

Zygmunt Bauman: Strangers at Our Door.

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The author of the book *Strangers at Our Door*, Zygmunt Bauman, was a sociologist and philosopher who was born in Poland in 1925. He was one of the most influential and famous sociology professors in the modern age. In this book he focusses on the theme of the refugee crisis. While describing the current situation, he analyses the origins and effects of the panic surrounding it, and shows how politicians use the fear of people. The conclusion he reaches is that instead of underlining barriers we should try to build bridges and find a solution that will bring both sides closer.

The book was published in 2016, one year after the biggest migration crisis in Europe started, as a reaction to the migration flow into the continent. The book consists of six chapters without any preface or introduction. Although the chapters are self-contained rather than interconnected, there is a common line between them that maintains the main idea that the author wants to develop. For us, the strangers wishing to immigrate to Europe are like uninvited guests that have knocked at our door since the beginning of time. They tend to generate fear among the local population because they are unknown. The whole situation is a politically correct game between the opinion makers (politicians) and the submerged human mind (society and ordinary citizens). The aim of the book is to obtain an overall perception of the migration crisis, show the roots of the hate and mistrust among the people and also suggest possible solutions to the problem of reaching the desired target – cooperation and dialogue leading to a prosperous society. The 117 pages of the book resemble a large collection of citations of articles and statements from politicians. The text is readable, and because of the fact that the main ideas are repeated throughout the whole book, the reader understands well the mission and thoughts that the author wants to emphasise.

The first chapter begins with a historical approach and a description of how society in general perceives strangers. From the beginning of modern times, people escaped from wars and knocked on the doors of others seeking help. For the people behind these doors those unknown people have always been seen as “strangers”. Foreigners cause fears in the societies they travel to because they are “alien”, unpredictable and completely different from the people we meet every day. We know the people we know, and know their cultural formula, and also, we fear the fact that strangers could change our life habits. When strangers are among us, new situations and problems appear and we, as a society, are not ready for them.

Every new wave of immigrants will cause a so-called breakdown of the order (system). According to Bauman, the system is a state in which the relationship between causes and consequences is stable. That makes strangers who are not foreigners understandable and predictable and allows the people in the society to proceed well through every individual situation. With immigrants coming into this system, however, this stability is disrupted.

The policy that politicians pursue in regard to foreigners is one of segregating and maintaining a distance (this is beneficial to the politicians) rather than building so-called bridges between cultures and opportunities for better communication. This leads to mutual distrust, alienation and harassment between the locals and the foreigners. This double-sided indifference does not lead to a successful solution to the problem. The chapter concludes with some words from Pope Franz delivered in 2013: “*today’s society lives in a culture of well-being that forces us to think only of ourselves, and thus, we*

become indifferent to others" (24). Bauman says this leads to a so-called globalisation of indifference.

The second chapter shows that a declaration of a state of emergency allows police to enter flats and houses without a court order, dissolve demonstrations and gatherings, and also declare a curfew, as is evident from the example of France. Such situations help the government to maintain the image of an actor that will keep its promises and protect its citizens. However, according to the author, this is not about lightening the concerns of its citizens, but rather the opposite. Politicians play cards when people feel insecure. The well-known statement from the Hungarian prime minister that "all terrorists are migrants" is an exact proof of how his government is abusing the migration crisis to effectively fight for survival. Political statements of this sort are well thought out. Politicians are aware that in order to make their statements more attractive, they have to lose logic. The author also states that identifying a "migration problem" with a security problem actually helps various terrorist groups to reach their targets.

The author talks about the three possible impacts of stigmatisation of people who try to integrate into the new society. The first is the painful strike of a stigmatised man who undergoes suffering and humiliation, which leads to his self-concealment and self-denial. The second reaction is that the stigmatised person perceives their stigmatisation as something that is undeserved, painful and insulting, and therefore requiring revenge. This revenge can force the society to renounce its original verdict, and the stigmatised person can thus get back his or her stolen self-esteem. The third reaction that may occur is a mixed one. A person can be cut off from the majority society by his or her alienation and protected by his or her own imagination, and at the same time perceive him- or herself as a full-fledged human being when it is just the others who appear to be inhuman.

This chapter also highlights the ideas of Pierre Baussand and Jean-Claude Juncker, who say that social exclusion is the main cause of the radicalisation of young Muslims in the European Union. Those who organise and commit terrorist attacks are the same people that the refugees were previously escaping from. Bauman argues that in order to eradicate radicalisation, the West should use its greatest weapons against terrorism, which include social investment, social inclusion and integration.

The third chapter deals with the government of strong men and women, and highlights the idea that the governments of the democratic countries are governments of a firm hand. The chapter also deals with the relationship between the average citizen and the government, which has a real impact on people's preferences regarding public policy. Certain questions are relevant to this: To what extent is a citizen interested in political issues? Does the citizen see a certain situation as threatening? Does the citizen expect that politicians will protect him/her from the chaos of this situation? The author concludes the chapter with the idea that "*the unforgivable [sin of] democracy in the eyes of the growing number of its alleged benefactors is its inability to meet what is expected of it and the subsequent excuses that there is no other option, which means that the government 'cannot do anything else'*" (53).

The fourth chapter addresses the issue of migration in terms of history. As they say, from the historical point of view, on a regular day, our ancestors met only with the people they knew. This was how culture and the world were shaped. The situation has changed in recent years. There is only one way that leads to mutual well-being and cooperation. The second option that occurs, leads to collective extinction. We still do not realise that the choice between survival and extinction depends only on our decisions regarding how we can live side by side with other people, how much solidarity we have with others, and how much we want to cooperate with foreigners who do not share our opinions.

The next chapter begins with some criticism of Viktor Orbán and his attitude towards migrants. According to George Konrad, his strict policy leads him to be illiberal towards his country's citizens, but at the same time he is also incompetent and non-liberal in

relation to the people who are looking for salvation in his country. This leads many people to have the following view: Orbán being non-liberal towards his own nation is not correct, but his being non-liberal towards others is right.

The last chapter deals with the different views of anthropologists regarding the problem of immigration and also tries to discover the roots of the hatred directed toward immigrants. It first explains Plato's thoughts on this issue. Then it moves to the ideas of Arendt and Kant, who believed that moral consciousness, the ability to distinguish good from bad, is inherent to all people because everyone is able to think rationally. What is the main difference between thinking and acting? If I think, I am my own "self," but when one begins to act, this individual is a member of "public" society (this means that this person is one of many). Meanwhile the order of logical / empirical reasoning is reversed when it is not the task of evidence to prove the truthfulness of knowledge, but it is rather the task of evidence to prove that the knowledge is in accordance with a certain faith. Also, the most common viral moments are those that come out of the subconscious, while hate, fear of others, and rage come out of the unconscious.

Finally, Bauman states that the essence of Gadamer's philosophy is that in creating a common framework, or horizon, the essential element is conversation. This involves an exchange of views between different dialogues. We should thus try to agree on the solutions despite our different dialogues. Conversation and understanding require a consensus that all understandings involve something like a common language, although it is a common language that is created only during the process of understanding itself.

On the last page, Bauman quotes Appiah when arguing that we should focus on the conversation model in regard to the migration problem – and especially on conversations between people who lead different ways of life as the world is becoming more populous: *"In the next half of the century, the population will reach nine billion. Depending on the circumstances, cross-border conversations may be uplifting, perhaps painful: in any case, they will be inevitable"* (86).

To sum it up, as Bauman says, whether we like it or not, the migration crisis and the current state of the world will bring opportunities that we will have to react to, and we will have to choose between the options that might occur depending on our behaviour. Bauman's book is intended for the general public. It describes what is happening against the background of the migration crisis, how the whole image of this phenomenon is being created and what influences the media's coverage of the issue and creates the opinion on migration of the whole society, which is mainly characterised by mistrust and fear of the people coming into our territory. In my personal opinion I find the book quite optimistic. It leads us to think about the causes and consequences of rejection and closed-mindedness. We have to be aware of the possible structural changes that immigration will bring and try to focus on its positive outcomes, and not see only the negative aspects.

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