyond Poland, such as in Spain and Italy, where young adults were hit especially hard by economic dislocation.

**His Lectures in Italy**

In Italy in particular, he spoke at various events throughout the country, including throughout this past year. For example, he was one of the most loved lecturers at the annual Festival Filosofia [5] in Modena, a city in the Emilia-Romagna region.

Gian Carlo Muzzarelli [6], the mayor of Modena, expressed his condolences, "A great philosopher and a friend of the city of Modena and of the Festival of Philosophy has left us. His lessons have always filled the squares with thousands and thousands of passionate people.” He continued, “His thinking is very current and commits us to a society that values democracy and the human right to look for new opportunities for themselves and for their families, present and future.”

He was also a frequent speaker at the Festival of the Generations [7], which experienced so much success in Florence that it became a tour festival, making stops in Rome, Salerno, and Bologna. The festival consists of meetings with writers and scientists and workshops, along with concerts, to address the problems that the elderly and the youth experience, to design a model of life finally livable, and to share the experience of two generations. The festival remembers him as "one of the most famous and influential thinkers in the world...responsible for the striking definition of 'liquid modernity.'"

Last September, Bauman attended the pranzo di pace [8], or the peace lunch, in Assisi [9] with Pope Francis and several interreligious guests. In fact, he was among the few at Pope Francis's table, where he spoke of the necessity of dialogue as the way for integration between people. In his speech, he cited three tips from the Pope himself: "a culture of dialogue" and "equitable distribution of the fruits of the earth and of the work." Thirdly, he recalled, "Pope Francis said that this dialogue needs to be the center of education in our schools, to give tools to solve conflicts in a different way from how we used to do."

Bauman has participated in several meetings inspired by the so-called 'Spirit of Assisi [10]' and organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio [11], including one in Antwerp in 2014.

**His Biography**

Bauman was born on November 19, 1925, in Ponzan, Poland, into a Jewish family. The poverty and anti-Semitism he experienced from a young age inspired his career grounded in social justice. In order to survive the Holocaust, he and his family fled to the Soviet Union, where he joined a Polish army unit as still a teenager. After WWII, he became one the Polish Army’s youngest majors. However, in 1953 he was fired from his army job due to the communist’s regime anti-Israel stance—his father inquired about emigrating at the Israel Embassy.

He made the most of this period of unemployment, studying sociology and later philosophy at the University of Warsaw [12]. He lectured there until 1968, when he was driven out of Poland, along with thousands of other Polish Jews, due to the anti-Semitic campaign engineered by the Communist government. Moving to Israel, he taught at universities in Tel Aviv and Haifa until 1971, before he

and his family settled in Britain, where he would remain for the rest of his life.

For the next 20 years, he headed the Department of Sociology at the University of Leeds [13]. After his 1990 retirement, he continued to write prolifically. Among his numerous awards and honors, he received an honorary degree in Modern Languages, Literature, and Literary Translation from the University of Salento in Lecce, Italy.

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