



## WHERE THE RESPONSE TO MIGRATION BEGINS

### Zygmunt Bauman's considerations about exile and migration

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#### KEY WORDS

*Migration*  
*Stranger*  
*Refugees*  
*Prejudice*  
*Indifference*  
*Responsibility*  
*Solidarity*

#### ABSTRACT

*Migration is one of the main problems in the modern world, one which is globally generated, but left to the individual's or small community's initiative. My proposal is that any solution – including the people's exigence to governments – must start with ethics, particularly by exchanging attitudes of prejudice and indifference toward migrants for attitudes of responsibility toward the other in need, and solidarity. I discuss some texts from Zygmunt Bauman because he has been one of the most renowned analysts of our society, and he himself was an exile.*

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Received: 29/ 01 / 2021

Accepted: 17/ 07 / 2021

## 1. Introduction

Migration is one of the main challenges for world governments. In Spain, Italy and Greece, the nearest European countries to African coasts, hundreds of migrants are received daily. But the trouble affects also other host countries for refugees, mainly Colombia, Bangladesh, and Turkey. According to the UNHCR (2020, 2) statistics, updated in December 2019, more than 1% of the world population (79.5 million people) is forcibly displaced. The causes which force people to flee from their homes are “war, conflict, persecution, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order” (UNHCR 2020, 8). Significantly, most of the refugees are fleeing from the war in Syria, followed by Venezuelans escaping a deteriorating situation of political insecurity and deprivation (UNHCR 2020, 21).

The same report estimates that a 40% of them – 30–34 million people- are under 18 years old (see UNHCR 2020, 8 and 14). This part of the population is particularly worrying, since they are at “risk of exploitation and abuse, especially when they are unaccompanied or separated from their families” (UNHCR 2020, 8), or are particularly vulnerable because they have not had access to education in their home countries, which means they are unable to access education in their host countries in order to improve their status (UNHCR 2020, 19).

Refugees represent the worst face of a broader drama. The quoted report does not count the data about, for example, economic migrants, meaning people on the move in search of a better life, due to the gap in opportunities between different regions of the planet.

Most of the refugees in Europe are allocated to the camp of Moria. The camp is overloaded with families waiting for a solution to their pleas for asylum in Europe. An example of the situation are the so-called “nowhere villes” as named by Bauman; places in which people who have left their birthplace behind, and cannot go back, survive in complete uncertainty about their destination or prospects for their future. Overloaded with more than four times its capacity, from few years ago there are several risks for its inhabitants’ physical and mental

health (Hermans et al. 2017) and access to education (Ayalon 2019). A significant indication of the desperate situation of the camp residents was the burning of part of the camp in September 2020.

Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of integration among the migrant population in Europe. A tragic sign of this is, for example, the origins of the perpetrator of a murder in Vienna, the young descendant of an Armenian father. As Bauman would say, he seemed to be one among many citizens with all the rights provided by the European Laws and the Welfare State, who felt themselves treated differently, or had witnessed disrespectful attitudes toward their parents. He, like the perpetrators of murders in France, for example, are young people growing in resentment and anger toward the European population. And their frustration ends in violence (Bauman 2004, 50).

In contrast with the first decade of the present century, during the second decade, the evolution of the problem of migration has been far worse, due to two interrelated factors. First, there are more people becoming displaced and with fewer opportunities to return to their countries in safe conditions. Second, a limited number of refugees are accepted for resettlement by host countries accompanied by difficulties in integrating them into the local population.

As a conclusion of its description of the current situation, the UNHCR report states the following:

With more people becoming displaced and fewer being able to return, an increasing number find themselves in protracted and long-lasting displacement situations. The world has clearly shifted from a decade of solutions to a decade of new and protracted displacements. [...] States need to offer more avenues to solutions for refugees in line with the objective of greater shared responsibility (UNHCR 2020, 12, see also p. 11).

The problem of the increasing number of migrants and refugees is multi-factorial and requires solutions at different levels. One is the level of State policies, pointed out by the UNHCR. But, due to the global dimensions of wars and famine, this may not be enough. At another level, governments can be reluctant to accept migrants

or refugees because they face other internal problems, which lead their populations to regard migrants with defiance or prejudice. In other words, the attitude of the dominant group toward migration can be a determinant for the adoption of policies of integration or refusal.

At this second level, the point that I propose is that a different view of migrants and migration is necessary in many sectors of population. Taking inspiration from an analysis of Bauman about morality ("Morality Begins at Home: or The Rocky Road to Justice", about the connection between individual and social morality, in Bauman 1997a, 46-70), I argue that a positive comprehension of migrants, at a social level, is a prerequisite to any legal disposition. Among other reasons, I defend this because it is civil society that chooses governments and can demand that they accelerate solutions to what is now one of the most poignant challenges to humanity ever experienced.

At this point, I discuss some texts of Bauman, because he was, simultaneously, a deep thinker who identified the moral problems of capitalist societies, and an exile in Europe. I start by arguing the authority of his writings in issues like this. Then, I focus on three concepts which synthesise the attitudes that migrants have to deal with when received in developed countries, namely spatial segregation, stereotyping (or targeting) and prejudice; and indifference. Lastly, I discuss Bauman's thesis according to which the presence of migrants in developed countries is beneficial at two levels: first, for their existential condition of uncertainty; second, because they raise seemingly unanswerable questions. Lastly, I briefly review Bauman's defence of the principles of responsibility toward the Other, solidarity and social dialogue, in their application to exiles.

Bauman's analysis of globalisation, and of the right to permit or deny access to countries as an stratifying factor, has provided a conceptual framework applicable to European contexts (see Rivero & Incerti 2020) and to better understand the negative social and cultural consequences of economic neo-liberalism (Cugini 2020, 14). This influence provides validation of his discussion of the matter of migration.

## 2. Bauman as a migrant or exile

Zygmunt Bauman was born into a Jewish peasant family of Poznan, which at the time was a small and underdeveloped town in Poland. His ancestors had suffered the impositions of the assimilation process he would describe in *Modernity and Ambivalence*. In any case, he denied having personally experienced such a process (Bielefeld 2002, 115).

In the course of his life, Zygmunt Bauman would pass through two exiles, for different reasons. According to the current definitions provided by the UNHCR, we could state that he and his family were refugees, because they were forced to leave their country out of danger and a threat to their survival. In the first exile, the cause was the start of World War II with the advance of the Nazi troops in Poland, in September 1939. The cause of the second flight from Poland was ideological and political, in 1968: with the years, Bauman had become a prominent intellectual in the country, a revisionist of the Marxist principles, and a powerful critic of the Soviet system and its leaders. Due to deep disagreement, he had to abandon the Communist Party, and as a consequence, he lost his job, he was under strict surveillance, and was blacklisted. To both issues and in both cases, the racial reason should be added: Bauman was prosecuted during the purging processes directed against the Jewish people, and by the communist authorities (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008, 11).

In this sense, I agree with Wagner (2020) in emphasising the importance of the distinction between "migrant" and "refugee", because the lack of security in the country of origin makes the problems more poignant in the latter case, and drives the imperative for assistance. I also agree with Wagner on the importance of the appliance of the second concept to the both the circumstances of the Bauman family. This notwithstanding, in the following pages, I use also the terms "migrant" and "stranger".

For the use of "migrant", I have two reasons. Firstly, my objective is to reflect upon ethical attitudes among the host countries' populations, which I think indirectly affect migrants and refugees. In fact, when stereotyping or

discriminating, ordinary people do not ask if the target of their attitudes is a migrant or a refugee. The difference is not essential, because it relies on the degree of insecurity of the person who is the object of discrimination. Secondly, Bauman became well integrated into the host communities. In his first exile in the USSR, he had the opportunity to study, accessing even high-level studies (Pallares-Burke 2004, 303). In his second exile, he spent three years in uncertainty but then he came to England with a good job and recognition for his contributions to social sciences. He was admitted, well settled and, after some time, also integrated. With reference to this second exile, I think it is more accurate to consider him as a migrant, in more general terms.

In a brief text about thinking in exile, Bauman recalled the stories of some intellectuals, philosophers and literary figures. He called exile a vocation, in as much as it can be disconnected from a territorial movement and become, instead, a condition of lightness and independence. At the end of those reflections, Bauman concluded "it is an exile who is saying this" (Bauman 1997b, 160). Implicitly, in my view, he seems to be saying that he identified with such a destiny and, if so, his own condition provides a hermeneutical key to his approach to migration. He was talking as one who could relate the suffering of others to his own experience.

As to the use of the term "stranger" for Bauman, it is taken from Simmel, who defined a stranger as "the man who comes today and stays tomorrow" (Simmel 1908, 173). A stranger is someone who, for some reason, is in the minority within a broader community. In Bauman's interpretation, there is also a token of ambivalence, because strangers escape the dichotomy between "friend or enemy", being neither of them, someone who has abandoned their own territory, and stays in another (Bauman 1991, 59). It is a key term to describe migrants and their social situation. Forced migration is, indeed, together with a sort of "racism" against the poor, among the recurrent concerns in Bauman's writings, as part of the outcasts of societies in the current liquid modernity (Bauman's term for the present condition of the world). Strangers are, therefore,

an important concern for thinking about in our times and criticising our culture (Davis & Pollock 2020, 2).

### **2.1. The Two Exiles of Bauman**

The Baumans had to leave their homeland for exile in Russia in 1939, because of the advance of the Nazi troops into Poland. There is not much information about this stage of Bauman's life in the USSR. From several interviews, we know that the move gave him the opportunity to study, a chance that would have been impossible in his rural homeland (Wagner 2020, 1-5). Maybe this factor made of him, at the time, a devout communist.

We also know that he started to study Physics, following two undergraduate degree courses. He also started to study Marxist philosophy. But, lastly, he also joined the Red Army, and participated in the liberation of Warsaw (Garcia 2004, 303). He also joined many Polish Jews who easily accepted the communist promises, seeing them as the solution to the problems of the country before the war (Morawski 1998, 30). From this time on, Bauman's ascent inside the Polish Army was quite fast, and he was soon counted among the youngest officials. The point is important because Bauman, when reflecting about power and inequity, was someone who had directly experienced both sides of the divide (Cheyette 2020, 68)

Bauman left the Army in 1954, in the context of a purge of the Jews, and started a brilliant academic career in the School of Sociology in the University of Warsaw. He soon became part of a group of revisionists, which, drawing inspiration from the writings of the young Marx, contested the official readings of the Soviet authorities (based fundamentally on *Das Kapital*) and claimed for total autonomy in the development of cultural activities. The Polish Communist Party, deeply ideologised, rejected the proposals of the revisionists (Kołakowski 1968, 465). This revisionist movement, whose leader in Poland was Kołakowski, had groups in Hungary and other countries under the Iron Curtain, with the same rejection from the Communists authorities (see Satterwhite 1992, *passim*).

In Bauman's writings of the 1960s, although they were subject to censorship, his progressive delusion about the implementation of the soviet system and his critics is perceptible. He denounced the bureaucratisation of society, and the lack of social involvement, of critical sense, and of creativity, in the young generations of Poland (Bauman 1962). He supported the movements which clamoured for an increase in individual freedom. *A Dream of Belonging*, his wife, Janina's, second book, is an outstanding witness to the evolution from the initial enthusiasm with the re-building of their country, to the disenchantment and a conviction of betrayal regarding the Bolshevist-Stalinist application of the Marxist principles (Pollock 2011, 82-83). These ideas are also reflected in a brief work by Bauman (1990b), writing indirectly, about the disillusionment of his generation of Polish Jews with the promises of the Soviet system.

Together with other fellow scholars of philosophy and sociology (Kołakowski, Morawski, among others), he decided to abandon the Communist Party. He was immediately fired from the university. As recalled in his wife's memoirs, he and his family were victims of prejudice, anger and insult, even threats. They were subject to permanent surveillance. They decided to escape. J. Bauman (1988, 169-171; 174-177; 180-202) tells the narrative of the escape from Poland. The family travelled to Israel, where some of their relatives lived (Welzer 2002, 110).

The Baumans did not feel at ease in the authoritarian State of Israel, which they would describe later as "years of comfortable life but of spiritual discomfort" (J. Bauman 2002, 33). Although of a different order, they perceived that rule as equally oppressive as that of Soviet Poland. They spent three years of uncertainty, in which Zygmunt looked for a job in which he could work freely, and for a place to live. They found it in a job offer in the University of Leeds, in which Zygmunt Bauman was appointed chair of sociology in 1972. From then, the couple lived in Leeds until their deaths in 2008 and 2017.

The testimonial writings of Janina Bauman, sober in style, tell us something about starting a new life, in their mid-forties and with three

daughters. She possibly suffered from the situation more than Zygmunt, who went to Leeds with a position, knowledge of the language and a network of contacts, because he had spent a year doing research at the London School of Economics and had published some works in English. Janina, instead, felt a change of status, because initially she became a housewife, having been before, in Poland, chief of the Film Services; and she suffered the insecurity of meeting people without any mastery of their language or their customs (J. Bauman 1988, 142-146; 158-159). Maybe for this reason, she collaborated in associations about the integration of migrants, or even made known the plight of less known or oppressed minorities, such as Gypsies (J. Bauman 1998, 61).

In any case, and even after many years spent in England, Bauman always felt himself like a foreigner, a Pole living in England. He kept some Polish habits, like speaking his mother tongue, and had some nostalgia about going back to his country, a hope that, in the end, was impossible to fulfil (Bauman 1997a, 4).

## ***2.2. An Outsider in the Capitalist World***

There is a peculiarity in Bauman's thought, and it regards its relationship with biography. As a premise, it is important to keep in mind a distinction, because sociology is a science and biography is a narrative. A juxtaposition of the two planes could threaten scientific rigour, as well as disrespecting the moral principles of Bauman, who wanted to be known as a public man, for his works (Tester 2001, 3-6).

But, in Bauman himself, the peculiarity of social science is its intertwining with everyday life, which provides both the source and the validation of each interpretation. The kind of sociology Bauman tried to make is deeply entrenched within human experience. Bauman himself contended that sociology is different from common sense, but it is also a science intended to give meaning to daily concerns in human experience. Their interpretations are to be validated by the common experience of common people, without a specific academic background.

Following Wright Mills, in his discourse of acceptance of the Chair at the University of

Leeds, Bauman advocated for the crucial role of sociology in modern civilisation, arguing that “it must show to the people [...] the way in which their most intimately private biographies are woven into the tissue of the history of the species” (Bauman 1972, 202). This perception is a guideline in his work of interpretation, for example, when considering that the “raw material for sociological findings [...] is the experience of ordinary people in ordinary, daily life” (Bauman 1990a, 9). It is a science that strives “to see the social in the individual, the general in the particular” (Bauman 1990a, 11) and, finally, “when thinking sociologically, one attempts to make sense of the human condition through analysing the manifold webs of human interdependence” (Bauman 1990a, 14).

In this regard, the person of the sociologist, living immersed in the same society he interprets, cannot but make it part of the narrative. On the other hand, as a scientist, there is, for the sociologist, a need to keep the facts uppermost to discuss every issue with rigour. In this sense, one must acknowledge that Bauman was very reserved regarding autobiographical reflections.

In any case, Bauman can be considered an observer and an actor in the society he describes at the same time (Magerski 2018, 3). He lived in uncommonly difficult times. And his admitted condition as a stranger, sometimes explicit in his texts, is an intellectual stance from which he observes the world. It is, in a certain sense, the point of view from a distance, required for scientific substance. This condition as a stranger, an exile or an outsider emerges, in the first place, in his analysis of the Jewish question, to which he devoted several works between 1986 and 1996. Afterwards, he broadened the application of the category to intellectuals and to all outcasts, or people on the margins of the society, such as the unemployed and the migrants (Cheyette 2020, 67).

In addition, Janina’s autobiographical writings are important in understanding Zygmunt Bauman’s context and interests (Davis 2008, 12). He several times acknowledged that *Winter in the Morning* (Janina’s first book) helped him reflect about the nature and mission of sociology. It contributed to making him recognise that the failure of common sociology,

that to which he refers as the “orthodox consensus”, was due to the failure to admit the moral relevance of individual choices.

From Janina I learned... that sociologising makes sense only in as far as it helps humanity in life, that in the ultimate account it is the human choices that makes all the difference between lives human and inhuman, and that the society is an ingenuous contraption to narrow down, perhaps eliminate altogether, those choices (quoted in Beilharz 2001, 335).

The point I want to make is that this principle is particularly true when Bauman analyses the problem of migration. He avoids personal references. But it is unavoidable to acknowledge that he is a migrant writing about migration. Possibly, he felt the sensation he himself described in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, about the Kafkaian animal, with its legs anchored to a slippery territory, and its arms floating in the air, looking for a future that is uncertain, suspended between a heaven of opportunities and a hell of insecurity (Bauman 1991, 162-163). A similar image would appear again in his writings about exile, under the metaphor, taken from M. Bradbury, of a “a grain of sand in somebody’s else desert” (Bauman 1997b, 157). He sees this grain as a self-propelled one, without roots behind it, but without a future either.

Some of Bauman’s statements about himself contribute to this conclusion as someone who was “dislocated”, not just in the topographical, but also in the intellectual sense and in regard to the *Zeitgeist* dominant in his world. Bauman referred to a critical distance toward “the self-contented, stand-offish and insensitive world, a world believing in no alternative to itself”, reluctant to do what claims “to be done in order to save and redeem its targeted victims and collateral casualties” (Bauman 2012, 197).

And this, in my view, reinforces the authority of his analysis about migration and the migratory crisis. He was also an intellectual who perceived his work as a service to common understanding, to critics and to emancipation. This is also perceivable in his writing about the stranger as someone who makes us stop, question even the unquestionable, and think.

In this sense, Bauman accepted his own definition as an intellectual “outsider”, as a Pole living in England, even after decades of work at Leeds (Bauman 2012, 72). Adding to this assertion also an intellectual drive, Bauman also defined himself as an outsider in the academic world, because of his own refusal to follow school or group guidelines (Bauman 2012, 159; see also Tester 2006, 277-278).

Drawing both from Adorno and from Arendt (2007, 99-122), Bauman could assume the role of a pariah, as an exiled intellectual who was able to interpret different systems of thought from an independent perspective (Cheyette 2020, 75).

### **3. Attitudes toward migrants in the liquid modernity**

When facing the problem of the stranger, whether in the solid or liquid modernity, Bauman relates the analysis to the need for homogenising identities. In the first phase of modernity, the solid one, this intent was centralised in the relationship between the State and nationalist ideologies. Once this structure, which provided foundations for the building of the identity in soil and blood disappeared, in the second phase, or liquid modernity, life is characterised by lack of references, which creates a sense of insecurity and the search for references in other, new, communities, such as the neo-tribes (Bauman 1992, 679-680).

Although ours is a society with a strong rhetoric of tolerance and inclusion, derived from the postmodern drive to reinforce contingency and diversity, the truth is that it continues to be a divided society, as Bauman repeatedly denounced. Liquid modernity is a stage of the predominance of the consumer, consumption being the main stratification factor. There is also a division between the consumers, the triumphant sector of society, and the “flawed consumers” who lack the ability to consume. These people represent the human waste of our societies, set apart from the elite by spatial segregation, by legal dispositions, or by the avoidance of human intercourse (Bauman 1998a, 107-108). Migrants, together with unemployed, make up a significant part of this group of the population.

As I intend to argue from Bauman’s writings, attitudes of refusal toward migrants are a constant in modernity, in its two phases, liquid and solid. The difference is that racial motives have lost relevance in liquid modernity, being replaced by cultural or ethnic arguments. There is also an increasing level of indifference as an attitude toward them. These concepts constitute a sort of invisible border which prevents the socially dominant part of population to attend adequately to the other, vulnerable and in need.

#### **3.1. Spatial Segregation**

Globalisation, according to Bauman, is, first and foremost, a dissolution of economic borders, intended to make easier the flow of capital, finance and products. This new facility, however, generates an economic elite which is disconnected from the territory where their workers live. This has, as a first effect, the production of “globalising wars”, in which the name of the “international community” conceals the vested interests of the enriched world, mainly the objective to remove limitations on the flow of market forces. Some cases of this phenomenon are the wars in Timor or Serbia (Bauman 2001a, 16-17).

As stated repeatedly by Bauman, migration is one of the global problems which cannot find local solutions. He denounced the lack of interest toward the underdeveloped parts of the world which has an effect on the conflicts within local populations, such as guerrilla movements, which force millions of people to flee from their homes and produce the masses of refugees (Bauman 1998b, 96). In this sense, Bauman denounced the technological wars, in which the number of victims seems of less importance, because they are kept at distance, where the military does not meet the enemy face to face, bureaucratising the action and avoiding the moral dilemma (Bauman, 2001a, 26-27).

As for the refugees fleeing from these wars, they frequently live enclosed in camps, which he named “nowhere villes”: places to which people belong neither for their past, because they have been forced to leave their past home, and have no way to go back; nor for their future, because they do not know if they will be admitted to one of the countries of destiny (Bauman 1998b, 88-

89). Such places where refugees live, in Bauman's view, are in a certain sense a premonition of the fragmented society, as an epitome of the precariousness and the fears of contemporary society, in "permanent temporary" locations (Bauman 2003, 141-142) or "permanent transience".

"Nowhere villes" express an extraterritoriality associated with unfreedom. Their inhabitants do not belong to such places: they are there as a result of movement, but they remain locked there, under surveillance, and as if they were in suspension from time and space (Bauman 2003, 142). Although the solid modern strategies of "anthropoemic" refusal (expulsion) or "anthropophagic" acceptance (assimilation) might not seem to exist any longer, the situation of these camps resembles those strategies. This situation of despair continues to divide the world, between citizens, who have a state to protect their rights, and the homeless (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008, 12-13). In Bauman's words, again:

On the earth sliced into estate properties of sovereign states, the homeless are without rights, and they suffer not because they are not equal before the law -but because there is no law that applies to them and to which they could refer in their complaints against the rough deal they have been accorded or whose protection they could claim (Bauman 2002, 285).

There is also another form of spatial segregation, that can be found inside the postmodern or liquid modern cities. This is the division of the urban space in fragmented spaces that prevent encounters and interaction with strangers, to confine them in their spaces. There, they are permitted to conserve their culture and their way of life (Bauman 1993, 157-159). But what is lost is a space for common engagement and common interaction. Their places can be visited by the other part of the social division, but only occasionally and maybe out of curiosity, or the search of aesthetic experiences, new and exotic (Bauman 1993, 168-169).

These districts of migrants are frequently seen, by population and governors alike, as places to police and surveille, under the assumption that their inhabitants, left to

themselves, would not be able to act in a civilised way. In this respect, they are similar to the camps.

### **3.2. Stereotypes and Prejudices**

To "modernise", in Bauman's view, means to set order, and to classify. When applied to the classification of people, this practice introduces a dichotomic conception of identity, whether expressed as "we/ them", "inside/ outside", or "friends/ enemies". The rise of modernity coincided with the rise of the "civilising process", which, interrupting the pre-modern "chain of being", set apart the elites from the masses. The former are concerned with the task of self-constitution and self-improvement; the latter are seen mostly as masses, or as objects for education and care, not as true agents in the public sphere. They are also criminalised, biologised or medicalised, policed in any case, because they are considered unable to master properly their own destiny (Bauman 1992, 681).

As the level of uncertainty about one's own life and identity increases in the liquid modern era, there is also the tendency to lay the blame for social malaise in all of its forms at the door of the immigrants as a scapegoat (Bauman 2011, 56):

In addition to representing the 'great unknown' which all strangers embody, the refugees bring home distant noises of war and the stench of gutted homes and scorched villages that cannot but remind the established how easily the cocoon of their safe and familiar (safe because familiar) routine may be pierced or crushed (Bauman 2002, 295).

Living in a world of liquidity, where there is lack of references for the orientation of life, can also produce a state of anxiety where the State is unable to provide security, individuals look for security in the reinforcement of the small community. In such a context, there is a rejection of migrants, as a way of finding a biographical solution to the systemic contradiction of their presence, imagining them as a potential danger (Bauman 2001a, 20-21). Especially when they are found to live in the same cities, the strategy is to set a moral separation, through the mechanisms of stereotype and prejudice.



Bauman defined stereotypes as “tendentious caricatures of the way people different from ourselves [...] live” (Bauman 1990, 17). They have the effect of defining a distance toward the other, and to typify our reactions toward them such as avoiding face-to-face intercourse, empathy and the understanding of the other, which is the necessary condition for the moral stance of responsibility and solidarity.

The growing demand for asylum from foreigners makes us aware of the contingency and fragility of our own order. The reaction is to try to protect it by showing its superiority as a civilisation, which means, at the very least, presenting the other orders as uncivilised, outside the norm, if not threatening. This is the origin of feelings that prevent the mixing of cultures, such as heterophobia (Bauman 1990, 158-159).

One of the main stereotypes of the capitalist era is the stigmatising labelling of “underclass” to all those, including migrants, who are without a role in the society of consumers. They are perceived as useless, and as if it would be better they were not around. As such, they are also feared and considered as a potential danger. At this point, Bauman observed that such an evaluation is a choice, not a description of an actual threat (Bauman 1998b, 71-72).

Stereotypes can possibly be associated to prejudice. This concept in Bauman’s words, means “a flat refusal to admit any virtues the enemies may possess, coupled with an inclination to magnify their real and imaginary vices” (Bauman 1990, 47). Among the manifestations of prejudice, there is a tendency to the double moral standard, which divides the world among “freedom fighters” or “terrorists”, or to see any newcomer, in the measure they incarnate change, as a threat to the order of things, or to the safety of the population. In this sense, “outsiders” can be easily perceived as “invaders”, stirring up feelings of insecurity, anxiety or hostility (Bauman 1990, 48-49).

Underlying this feeling, there can be another stereotype, according to which the resources of the planet for human survival are limited. This follows the idea that there is a sort of competition among human beings, in which each one acts as a rival to others. The conclusion is

that we see the other as a rival in the battle for survival, and in thinking like that, in this world, some people must settle for less than the others (Bauman 1990, 129).

There is also the modern assumption that the building and development of one’s own personality and destiny depends exclusively on individual merits. The worse aspect of it is its application to the fate of the “flawed consumers” or outcasts from the global market hierarchy. They become criminalised for not having reached the standard of consumer life (Bauman, 1990, 130). Their culpability is expressed through labels of laziness or lack of effort, or insufficient adaptability to their environment.

These attitudes are sometimes fostered by governments because the presence of such potentially dangerous strangers make apparent their efforts to establish an order and to protect, with their rules, their populations. This stance seems, then, to be also at the origin of certain political attitudes of refusal toward migrants

Populist slogans demanding deportation of foreigners, that ‘drain on our resources’, and closing the borders to migrants, a priori defined as parasites and spongers, not creators of wealth) – they need to be isolated, neutralised and disempowered, so that the chance of their massive, yet individually experienced, miseries and humiliations being condensed into collective (let alone effective) protest be further diminished, ideally reduced to nought” (Bauman 1997a, 59).

### **3.3. Indifference**

The result of spatial segregation, and of the practice of moral distancing is indifference toward the migrants, whether economic migrants or refugees.

Indifference is a moral stance, both individual and social, which consists essentially, in a “responsibility abandoned”. As such, it occupies a space together with love and hatred, the traditionally recognised forms of morality. But it has an important difference from them: love and hatred make sense in the field of an assumed moral responsibility; indifference, instead, consists in the non-admission of the responsibility, of the moral relevance of the object of an action (Bauman 1995, 66).

From his study on the Holocaust onwards, Bauman reflected repeatedly upon the moral stance of indifference. He asserted that it is socially produced, through stereotypes and prejudices. As Arendt before him had observed, one of the main characteristics of Eichmann's personality was his "indifference to the meaning of suffering" (Arendt 1985, 299; Bauman 1995, 66).

Going a step further, Bauman pointed out the de-humanising drive of indifference, showing that this attitude of inactive masses toward the destiny of the Jews was decisive in permitting the Final Solution (Bauman 1989, 17-18, 57-58, 85). With this emphasis, most of all, Bauman intended to warn that indifference toward human suffering is still possible in present societies, and that it is made increasingly possible by technological developments, which establish an increasing distance between us and the others (Bauman 1989, 173), specifically toward the Other who are suffering.

Indifference frequently takes the form of what Goffman called civil inattention (Goffman 1986, 131-132). This form of indifference does not completely avoid the intercourse, but it adopts an uncommitted mode, too formal, that avoids showing human interest toward the Other. According to Bauman,

"what is lost in the process is the *ethical* character of human relationships. A wide range of human intercourse which is devoid of *moral* significance now becomes possible; conduct exempt from being evaluated and judged by the standards of morality now becomes a rule" (Bauman 1990, 69, emphasis in the original).

Civil inattention, as a disguise for indifference, impacts in the loss of the face of the other. It treats the masses as the outcasts of the population, not as individuals with their own concerns, many times as victims of injustice, but as numbers, as masses that require control and surveillance (Bauman 1993, 155).

There is also another form of indifference, which is viewed through the lens of rationality, in the sense of a calculation of costs and benefits. When facing human dramas, such as migration or exile "Many human beings may perish in the explosion, yet the most prominent among the victims is the humanity of those who escaped the

perdition" (Bauman 1998b, 117). It has also to do with our context of privatisation of life, and the rise of the individual to the detriment of the citizen. The first is concerned about the self; the second search for the common good (Bauman 2001b, 48) in which any form of misfortune is seen as a private affair and, as so, it is difficult to join them to build a common cause (Bauman 1995, 270-271). The weakening of politics, coupled with this privatisation of problems, adds further difficulty to this search for joint solutions (Bauman 1995, 273).

The last form of indifference is tolerance. This attitude, although highly praised by modernity from its earliest stages, was also strongly criticised by Bauman. Specifically, he remonstrated that tolerance is a juxtaposition of ways of life that do not interact and between which, therefore, no social dialogue is possible (Bauman 1991, 235). Under a layer of softness, especially in contrast to intolerance, the result of tolerance is isolation, callousness and indifference (Bauman 1997a, 103; Bauman 1997b, 63).

#### **4. Contributions of the migrants to the reception society**

Overcoming the practices of physical and moral distancing is a matter of justice and an ethical stance toward those who, today, are suffering deeply. The best way to do this is to better understand the contribution of strangers to our culture.

Bauman seemed to develop this new development in two directions. Firstly, exile or migration appears in his texts as an existential condition in a fragmented and liquid world. In this context, exile represents an avant-garde of the essential condition, of the contingency, of human life. Secondly, being an exile or strangerhood is a position of increased freedom, which sets those who live in it in a lighter, better condition for the development of critical sense. A sense, in Bauman's words, it supports the need for the liquid modern world.

#### **4.1. The Existential Condition of the Migrant in Liquid Modernity**

The current phase of modernity has been defined by Heller (1989, 321) as an opportunity to accept contingency as a destiny. The Hungarian philosopher considered that contingency was part of the human condition, but that modernity tried to conceal it under the dominion of the state or of a national culture. In her proposal, destiny appears not as an imposition, but as a choice, as a vocation. And the means to make contingency into a destiny are, for the individual, the consciousness that he or she has made the best of the given possibilities for their action; for the society, the means is a decision to give preference to the world we are living in, here and now.

One of the aspects of this acceptance of contingency, in Heller's thought, is its application to space and to the sense of belonging. Heller identified a sort of "geographical promiscuity", which makes the spatial links appear as a limit to freedom. She also stated that, although different in their characteristics, both the universalist intents which prompted the assimilation processes in cultures, or the particularisms, more present nowadays, show the danger of intolerance toward different cultures or ways of life (Heller 1995, 17-18).

Heller's proposals were reflected upon by Bauman, who converted it in a definition of postmodernity (his language at the time) as a triumph of ambivalence, and the decision to make into a destiny. Bauman added that ambivalence as a form of modernity is a fate, meaning something which imposes itself involuntarily. He proposed, as Heller, to convert it into a destiny, through the choice of accepting the difference (Bauman 1991).

Bauman also drew from the thinking of Niklas Luhmann (1986), according to which the inhabitants of the postmodern world live in a situation of mutual estrangement from every social subsystem. In a world "partly sliced into fragments", we give a part of our self to each of the parts, but to none of them our whole self (Bauman 1997b, 159).

In this sense, we are all, in a certain sense, strangers who live in a paradoxical situation: on

the one hand, estrangement opens up space for individual development; on the other, the continuity of individual communication becomes questioned, and there is a need for validation that, following Luhmann, we can only find in love (Bauman 1988, 42-43).

Migrants, in the new context, with their existential situation, can help insiders to better understand that, in a pluralistic and fragmented world, we are all, more or less, strangers: "being a stranger' is experienced, to a varying degree, by all and every member of contemporary society with its extreme division of labour and separation of functionally separated spheres" (Bauman 1991, 94). The reason for this is that our society, as far as it is fluid and without roots, makes us all live in a state of permanent uncertainty.

The impossibility of feeling at home [in] our liquid modern world in which everyone, though mostly unknowingly, shares in the condition of being in exile... Almost everything that one can say in trying to convey the exile's amorphous and vaguely threatening condition can also be said of all other men and women exposed to the new liquid modern cityscape (Bauman, 2005: 137-138).

During the decade of 1990, Bauman explored different icons of the agents who lived in the late modern world. Among them there was the refugee, although, as Magerski (2018, 10) observed, this image is not definitive:

Perhaps the time will arrive for discovering the avant-garde role of the present-day refugees – for exploring the taste of nowhereville life and the stubborn permanence of transience that may become the common habitat of the denizens of the global full planet (Bauman 2003, 148).

What refugees live, Bauman asserted, is what we all experience, in a certain sense, when we acknowledge that, in modern life, everything is uncertain. This assertion should lead the receivers, at least, to refuse the practices of individualisation and privatisation of the migrant's fate. The same extent that we suffer some conditions of uncertainty under which we must live, they cannot be blamed for having been

expelled from their homeplaces and asking for asylum.

#### 4.2. *Strangerhood and Critical Thinking*

Bauman's consideration of the exile as a positive condition for critical thinking departs from a statement of Adorno about the intellectual condition itself:

No thought is immune against communication, and to utter it in the wrong place and in wrong agreement is enough to undermine its truth. [...] For the intellectual, inviolable isolation is now the only way of showing some measure of solidarity [...] The detached observer is as much entangled as the active participant; the only advantage of the former is insight into his entanglement, and the infinitesimal freedom that lies in knowledge as such (Adorno 1974, 25-26).

In Bauman's reading, this text is inserted in a reflection about emancipation in liquid modernity, and the urgent need for critical thinking in a society fragmented for the increasing numbers of individual consumers. In this context, the Polish sociologist contended that exile is "the archetypal condition to be free from exchange [...] He is insured against the risk of producing anything of value in the local market" (Bauman 2000, 42).

The other source for this point in Bauman is a more general assertion of Castoriadis about society. The French philosopher stated that an autonomous and democratic society is the one that "questions everything that is pre-given and [...] liberates the creation of new meanings" (Castoriadis 1991, 212; translated by Bauman 2000, 212). This point makes Bauman insist that the worst problem is conformity or uncritical sense:

society is ill if it stops questioning itself; and it cannot be otherwise, considering that - whether it knows it or not - society is autonomous [...], and that suspension of self-questioning bars the awareness of autonomy while promoting the illusion of heteronomy with its unavoidably fatalistic consequences. To restart questioning means to take a long step toward the cure. If in the history of human condition discovery equals creation, if in thinking about the human condition

explanation and understanding are one - so in the efforts to improve human condition diagnosis and therapy merge (Bauman 2000, 215).

In another, not too much later writing, Castoriadis added that the Other shows that another world, or other way of life is possible. To perceive the Other as a potential danger is possible, but only in the context of egocentrism (Castoriadis 1992, 6.9).

Quoting Adorno once more, Bauman found the reason for this in the fact that the exile "lives in an environment that must remain incomprehensible to him" and because he lives in austerity, which prompts him to be more immune to self-interest (Adorno 1974, 33-34).

Bauman explored firstly this question with the analysis of the Jews before the ascent of the Nazi regime, stating that, as strangers, they are on the outside even when inside, examining the familiar as if it was a foreign object of study, asking questions no one else asked, questioning the unquestionable and challenging the unchallengeable" (Bauman 1989, 53). Doing so, he asserted that the Jews "epitomised the awesome scope of social upheaval and served as a vivid obtrusive reminder of the erosion of old certainties" (Bauman 1989, 45).

Questioning the unquestionable and eroding the old certainties, in search for new meanings, is the essence of that critical thinking which Bauman considered so urgent to the consumer society. From this he concluded, therefore, that living and thinking in exile not only implies a condition of insecurity (Bauman 1996, 321); it also is a condition for thinking: "it is in exile that the thinking [about a] person's detachment, his habitual way of life, acquires survival value" (Bauman 2000, 43).

To Adorno and Arendt's texts, the image of the exile intellectual who provides critical sense and enlightenment to the society in which he lives, can be enriched with other examples, such as Wittgenstein, Derrida in the field of philosophy, but also many writers from Ovid and Virgil, passing through Dante, to Kundera or Solzhenitsyn. From those examples, Bauman concluded "there must have been something in their out-of-placedness which added fertility to places in which they settled out without being

rooted" (Bauman 1997b, 157). In this sense, their story repeats that of other exiles, Jews, who were in the advance guard of the European culture, as illustrated in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991).

According to Marotta (2002, 47), the position of the Jews loses its significance in a postmodern and globalised world, where difference is accepted as intrinsic to the human condition itself. Jewishness, according to another statement of Bauman, can be interpreted as an existential (therefore, universal) condition, which anticipates what the current societies were to be forced to accept: "they lost their distinctiveness – but only because the state of 'being distinct' has turned into the only truly universal mark of the human condition" (Bauman 1991, 159).

Long before the finding of the metaphor of liquidity as a descriptor of the current situation, Bauman had observed that the present phase of modernity has as main characteristic the "being on the move", which he also expressed as living in a world of migration.

We live today in a nomadic world, in the universe of migration – of commodities and, increasingly, of people. Variegated provenance of inanimate constituents of life-worlds, as well as of a growing fraction of newcomers {of varying degree of strangeness} among the human ones, brings into relief the nomadic character of life itself; its territorial uprootedness and weakened dependence on hereditary determinants (Bauman 1992, 693).

The election of the term "nomad" represents a symbolic figure for identity, in contrast with the metaphor of the "pilgrim". The core of the symbol lies in the fact both figures are on the move, and this movement stands for the process of building one's identity. The radical difference, instead, is to be found in the fact that pilgrims know where their destiny is; nomads, instead, have just a momentary identity, valid for the present moment, but they are uncertain about their identity in the future (Bauman 1992, 694).

Indeed, for him, to be an exile had, by definition, the characteristic of looking for a space for one's own, actually independent from the physical space. In Bauman's words:

What is rooted in all exile, particularly the literary or artistic exile (an exile which articulates itself in words or images, which constitutes itself into a communicable experience of exile), is the controversial, ambivalent desire to integrate/not integrate; the desire to stand out from the physical space, to conjure up a place of one's own, unlike the place of those around, unlike the place left behind and unlike the place of arrival. Exile is defined not in relation to any particular physical space or opposition between several physical spaces, but through autonomy toward space as such (Bauman 1997b, 158).

This aspect of Bauman's thought with its emphasis on intellectuals as exiles and their impact on culture, can seem somehow intellectualistic. In this respect, it is important to note that Bauman's interest was directed toward all the outcasts of the global and consumer society, including asylum seekers, economic migrants and refugees (Bauman 2004, 51).

Intellectuals are just the advance guard of what Bauman observed as a condition of any migrants, even an universal condition. In this assumption we can perceive, possibly, a part of the amalgamation between biography and sociology characteristic of Bauman's hermeneutics: he was immersed in the experience he was writing about.

## 5. A New Starting Point: responsibility to the Other, solidarity

Bauman's diagnoses about liquid modernity intended, in all cases, to make people consider that another world is possible. In particular, he aspired to inspire people's efforts to build a world of emancipation for all. And the point of departure for the construction of such a world is the innate sense of responsibility for the Other in need or suffering. In fact, Bauman's work can be read as an attempt to recognise suffering and to awaken our moral sense, which means to feel responsible to alleviate it or to make it disappear, whenever it is possible (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008, 16).

Drawing from Levinas' morality, Bauman asserted that "a human relationship is moral in so far as it stems from the feeling of responsibility for the welfare and well-being of

the other person” (Bauman 1990, 69). The vulnerability of the other person becomes a command, a moral imperative, from which follow two conditions for a relationship to be moral: first, it is totally disinterested and unconditional; second, it is inalienable and non-transferable. Both conditions contradict the logic of self-interest and self-satisfaction promoted by the logic of the market forces and individualisation (Bauman 1990, 69).

When applied to the case of strangers, whether migrants or refugees alike, one can argue that the situation of those people is itself a command to the conscience. In contrast with the problem, seen above, of the recognition of the rights of those people, it must depend on the person who is in need, clamouring for their rights or suffering in silence. In this sense, it can be said that “the chance of human togetherness depends on the rights of the stranger, not on the question who – the state or the tribe- is entitled to decide who the strangers are” (Bauman 1997a, 33).

As the substance of morality, the principle of the responsibility to the Other contrasts the ill tendencies of liquid modernity toward those groups labelled as “underclass”, including the refugees and migrants. Against the individualisation and criminalisation of deprivation, the ethical drive is “the impulse of responsibility for the integrity and well-being of other people who are weak, unfortunate and suffering” (Bauman 1998b, 82). Against the practices of stereotyping and prejudice, with their exclusion from the universe of morality, Bauman proposed the responsibility as “crucially relevant to the moral sentiments and concerns owed to human beings as well as the self-esteem of the human community” (Bauman 1998b, 83). It involves taking a stand in favour of those who suffer most, giving primacy to the mandate of their vulnerability over the consideration of their economic, political or social usefulness.

The responsibility for the Other is a moral imperative, but it does not come for itself. It is a matter of election. The election is between self-interest or disinterested help, which is the essence of the moral duty. They point in opposite directions (Bauman, 1990, 131). On the other side, it is always possible to escape, to evade, such a moral imperative, substituting it for the

rationale of utility. The quandary remains always open to us (Bauman, 1990, 141). But the choice of moral responsibility is an exercise of freedom and emancipation from the pressures of the establishment; in this case, of the market forces. It is what makes life, in the last instance, more human.

By itself, moral responsibility concerns what Levinas call “the moral party of two”, the encounter face to face. In this primary encounter, what counts is “the bare essentiality of our common humanity” (Bauman 1993, 46), all the other differences disappearing.

With the manifestation of the third, there appears also the social dimension of responsibility. This is, according to Bauman, solidarity. By this term, he defined “the recognition of other people’s misery and sufferings as one’s own responsibility, and the alleviation and eventually the removal of misery as one’s own task” (Bauman 1997a, 63).

This new relationship with the Other in need, with the stranger, implies again the adoption of a new stance, which includes a disposition to share a common destiny for the humanity:

My link with the stranger is revealed as responsibility, not just indifferent neutrality or even cognitive acceptance of the similarity of condition (and certainly not through the disdainful version of tolerance: ‘It serves him well to be like that, and let him be, though I cannot imagine to be such myself’). It is revealed, in other words, as commonality of destiny, not mere resemblance of fate. Shared fate would do with mutual tolerance; joint destiny requires solidarity (Bauman 1991, 236).

Regarding solidarity as this disposition to understand and to share, seeking a common destiny, Bauman made two caveats, in order to avoid confusion of solidarity with other forms of interaction. First, solidarity is not affinity. Affinity among individuals or groups refers to “liens they have not chosen and are not at liberty to trade off”: it is a way of union based in fate, dispersed and therefore, precarious when one tries to translate it into action (Bauman, 1992, 685-686). In this sense, by itself, the situation of the outcasts, including migrants and mainly refugees, is one of affinity, because they are

dispersed, and they lack either the means or the strength to build solidarity from it (Bauman 1999, 53-54).

Second, there exists also a sort of consumerist-like form of pseudo-solidarity, much in the style of the “sensation seeker” who is the consumer. Borrowing an expression from Kapuściński (1997, 146-147), Bauman called it a “carnival-like solidarity”, referring to sporadic and short-lived movements of compassion toward those who suffer. Sometimes, they are promoted by the media, when showing like a spectacle the deprivation of others or the catastrophe. The problem with this mode of aid is that, once their momentum is over, they revert again to indifference (Bauman 1999, 192). As a consequence, they make more bearable the moral indifference toward the poor and, in the end, justify an “ethical exile” (the fact of not been taken into account) of the excluded (Bauman 1998b, 84).

Bauman’s writings, as usual, make us reflect upon the problems of our society, and make his readers more conscious of the relevance and immorality of suffering in all of its forms, also in the form of exile, refuge or migration. Doing this, he awakens our critical sense, emphasising, echoing in a certain sense Adorno, that “there can be hardly be any beauty without solidarity with the humiliated”. But he did not advance solutions to the problem.

Referring to his last work, as a sort of testament, we could advance that, war being one of the causes for refugees to flee from their countries, one of the solutions could be a commitment by the international community to end the arms trade. Most probably, this could reduce the number of displaced people. On the other side, is poverty, deprivation and lack of work – the main cause of economic migration. One could then ask if there is no possibility of investing more in the development of the countries of the south hemisphere. At last, this suggestion can be found in Bauman’s last work, *Retrotopia* (2017).

In any case, a morally responsible and caring response can only be found in the context of overcoming the individualistic and self-centred consumer impulse. It is a task that requires the revitalisation of the modern citizen, predating

the emergence of the individual in modernity, who is characterised by a concern for the common good. The tract of the citizen is their responsibility for the public sphere and their right to interfere in the making of laws (Bauman 1999, 166). The requirement for this is to reverse the definition of individuals mainly as consumers.

The task of this intervention and claim for the rights of the migrants must be carried out in the context of a renewed agora. With this, Bauman pointed to a space which is an intermediate sphere, between the public and the private, where the citizens can define together and autonomously the meaning of the common good, taking into account private concerns (Bauman 1999, 87).

From Bauman’s writings about strangerhood, in general terms, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the issues related to the outcasts of modernity and postmodernity should be a matter of political open dialogue. The environment for such a dialogue is a new republic of free and participative citizens in which concepts of responsibility toward the Other and solidarity prevail (Marotta 2002, 52). Exiles and migrants make up a significant part of this group of vulnerable Others.

## 6. Conclusion

In the context of contemporary sociology, Bauman's work is characterised by a particular intertwining of theory and everyday life. He emphasised the interpreter's involvement in the social events he experiences.

This intertwining becomes especially significant with regard to Bauman's treatment of the theme of migration or exile in his work. His biography, in this respect, is peculiar in that he had twice undergone the experience of exile. Although he maintained great reserve with regard to personal narrative, this fact enhances the authority of his voice when he reflects on the suffering of migrants.

Under the guise of acceptance of all forms of diversity, our consumerist society, with life on the move, is a source of insecurity that manifests itself in forms of rejection of newcomers. The means of establishing distance, physical or emotional, are segregation, stereotyping or

prejudice. The result is indifference to the other and to their suffering. Ultimately, this results in a loss of humanism in society through a diminished sense of morality.

Bauman's analysis opens up the possibility of recognising that migrants have something to contribute to the society that receives them. This contribution takes place on two levels. On the existential level, they are an icon of the human condition in a society that has become fragmented and shifting, where we all suffer, under certain aspects, from uncertainty and insecurity. On the cultural level, migrants bring with them the ability to question the established and, from this point of view, they can contribute elements to a society whose main problem is that it has lost its critical capacity, its ability to question itself.

In this respect, I believe that the sociologist's involvement in the society in which he lives is best seen in his attention to intellectuals. However, his interpretation is not selective, since

he sees intellectuals as a vanguard of the social group of migrants, and of society as a whole.

Finally, I tried to answer the initial question of where the response to migration begins. Bauman was suggestive, but not very prone to providing solutions. Nevertheless, his proposal was to start with the fundamental moral duty, which is responsibility, total and unconditional, toward the suffering Other. In its social aspect, it is solidarity, which treats the problems of the suffering as its own, and tries to alleviate or eradicate them. This new attitude opens the way to a recovery of the concept of the citizen who is concerned with the common good, as opposed to the individual; and to a reconstitution of an agora or public space in which the particular concerns of migrants meet the interests of society as a whole.



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