

## Artur Domosławski

Excerpts from two non-fiction texts:

### I. From *Wykluczeni* (The Outcasts)

#### **Pink crosses in a vale of tears** *Ciudad Juárez – Mexico, 2000-2015*

Femicide is committed by someone who deprives a female of her life purely because she is female.

The source of the word “femicide” is a wave of mysterious murders committed for many years in the state of Chihuahua in northern Mexico, to be precise in the border town of Ciudad Juárez. The word was coined by academics researching this phenomenon. In time, this specialized, rather odd sounding word went into general usage. And later on into the penal code.

Depriving a female of her life is defined as femicide if at least one of the following circumstances applies:

- There is evidence of sexual violence on the victim’s body.
- The victim’s body has been injured in a humiliating way, whether the injuries were inflicted before or after death.
- There has been an act of necrophilia.
- The perpetrator has previously committed acts of violence at home, at the workplace or school.
- The victim and perpetrator were in a relationship based on love or trust.
- There is known information about previous threats, harassment or injuries inflicted on the victim by the perpetrator.
- Before being deprived of her life the victim had ever been deprived by the perpetrator of the opportunity to communicate with the outside world.
- The victim’s body was put on public display.

The crime of femicide is punishable with a 40-60 year jail sentence.

So says the Mexican national penal code, and most of the state codices too. One of the few exceptions is the code for the state of Chihuahua, where the local criminal law does not recognize femicide as a separate category of crime.

Giving the crime a name did not cause it to disappear. Women still disappear without trace in Ciudad Juárez, and their mutilated, dismembered bodies are quite often found in public places or in mass graves.

### **Lupita goes missing**

Lupita Perez, aged seventeen, a student at High School No. 3, was happy to look after her nephew when her older sister had to go shopping. On 31 January 2009 her sister was in hospital, and Lupita had her school winter holidays, in other words a lot of free time. Their mother, Susana Montes, went to the hospital to see how her oldest daughter was doing, while Lupita and her younger sisters stayed at home with their little nephew.

The house, or rather cottage, is located in the Guadalajara Izquierda district of Ciudad Juárez – one of the many sources of cheap labour for the local *maquiladoras* – electrical equipment assembly plants, clothing factories and plants for a few other industries. To get here you drive along a sandy road, while your car sends up clouds of dust that get into your eyes and mouth. It’s a slum, with no development plan, just hills and dales, and desert plants. There are hens in a small

enclosure, and dogs barking next to it. Chaos and noise. Inside the cottage is neat but cramped: the kitchen, dining and sitting area are all one space. On the walls there are holy pictures, of Jesus, and the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe.

At noon somebody called Lupita. She went outside, walked around in circles for ages, then sat down, and despite the January cold weather she didn't move for ages. At about one o'clock she put on warmer clothing, told her sisters "I'm going out", and set off for the bus stop.

At half past four, when Señora Montes came home and found Lupita gone, she felt worried, mainly because it was due to get dark soon. A seventeen-year-old girl wandering about Juárez after dark, especially in districts like Guadalajara Izquierda, at the height of the drug wars, was never safe. Señora Montes' anxiety increased when despite repeated efforts she failed to get through to her daughter by phone. Lupita wasn't answering. She wasn't at her best friend's place either. Or at her boyfriend's. Señora Montes and her husband set off towards the city centre. There was no plan or logic involved, but parents who are afraid of something happening to their daughter don't sit at home doing nothing.

It was night by the time they went to the police station to report Lupita's disappearance.

"She's probably with a boy, there's nothing to get upset about," the duty officer told them. The police can only start a search forty-eight hours after someone goes missing.

Over the next few days friends and acquaintances joined in with the search for Lupita. Messages and requests for any information about the missing girl appeared on local television. Señora Montes posted photographs of her daughter in town; her disappearance was also reported on the other side of the border at the police station in El Paso, just in case the girl had fallen victim to human traffickers, which happens here on a major scale.

Busy with the fight against the drug cartels (or busy protecting them, depending which policeman and which police station was concerned), the investigators advised Señora Montes to carry out her own search in the local night clubs. This advice implied that Lupita must have been kidnapped for work in a brothel. At one of the bars Señora Montes and her husband realized that many of the sex workers were like their daughter in appearance – slim, not very tall, with straight, dark hair and dark eyes. They got a similar impression when they looked at the girls accosting customers on the streets in the city centre. They noticed that they were being discreetly supervised by pimps sitting in cars.

But Lupita wasn't among them.

Some time later, Señora Montes and her husband came upon what later turned out to be the only piece of evidence, foggy and circumstantial. Lupita's girlfriend admitted that a mutual friend of theirs had seen her in the city centre. Apparently she was walking along with an older man with grey hair who looked like a gringo. The friend had called out: "Lupita!", and when the girl turned round, the man had elbowed her in the side and gripped her arm. She hadn't managed to shout a reply. The boy repeated this story to Señora Montes and to the police investigators.

Three years later when a villager found a grave containing the remains of twenty-six women, Señora Montes had no sinister forebodings, no pangs of heartache, and no prophetic dreams, and none of the vases in her house had cracked. She believed her daughter had been kidnapped, and she was living on the hope that sooner or later the girl would be found. She still refused to believe it a few months later when DNA tests proved that the remains of one of the women found in the grave were Lupita's. She asked specialists from Argentina to do the tests again. They confirmed that Lupita really was dead.

### **The macho's injured pride**

When did it all start? There's no precise date. We know when they started to count the women who were being murdered in a brutal, elaborate and perverted manner. It was in January 1993, when on a piece of waste ground adjoining the Las Flores district in Ciudad Juárez the local kids found the

dead body of a girl their own age. She had haematomas on her arms and legs and in one eye. Her name was Esperanza Gómez. She was dressed in a white top and a yellow knee-length skirt. She was thirteen. Before death she had been raped vaginally and anally. She had died of strangulation.

This method of inflicting suffering was repeated on a series of women. Before or just after being killed they were raped. They were almost always subjected to brutal tortures. Their bodies were mutilated, as if the killers were performing an act of personal revenge with unrestrained malice. In one of the mass graves the women's bodies had rhombus-shaped cuts, as if the murders had been carried out by a fraternity, with the cuts as a sort of signature. The meaning of this sign has never been explained, though it prompted the most extraordinary speculation – about a secret sect, a gang of perverts, or Satanists.

The women's disfigured corpses were dumped in public places, on the edge of town or in the desert – just as rubbish is thrown out. The term *como una basura* – “like a piece of trash” – comes up in many conversations. The bodies of men killed in mafia score-settling, if not hung as an example from bridges or lamp posts to broadcast the horrific news to a rival cartel, are usually covered by their killers, using rags of some kind, a sheet of plastic or cardboard. It could be said that the killers show a peculiar form of respect to their victim's body, appropriate to the act that ends a human life. The women's mutilated corpses are not granted this privilege. (“The manner of killing says a lot about the sort of society we are,” I will later be told by Julia Monarrez from El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, regarded here as the leading expert on incidences of femicide.)

Dozens, if not hundreds of academic papers have been written about the femicides committed in Ciudad Juárez, mostly in Mexico and the United States, as well as feature articles and novels, but the temptation to describe this phenomenon yet again, in a slightly different way, including some under-explored thread or some of the new information that surfaces each year, keeps attracting author after author. Perhaps it's the difficulty of encapsulating what's at the heart of this horror story, its enigmatic side, the endless amazement that something like this is at all possible, that still remains a challenge for researchers, reporters, writers and film-makers.

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The tragedy of the women of Juárez has its roots in the 1970s, when the *maquiladoras* started to flourish – the electrical equipment assembly plants and clothing factories. Foreign firms opened their plants here, attracted by the cheap labour. The inexpensively assembled equipment and clothes sewn for pennies are sold at relatively high prices only a kilometre or two north of here – across the US border, in El Paso and beyond. Compared with the salaries in their large neighbour, the pay at the factories of Ciudad Juárez is much lower, but for the penniless migrants from all over Mexico who came here and still keep coming to earn a crust, they're enough to make a modest living.

So men were drawn to the border town, and so were single women, often with children – abandoned by their husbands or fiancés, or running away from domestic abusers, drunks or life's castaways. Desperate women from indigent areas who had left their homes and husbands prompted no applause in Mexican society, neither among the poor nor the well-off. And not in Ciudad Juárez either, yet the stigmatization of women who risked taking their fate into their own hands was far less acute here. Since the early twentieth century the city had been a place of carousing and debauchery for American soldiers. In the days of the prohibition Al Capone used to come here to have fun and to confer with his Mexican associates. Upper-class men used to fly in from the capital to visit the brothels of Ciudad Juárez because – according to local legend – the local girls knew bedroom tricks that weren't to be found anywhere else. The influence of the liberal, individualist culture of their neighbours across the border also played its part, especially in the 1960s. The women who chose to shape their own fate took matters into their own small hands.

Those small hands are not a literary metaphor. At first, the assembly plants were just as willing to employ men as women, but quite soon the employers realized that the women's smaller hands and thinner, nimbler fingers were a better tool for assembling electrical equipment than the

men's big strong hands. Besides which the women were easier to control and easier to manage. They're weaker – and in keeping with time-honoured discrimination – you can pay them less.

And so the men who had come to Juárez in search of work began losing it to the female competition. Yet again in their lives, the castaways from other regions of the country suddenly became castaways in a new place that was supposed to change their fortune. This was the first time that their macho pride was wounded.

How it was wounded for the second time I was told by Juan Carlos Martinez, an invaluable guide who has lived in Juárez for almost a quarter of a century. ("I too grew up in a macho culture," he says. "I was trained out of it by Cristina, my wife and partner in social work.") He tells me that the women who came to the city soon freed themselves of dependence on men. They made their own living, and any woman who formed a permanent or temporary relationship didn't have to wait for his lordship the macho man to condescend to allocate her a few hundred pesos for the shopping, a new dress or shoes. They had their own money, which they had earned. Servility towards a husband or a lover passed into history. On Friday evenings, when they went out to the bars to have fun, they put on mini-skirts and picked up guys, just as the guys used to pick up girls. They swore and sneered at the ones they didn't fancy. They paid for their own drinks and chose who to dance with and who to refuse. After the dancing they were the ones who decided if they were going to let themselves be taken home, and whether or not they'd be staying for breakfast. Nowadays it's the norm, but thirty years ago it was a revolution. You simply didn't refuse a guy... So not only had the men lost their jobs because of the women, not only did the girls have money – sometimes more than they did – they had also awarded themselves the right to make fun of the losers.

The local women to whom I've spoken – including high-school head teacher Armide Valverde and psychotherapist Gabriela Reyes – claim that the nature of the femicides and their social context have an obvious connection with a crisis of virility. This crisis was prompted by the drastic limitation of male power and domination. In fact, the boss at the assembly plant has to be obeyed like the Lord God, and the working conditions are an affront to one's dignity, but ultimately it's the boss who signs the pay slips, and a salary she has earned for herself gives a woman independence from men at home, in the street and in the bar. The women of Juárez had ceased to be meek in their intimate relationships. Their liberation led to a collapse of the macho model of relations between the sexes.

The reaction of the macho men was a lack of belief in themselves, a sense of degradation. They soon found scapegoats on whom to take out their frustration and grievances, both real and imaginary – the women. That was why the bodies of the victims were always mutilated, dismembered, or raped before death and after. And finally tossed away like trash.

Armine Arjona, a doctor and visual artist who is well-known in this city, and whom I visit whenever I come to Juárez, spreads out the collages and drawings she has been sketching for years to the rhythm of the city's successive tragedies. Exploitation at the assembly plants, femicides, drug wars. Rather than works of art, these are more of an intelligent visual commentary on events. A globe pierced from north to south by a large phallus. A woman's body deprived of its limbs, its neck twisted into a pink cross – the symbol of the women killed in Ciudad Juárez. Another victim, whose outspread arms are changing into the arms of a cross; her mouth is gagged, there's terror in her eyes and her chest has been mutilated.

Armine believes the marks the killers leave behind speak of their sense of strength and their desire for domination. And they say very little, usually nothing at all about sexual pleasure.

Perhaps the liberation of the women of Juárez and the men's frustration would not have led to such tragic consequences if not for another circumstance, which caused the bomb to explode. The city is on the drugs trail: marihuana, heroin and cocaine pass through it to the United States. Violence and brutality are an irrevocable part of the world of the drugs cartels. In places where the cartels have put down their roots for longer – and Juárez is one of them – their violence casts its

shadow over all interpersonal relations. The drugs world is not populated by outsiders who live separately from the rest, but by husbands, lovers, brothers, brothers-in-law, friends and neighbours. If working in the drugs trade involves extreme tension, if total domination is the rule within it, if problems at work are solved by brutal violence, it's impossible to drop it just like that at the end of the working day. Especially when the working day never really ends.

Not knowing what to do next in life, many of the men who were dismissed from the assembly plants joined the cartels instead. They became hired guns, dealers, smugglers, guards or moles. Equipped with strength and power, they could take out their humiliation on the women who had caused it – or so they imagined.

The most shocking hypothesis to explain the reasons for femicide was formed in the last few years. The killers, who are sometimes the sons of single mothers who worked at the assembly plants, are taking revenge for years of maltreatment in their childhood. They blame their mothers for abandonment and neglect, but they carry out their acts of vengeance on other women. Their mothers worked as semi-slaves for twelve hours a day, leaving the house before dawn and coming back after nightfall. The sons – with no fathers – spent their childhood alone, on the streets, with nobody's warmth and care. Nowadays many of the soldiers of the cartels killed in the drug wars of the years 2008-2012 – men aged from twenty-five to thirty-five – are referred to as "children of the assembly plants". It's extremely likely that most of the woman-killers come from among them.

The refrain I hear in many of my conversations is that the city of assembly plants, where tens of thousands of women work within a relatively small area, makes them easily accessible, and creates the opportunity to pick and choose. This one today, that one tomorrow. The employers don't stand up for the murder victims, because tomorrow they'll simply employ the next ones in their place. Nor do the families, because they usually live far away, in another region, and they don't always know where their sister or daughter has gone.

The assembly plant city has created a culture where the life of an easily "replaceable" woman, poor and with no social background, isn't worth much.

### Flowers of the desert

At Campo Algodonero (the cotton field), site of one of the women's mass graves, there is now a special memorial site. Inside a heavy metal gateway they've erected not exactly crosses, but what might be described as thick bars suggesting the shape of crosses, and they've painted the gate a symbolic pink colour. At the memorial site there's as much noise as by a motorway – some busy multi-lane roads intersect right next to it. In 2001, when the murdered women's mass grave was found here, this spot was in the middle of a wasteland. Somewhere I read that an association of owners of *maquiladoras* had its headquarters near here, but I wasn't able to confirm this piece of information.

At the entrance to the memorial site there's a plaque with the names of the eight victims found here:

Claudia Ivette González  
Esmeralda Herrera Monreal  
Laura Berenice Ramos Monarrez  
Maria de los Ángeles Acosta Ramírez  
María Rocina Galicia  
Merlín Elizabeth Rodríguez Sáenz  
Mayra Juliana Reyes Solís  
Unidentified

The slogans carved on the marble plaque say:

¡Por la vida y la libertad de las mujeres! (For women's life and freedom!)

¡Ni una desaparecida más! (Not another “disappeared” woman!)

¡Ni una asesinada más! (Not another murdered woman!)

On the other side of the path, behind a pane of glass there are dozens of photographs – portraits of the victims. The earliest one is of Maria Elena Garcia Salas, who went missing without trace on 5 December 1995; she was sixteen, though the picture must have been much older, because she looks about twelve in it.

In the middle of the memorial site there’s a monument entitled – literally – “Flower of sand”, but a better translation would be “Flower of the desert” (Ciudad Juárez is in the desert). The monument represents a woman growing out of a wild flower, while also being an integral part of the flower. The city that kills women, as Juárez has often been described, has paid tribute to its victims. But not out of good will or voluntarily – not in the least. The Mexican state was ordered to put up the monument by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in an unprecedented ruling that I’ll write about later on.

In and around the city there are five sites like this one, where the corpses of several women were found. These sites tell the story of the last quarter century in Ciudad Juárez – the history of the femicides:

Lote Bravo and the nearby highways towards the suburb of Casas Grandes. In 1995 the mutilated bodies of twelve women were discovered here.

Lomas de Poleo. An indigent suburb of the most godforsaken kind, a source of workers for the assembly plants. Primitive cabins made of breeze blocks, the poorest ones made of wooden boards, planks and plywood, covered with straw. In winter an icy, desert wind roars through here, and in summer it’s almost too hot to bear. From here and from Anapra, the neighbouring suburb, most of the victims were kidnapped and murdered in the first few years of the serial femicides. In 1996 the corpses of eight of them were discovered here. The site of the crime is marked with pink crosses.

Campo Algodonero, 2001 – eight victims, now a memorial site.

Cristo Negro hill, 2003 – seven corpses.

Arroyo del Navajo, 2011 – the remains of twenty-six victims.

These specific graves do not say much about the scale of the crimes committed in Ciudad Juárez. Twelve, eight, eight, seven, twenty-six. Since the number of victims began to be counted in January 1993 – when the thugs abused and strangled Esperanza Gómez – up to November 2015, when I wrote this chapter, 1575 women were murdered in Ciudad Juárez. That’s an annual average of sixty-eight.

### **Subterfuge**

The women from Juárez die because killing women is allowed to happen here. It’s not that the law allows it – of course it doesn’t. But a woman-killer isn’t taking much of a risk, and if he has connections, there’s no risk at all. In 2009 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a verdict in which it subjected the Mexican authorities to crushing criticism for mistakes in conducting inquiries and for failure to protect witnesses. It was the first time an institution of this rank had confirmed that the women are killed purely because they are women.

The Court issued its ruling after the grotesque trial of two bus drivers who were accused – though in fact innocent – of killing the eight women found in 2001 at Campo Algodonero. These men confessed their guilt after being tortured, and were convicted. One of them died in prison, but the other was released after three years and pardoned, yet he refused to demand justice or compensation. He was aware that demanding justice could land him in a new hell that he wouldn’t survive. During his original trial his lawyer, Mario Escobeda, was shot dead, when probably a step away from unmasking some subterfuge.

The investigations into cases of femicide have been conducted in a similar way from the very start. In 1995 an Egyptian called Abdel Latif Sharif was arrested, who had already served time in the United States for rape. The investigators from Juárez connected him with the murders of seven women and had him sentenced to sixty years in prison. Sharif died in 2006, while serving the sentence for crimes he did not commit. During the trial it turned out among other things that one of his alleged victims was alive. Members of a youth gang called Los Rebeldes (“The Rebels”) were forced under torture to confess that Sharif had commissioned them to kill the women. Sharif’s lawyer was intimidated and an attempt was made on the life of his son, who only survived by a miracle.

During Sharif’s trial and his subsequent prison sentence women went on being killed in Juárez just as before. Of all the people whom I have met who’ve been researching or taking an interest in femicides for years, not one of them believes in the Egyptian’s guilt. But they’re all convinced that people from the criminal world, meaning the cartels and gangs, and people in authority, meaning members of the police, the military, or the city’s business and political elite are equally mixed up in the femicides.

Despite all the reports about women being killed, not many investigations have actually been conducted. The victims’ relatives have been given false information about the circumstances of their daughter’s, sister’s or girlfriend’s deaths. The investigating officers have lied about marks on their bodies, which the relatives could see for themselves. Many femicides have been treated by the police and the legal system as accidents or as crimes of passion – motivated by emotion, in which case the sentences are almost always low. As often happens in these situations, the police have come up with brilliant excuses, such as: “She was wearing a mini skirt, she was asking for it”. Or: “She was carrying on with lowlifes and got what was coming to her”.

Police reluctance to conduct investigations into the cases of the murdered women was caused by various factors. Sometimes it was to do with being macho, sometimes it was laziness: either way, the police didn’t want to bother with the murders of women, especially women from the poorest outskirts of town. But very often they were covering up for someone, or were themselves implicated in the crimes.

The drugs war eclipsed the femicides, even though about a thousand women were killed in the course of the five-year conflict, which is twice as many as in the previous fifteen years. During this period, however, five or six corpses were found in the streets each day – the victims of score-settling between cartels and clashes between the mafia and the forces of law and order.

Horror prompted by the killing of women returned one day in autumn 2011, when in the nearby village of Arroyo del Navajo, an hour’s drive from the city, a local man called Hector Garcia Treviso found a grave containing the corpses of twenty-six women, one of whom was Susana Montes’ seventeen-year-old daughter, Lupita.

(2) Four extracts from *Wygnaniec. 21 scen z życia Zygmunta Baumana*

### THE EXILE. 21 SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

pp. 27-29

#### A Jewish boy on the ghetto bench

This scene takes place on September 1, 1938.

Wearing a Gymnasium cap, thirteen-year-old Zygmunt enters the classroom at his new school. Suddenly he's submerged in an avalanche of punches and kicks. Pushed and hit, he loses balance. His attackers drag him to a bench in the back row on the left-hand side and instruct him: "Here is your place, Jew! And don't you dare look elsewhere!"

He's shocked. The pride he had felt at joining the elite company of Gymnasium students, the future intelligentsia, vanishes for the time being. Minutes later, from the tangle of bodies four more boys are pushed onto the benches in the back row. They are pale, choking back tears. They cast furtive glances at one another. The din only stops when the teacher enters the classroom.

Anti-Semitic insults are nothing new to Zygmunt. The novelty that day is something else: for the first time he is not alone in that situation.

In the Poznań district of Jeżyce, where he lives with his parents and sister, he is the only Jewish boy, at least in the immediate neighborhood, and as a result he is the favorite target for the taunts of other boys of his age. On his first day as a student at the Berger Gymnasium in Poznań he is one of five to be "singled out". Three of the five are repeating the first year, which means that in this grade, apart from Zygmunt, just one other Jewish student has been admitted to the school. The Gymnasium is the only one in the city where Jewish Poles, or if you prefer, Polish Jews have the opportunity to study. At all the others the *numerus nullus* rule is in force: no Jews at all.

Zygmunt came close to losing this opportunity too. After passing his written exams in Polish and mathematics with flying colors, he almost came to grief in the oral exam. He was overcome by nerves, trembling from head to foot. He sat down on the bench facing the teacher conducting the exam. And then there was a surprise—the examiner did not ask him to talk about a major historical event, or to analyze a work of Polish literature, but told him to "describe your daily way to school". Despite the simplicity of the question, or maybe because of it, Zygmunt was dumbfounded. His observations and experiences flatly refused to form any kind of coherent answer.

"I live in a corner-street house..." he managed to stammer, though he meant to say something completely different: that he lived in a corner house.

"I saw with horror a smile crawling over my tormentor's face," he will note several decades later in a memoir written for his daughters. "He was clearly relieved - 'it was easy to get rid of this one'."

Zygmunt was saved by the Gymnasium director, who was listening to the exams from a podium, while looking at the candidates' written work.

"Excuse me, Sir, this boy needs no orals. Both written exams were excellent, he has already been admitted."

"The Director's words, the examiner's suddenly sour and disappointed face, the deafening pounding of my heart, the tears of my mother who waited, half alive, outside—all melted into the experience of an excruciating happiness: the happiest memory of my childhood years. My first achievement—by my efforts alone, and against overwhelming, indomitable odds.



**Father**

Zygmunt's first unfading memory as a boy of about five is not very edifying.

There is loud knocking at the door. Some strangers enter the apartment carrying a stretcher, on which his father is lying, in a coat dripping with water, covered in strips of waterweed and slime. Maurycy Bauman, by profession a bookkeeper, a failed entrepreneur with no head for business, has made a desperate attempt on his own life. He jumped off Tumski Bridge into the river Warta, and if some boy scouts hadn't been passing that way, Zygmunt would have lost a parent. The scouts jumped into the icy current, and despite the resistance of the would-be suicide, dragged him onto the riverbank.

The matter will cause enough of a stir for a local newspaper to write about it. The Baumans will keep a cutting among the family memorabilia, headlined "A Jew attempted suicide. Saved by the Polish scouts".

"He was a self-effacing, humorless, taciturn man," Professor Bauman would write as the father of three daughters. "I suppose he did not respect himself enough to believe that his life was worth a story. He did not believe either that anything that happened to him could be interesting, even to his children."

Maurycy Bauman never boasted of anything. He never reminisced about his childhood, and never shared his feelings. He never complained about anything. The only exception is at the end of his life, in Israel, following his emigration in the late 1950s. In his final days, he told Zygmunt, who was nursing him, that as a boy at the cheder—the Jewish religious school—he often wept. The Torah teacher kept the students with him all day long, only allowing them one short break for the midday meal. Little Maurycy would cry with envy when he saw the other boys eating bread with kosher chicken fat, while all his parents gave him was dry bread.

"I think his vocabulary lacked the words which other people use to share their emotions. I suppose his silence had one more, perhaps deeper reason: dignity. My Father thought that he got what he deserved, that he did not deserve anything else, and that to wish something one did not deserve was undignified, if not blasphemous, and so he did not fret or grumble... life cannot humiliate a man who does not complain. Nothing is humiliating unless made into a grievance."

*pp. 130-136*

**Zygmunt Bauman chooses communism – twice.**

The place: Professor Bauman's house in Leeds. The date: late 2016. A conversation with Aleksandra, his second wife, about his final reckoning with life. I don't know of any other stage directions.

"He said that if he had to choose which path to take after the war again, his choice would still be the same," Aleksandra tells me at one of our meetings.

Bauman had made his mind up about it long ago. In 2010, when I visited him in Leeds and we talked over tea about the dispute surrounding my book about Ryszard Kapuściński, he mentioned his political choices after the war. He expressed a thought that concurred with what he told his wife shortly before his death: in 1945 choosing communism was the best choice, because the communists had the best program for Poland.

I remember him stressing "the best program for Poland". As I understood it, political realism ("Poland is in the Soviet sphere of influence, so there is no alternative") did not play a vital role in his choice, if any role at all.

I liked the sincerity of his confession, mainly because in later years plenty of people from Bauman's generation dissociated themselves from their fascination with communist ideology, played down their own involvement, and used political realism—the lack of an opportunity for any other Poland after 1945—to justify having joined in with the system, entered public life, and built themselves a career. As if they were saying: we didn't want communism, but we supported the new authorities, there was no alternative, someone had to rebuild Poland and give it a new structure.

Indeed, political realism did motivate some of those involved in public life in People's Poland, but many of the people who were building a career, especially at the start of that era, supported the new regime with conviction and often neophyte enthusiasm. Bauman was one of the few people to talk about it openly after the political transition of 1989. What is more, he was capable of admitting that if he had to make that choice again, even with the wisdom of later experience, he would do the same.

In 2013, an interview with Bauman that aimed to settle accounts with the past was published in the leading Polish daily newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, one of the few in which he spoke about his political choices in the days of People's Poland (the PRL). The editors gave it the title "I Let Myself Be Deluded".<sup>1</sup> "That title made Zygmunt angry and depressed," says Aleksandra. "He complained that he never said anything of the kind to the interviewer, Tomasz Kwaśniewski."

"I never let myself be deluded! It was a conscious decision, my choice!" That is what Aleksandra remembers her husband saying, saddened and annoyed by turns.

Meanwhile, in the interview we find:

Kwaśniewski: Are you still ashamed [*about your involvement in the building of communism—A.D.*]?

Bauman: There's no question I let myself be deluded. I was naïve. There were a lot of things I didn't understand. It's true. On the other hand, I don't feel bad about doing dishonorable things because I swear I never did any. Though in a sense by not rebelling, I contributed to those things indirectly. And I do feel bad about that.

Kwaśniewski denies adding anything that Bauman did not say.

"Ascribe to Bauman a thought that wasn't his? Who would dare?" he says.

Bauman may not have been sure if the remark that upset him so badly afterwards did come up in the conversation or not. He never wrote a disclaimer. Jointly, Aleksandra and I reach the following conclusion: it is possible that the remark did fall from his lips—how often do we say things with which we later disagree? What spoiled Bauman's mood the most was that the editors had made this remark into the title, because that often determines how an entire text is received.

According to Bauman this remark was highly unfortunate. "I let myself be deluded" sounded as if he were renouncing his choice, denying himself. As if he were running away from responsibility. But he was not trying to do that. He was merely trying to explain why he became a communist. And why so many of his generation accepted the new regime and the new faith with enthusiasm.

Now, since talking to Kwaśniewski, I have some doubts about whether Bauman really did want to explain anything, at least publicly. For a long time he refused to let them publish the interview, which took place at his house in Leeds in 2010, but only appeared in *Gazeta Wyborcza* three years later. When Kwaśniewski sent him the transcript of their conversation, Bauman refused to authorize it or to give his consent for publication. Kwaśniewski got the impression that Bauman felt anxious talking about his past. He couldn't understand that anxiety.

"First he refused the conversation, then he agreed to it, and once we'd done it, he took a dislike to me," says Kwaśniewski.

"How did his dislike come across to you?" I ask.

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<sup>1</sup> Tomasz Kwaśniewski, "Bauman: dałem się uwieść", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 28, 2013.

“He became cold.”

At some point Kwaśniewski offered to write a biography of Bauman, during his lifetime. The work would be done in the following way: Bauman would give Kwaśniewski the names of potential interviewees who remembered various periods in his life, Kwaśniewski would have conversations with them, and would then run all the information they provided past Bauman. Despite such an inconvenient arrangement for a biographer, Kwaśniewski was counting on being able to preserve an independent view, and was not going to produce a hagiography that omitted the subject’s weaknesses and mistakes, without any ambivalent, or sometimes critical appraisal. Meanwhile, Bauman would certainly have kept relative control and significant influence over this account of himself—a tough compromise between author and subject.

“He never replied to my proposal,” says Kwaśniewski.

The journalist also mentioned the impression he gained from several meetings that, while eager for recognition, Bauman was not getting it—or at least not the kind he hoped for, and definitely not in Poland.

Did he think that talking about the past could harm him in the eyes of the Polish public? His past political involvement certainly didn’t help him to win wider acclaim in Poland. Was he expecting to be named *Gazeta Wyborcza*’s “Person of the Year”? In any case, he never won that title.

“They call, they ask for articles and interviews, and I get nothing for it,” Kwaśniewski remembered Bauman saying.

To Kwaśniewski’s surprise, Bauman finally gave his consent for the interview about his compliance with communism three years after it was held. The sequence of events seems obvious: the interview was published just after the painful incident in Wrocław, when nationalists interrupted his lecture and hurled insults at him. But only then did one of the editors at *Gazeta Wyborcza* succeed in persuading Bauman to let it appear. According to Kwaśniewski, the version that finally appeared was abridged, though he cannot remember if anything truly essential was cut. Nor can he check, because the first version was not archived and is lost.

Kwaśniewski recalls the actual interview with disappointment. He says he was angry with Bauman. Why? Because the great intellectual did not know how to settle accounts with his own past, or with himself, although his position was not under any threat, and he was highly acclaimed worldwide.

“What exactly did you expect from Bauman?” I want to know.

“I thought he’d say: ‘I was stupid, I didn’t realize they’d make a fool of me.’ As if that flaw would take away his splendor.”

I suggest that the interview is superb, the best anyone ever did with Bauman on this subject, because it is the first time when, in talking about his involvement with communism, Bauman does not hide behind theory or quotations from philosophers, but talks in his own voice. As I see it, extremely frankly.

I also note that Bauman couldn’t have said “I was stupid”, because to the end of his life he regarded the choice of communism after 1945 as the best in those circumstances. And shortly before he died he admitted that if he had to choose again, he’d make the same choice.

Kwaśniewski is not convinced by my comments.

“That’s not logical,” he says. “He was wet behind the ears, he’d ended up in the USSR during the war, he went to school there, something was put into his head, and then the same thing happened in the army. His life turned out the way it did, and not otherwise. There was no window for him to jump out of, so it wasn’t entirely his choice. He said himself in the interview that he couldn’t have had any other life. And it’s true. It was many years before he’d collected the data to assess the situation properly and make some genuine choices. I can buy the view that ‘I’d do the same again’ if I imagine that nineteen-year-old in 1945, the situation he was in, and the state of his knowledge. But the sort of appraisal that says ‘from today’s perspective I can confirm that I did the right thing’ prompts doubts.”

I am not sure if Bauman was only thinking of the first of these, or the second too.

For the generations that followed, caught up in the struggle against the regime that ran the PRL, nowadays it is hard to understand that at the end of 1945 communism was a justified path to take in the same way as other political paths—perhaps even more so than others. This is pointed out to me by Krzysztof Pomian, the philosopher and historian of ideas who was a colleague of Bauman's at the University of Warsaw.

"The men in gray greatcoats who came from the east along with the Red Army," says Pomian (whose father died in a Soviet camp), "were deeply convinced that if the Soviet Union had not defeated Hitler, they'd have been the first to be annihilated. Some of them, like Bauman, the future historian Bronisław Baczko and the economist Włodzimierz Brus, had Jewish roots. So what if they only thought of themselves as Jews when others reminded them about it? In a world where Hitler had defeated Stalin they would have been annihilated by the Third Reich, like so many of their relatives who stayed behind in the occupied territories. For people of this background," Pomian continues, "including my mother, an educated woman and prewar communist, who was critical of Stalin and later of the PRL regime, the defeat of Hitler and fascism gave some justification to the actions of the Soviet authorities and of Stalin, and the vast amount of harm that was done. Such was the climate of the era. Understanding this is essential for understanding the people of that time and the choices they made."

If one was also from the lower classes, supporting the PRL created the opportunity for social advance, for an upward move. If not for social advance, Bauman's professional and personal life would have turned out differently. If not for the great societal reshuffle of the PRL era, his first wife, Janina, with whom he spent more than sixty years, and who came from a well-to-do background, would probably have been "out of his league", as Bauman admitted to Aleksandra many years later.

"Just imagine you're eighteen again," says Bauman to Kwaśniewski, fifty years his junior, in the interview titled "I Let Myself Be Deluded". "Of course you're thinking about girls, it goes without saying, but what do you think about the rest of the time? Yes, quite: you think about the state of the world, and what could be done here to make it different.

"So I listened in on all this, associated it with my own childhood experiences, and came to the conclusion, like very many young people at the time, that if you compared all the programs for Poland, the communists had the best one.

"So please, feel your way into that situation. They come along and say: We'll give the land to the peasants. And I knew the peasants were suffering because they didn't have any. We'll give the factories to the workers. Wonderful, my father won't have to doff his cap. Generally we shall all be equal.

"Education will be free. Fabulous! For me, education was an extremely important matter.

"All sorts of slogans against discrimination and humiliation were being broadcast too. Humiliation in particular had become a very important concept in my life, and continues to be."

Explaining his motives, Bauman places emphasis on the experience of the prewar years: that world "was a complete let-down", everything that was meant to guarantee human existence was compromised.

It is for this very reason that after the war the whole of Europe shifted to the left. The communist parties in France and Italy were powerful. Even the program of the political parties that represented the Polish Underground State included the promise of far-reaching social reforms in a left-wing spirit.

Bauman writes a bit more about the grim heritage of interwar Poland in the interview I conducted with him by correspondence in 2006.

“‘That Poland’ was a country of incredible poverty, which was concentrated a few steps away from my house, just on the other side of Dąbrowski Street, and from time to time it put out shoots and extended along the prettified, outwardly smug and self-satisfied Prus and Słowacki Streets. For a couple of years inside our apartment, and in every village I had occasion to visit in my childhood, unemployment and hopelessness proliferated without restraint, openly mocking any kind of pretense, masks or appearances. There was also the hospitable Poland for the wealthy, but it was a pitiless, totally unsympathetic place for those who depended on their favors, forcing those people, like my father, to exchange their dignity for bread to feed the family. I never forgot it all, just as I never forgot the pokes, kicks and shoves, the memory of which hurt long after the bruises had disappeared and the pain had stopped; and the insults calculated to last eternally. (...) it was in ‘transforming that Poland into a better one’ that I wanted to participate.”

In 1945, the prospect of getting the country out of the material and spiritual destruction of the war matched the young man’s personal wishes: to do something that made sense from the start of his adult life. And it suited his plebeian aspirations: to break free of the poverty he had lived in before the war.

Bauman finds arguments that speak to the imagination of an interviewer several decades his junior by mentioning Stanisław Ossowski, a lecturer at the University of Warsaw who mentored many sociologists. Toward the end of his life Ossowski confided his thoughts about prewar Poland.

“In 1939, when he [Ossowski] was mobilized to Modlin Fortress and a rumor went around that Beck and Ribbentrop [the Polish and German foreign ministers before the Second World War] had agreed there would be no war, he fell into dreadful despair. ‘Is life going to go on being the same? Just as awful? I was hoping the war would change, smash, shatter, and liberate something.’”

So the choice of communism, as Bauman explains to Kwaśniewski, “was not a form of eccentricity”, though “in Poland nowadays the prevailing opinion is that it was a sort of deviation, that only monsters went that way. And what for? Purely to subjugate Poland and deprive it of independence.”

*pp. 464-467*

### **The man who didn’t belong**

In 2002, many years after his exile from Poland, Zygmunt Bauman was awarded an honorary degree from Charles University in Prague. During preparations for the ceremony an unexpected problem came up: which country’s anthem should be played in his honor? Traditionally they play the national anthem of the award-winner’s country. In Bauman’s case this turned out to be unclear, unambiguous and complicated.

At the time he had been living in the United Kingdom for thirty years and had British citizenship but, as he often said, he didn’t feel British, and had no aspirations to be British; to his fellow lecturers and students he was obviously a foreigner, “a Pole, to be exact”.

So why not the Polish national anthem? He still felt like a Pole, despite having been officially stripped of his Polish citizenship by the regime then in power three decades earlier. In such circumstances he thought playing the Polish anthem would be “acting on false pretenses”.

Janina came up with a solution to the dilemma: let them play “Ode to Joy”, the anthem of Europe. After all, Zygmunt was a European, he was born in Europe, he lived and worked there, and most importantly, he felt European. “There is thus far no European passport office,” he later wrote,

“with the authority to issue or to refuse a ‘European passport’, and so to confer or deny our right to call ourselves Europeans.”

So in Bauman’s honor the anthem of Europe was played. He regarded this as both an “inclusive” and an “exclusive” gesture at once. “It removed from the agenda an identity defined in terms of nationality—the kind of identity that has been barred and made inaccessible to me”. He had been denied this identity in Poland, while in Israel, the country to which he moved as an exile, he chose not to identify with the national state. Polishness and Jewishness remained in him, and would always cause pain, especially when vile acts were perpetrated in the name of one or the other community.

“I do not remember paying much attention to the question of ‘my identity’, at least the national part of it, before the brutal awakening of March 1968 when my Polishness was publicly cast in doubt. I guess that until then I expected, matter-of-factly, and without any soul searching or calculating, to retire when the time came from the University of Warsaw, and be buried, when the time came, at one of Warsaw’s cemeteries. But since March 1968 I have been and am still expected by everyone around to self-define and I am supposed to have a considered, carefully balanced, keenly argued view of my identity. Why? Because once I had been set in motion, pulled out from wherever could pass for my ‘natural habitat’, there was no place where I could be seen as fitting in, as they say, one hundred percent. In each and every place I was—sometimes slightly, sometimes blatantly—‘out of place’.”<sup>2</sup>

One of Bauman’s first reactions to being excluded from Polishness and pushed toward a Jewish identity was “the mirrored self” effect (an interpretation offered by Jerzy Wiatr). This term was coined by Florian Znaniecki, one of the forerunners of Polish sociology. The mirrored self is a kind of social reflection of ourselves: if the people around a man tell him that he is beautiful, being beautiful becomes part of his self-knowledge. If they keep telling him he is not a Pole but a Jew, he starts to think of himself as a Jew. Bauman, who felt above all Polish, was usually reminded of his Jewishness by anti-Semites; by doing so, they certainly reinforced the Jewish part of his identity.

In 1968, in his case the “mirrored self” effect prompted willful affirmation. “So, as it was decreed that I was a Jew, I decided to be one,” he would later say. “I had the same reaction as the American blacks who instead of being ashamed of their black skin add to it by adopting an African hairstyle.”

His personal exile and unplanned, unwanted wandering brought the sociologist in Bauman some incredibly rich material for reflecting on the question of identity.

“The peculiarities of my biography have only dramatized and brought into full view the kind of condition which is nowadays quite common and on the way to becoming almost universal.”

In the age of globalization a person’s identity often fails to keep its continuity or coherence. In our lives, over several decades many of us belong to various societies, we function within different cultural groups and environments, and we spend time in various places on the geographical and social map. This is true of people from the prosperous parts of the world as well as those from regions of poverty, who flee to escape wars, drought, exploitation, or simply in search of a better destiny. In the globalized world the identity of the individual is not a given thing once and for all, but depends on constant choices and negotiations, it is “in motion”, something ambiguous.

The pioneers of “the new” were.... the Jews.

“The Jews were the first to be confronted by it,” said Bauman in the final years of his life, referring to his own life story. “They were the discoverers of the new world, against their will. One

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<sup>2</sup> The quotations in this section are from Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2004, pp 9-12.

could say they were the vanguard of ambivalence. They were the first to find themselves in a state typical of the liquid modernity in which we live.”<sup>3</sup>

Bauman wittily illustrated the phenomenon of the ambiguous identity, “in motion”, by quoting the text from a poster he saw in Berlin in 1994:

“Your Christ is a Jew. You drive a Japanese car. You eat Italian pizza. You have democracy from Greece. Coffee from Brazil. Arabic numerals. The Latin alphabet. You go on holiday in Tunisia. Only your neighbor is a foreigner.”

(Which anthem should be played for all of us?)

The events of a stormy life were constantly offering Bauman new pieces for the jigsaw puzzle of his identity. It was rarely he who chose who he was, who he would become and who he would be taken for.

At the end of his life he discovered the advantage to be gained from being someone “out of place”, who does not fully belong to any one nation or country, and he came to enjoy it. Nor did he belong to any one party, clan, school or environment. He was a Pole, but not only. He was a Jew, but not only. Was he a Briton? Maybe when it came to self-restraint, manners, and place of residence. Though exiled by the communists, he was not an anti-communist. Was he a left winger? Yes, but one who was still trying to square the circle of “how much freedom, how much security”. Was he a sociologist? Perhaps more of a philosopher, a prospector who crossed the borders of various disciplines, a writer and essayist?

Was he a homeless person, in the symbolic sense?

He was certainly a man who does not belong.

But the flip side of this fine, individual utopia is that even when you say the wisest things, those who do “belong” do not listen. Bauman’s incisive political criticism was not heeded in Poland or in Israel. Whenever he was aggressively attacked, few voices were ever raised in his defense. In Great Britain he may not have aspired to be heard widely as a political critic; instead he targeted questions of civilization and comments on the human condition. To the end of his life he regarded himself as a man of the left, an egalitarian and a socialist, and although he was an authority for many who looked in the same direction, some saw him as a dissenter who had renounced the big idea and capitulated. Some sociologists in turn questioned his membership of the discipline that he regarded as his intellectual territory.

Bauman didn’t fit in—he was out of place.

“I was [‘an alien’] from birth, and I’ll die one. I cannot name the date, but I fairly soon realized that there was no remedy for being an alien. So I accepted it, and in a way I grew fond of it. Or perhaps it’s not that I grew fond of being alien, but I gained an aversion, and a deep one, to the alternative (...): to ‘belonging’.”<sup>4</sup>

This aversion, which may have started to take shape in his childhood, and was clearly to do with being ejected from the yard, the army, the party, and Poland, was to invalidate his ethnic affiliations, and was rounded off by the years he spent in Israel after being exiled.

What actually happened there?

### [On Bauman as public intellectual and his work]

pp. 695-703

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Haffner, Zygmunt Bauman, *Making the Familiar Unfamiliar: A Conversation with Peter Haffner*, trans. Daniel Steuer, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2020, p. XX. [Correct text and page number to be added – ALJ.]

<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, Włodek Goldkorn, “Ludzie w ciemnych czasach” [“People in dark times, a conversation”], *Odra* nr 10, 2013.

“What exactly is the main topic in the polythematic work of Bauman’s later years?” I ask Wojciech Burszta.

“Criticism of capitalism,” I hear the confirmation of my own intuition. “Bauman is concerned with a critique of capitalism and its successive transformations, shapes and forms,” says Burszta. “His main interest is, in the broad sense, the culture created by capitalism, and what it does to people and societies. I think in his own way he remained a Frankfurter to the very end.”

A Frankfurter is a supporter of the Frankfurt School, which was inspired by the thinking of Marx and concerned with criticizing capitalist systems.

Claiming that Bauman was one could be confusing, considering that the modern Frankfurters have quarreled very fiercely with the postmodernists, to whom Bauman belonged, at least for a while, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. A postmodernist Frankfurter? Yes, it’s possible. In the first place, Bauman’s relationship with postmodernism was more of a temporary flirtation than a lasting relationship. Second, Bauman was not so close to today’s generation of Frankfurters as to the previous one, active in the 1960s, above all to the thinking of Theodor Adorno. Like Adorno, he stresses the dark side of the legacy of enlightenment, and in his view modernity as a project for the rational management of the world on the basis of scientific knowledge suffered a defeat (the Holocaust, Soviet communism). The modern Frankfurters, led by Jürgen Habermas, defend the inheritance of enlightenment and reject the claim that modernity has been defeated. They regard it as “an unfinished project”. Although Bauman polemicizes with Habermas’ visions, he never denies the fact that enlightenment and modernity have left a positive legacy as well. Instead he persuades us to look at both sides of the coin, to see the ambivalence that is inherent in modern “order-building” aspirations. What connects Bauman with the Frankfurters of both generations is his unquestionably critical deconstruction of capitalism.

I’m going to check that again.

Bauman usually formulates his critique with the help of a story, and less often by referring to distinct theses. He talks in the language of images and persuasion, which is designed to be digestible for people of various outlooks, not just left-wingers. To me, this is a literary strategy, and it is probably the reason why his books and statements do not often include overt criticism of capitalism that plainly uses the term “capitalism”—as if he believes that intelligent readers will realize for themselves what he is writing about.

But whenever criticism of capitalism appears *expressis verbis*, it is crushing.

“The inborn paradox of capitalism, and in the long run its doom: capitalism is like a snake that feeds on its own tail...”, he writes in *Liquid Times*.

Before it reaches the point of eating its own tail, capitalism feeds on everything that constitutes its environment, in order to achieve accumulation.

“Rosa Luxemburg envisaged a capitalism dying for lack of food: starving to death because it had eaten up the last meadow of ‘otherness’ on which it grazed. But a hundred years later it seems that a fatal, possibly the most fatal result of modernity’s global triumph, is the acute crisis of the ‘human waste’ disposal industry, as each new outpost conquered by capitalist markets adds new thousands or millions to the mass of men and women already deprived of their lands, workshops, and communal safety nets.”

Bauman warns that the number of people made redundant “by capitalism’s global triumph” is approaching the limit that the planet is capable of withstanding; “there is a plausible prospect of capitalist modernity (or modern capitalism) choking on its own waste products which it can neither reassimilate or annihilate, nor detoxify.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The quotations in this section are from Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times*, pp. 28, and 29.



Soon he is being read not just by academics, but also people simply in search of various kinds of reading matter, interested in what is happening around them.

The phenomenon of Bauman—a wise man and leading light in the humanities who communicates with a wider audience than the academic world does—is born with the new century. Bauman offers new diagnoses—or perhaps he just expresses them in a new way, comprehensibly? He certainly elaborates a new language for sociological thought, one that is accessible to the general public, using popular terms, images, and metaphors.

It starts with the book *Liquid Modernity*, followed by its numerous sequels in the “liquid series”: *Liquid Life*, *Liquid Fear*, *Liquid Times*, *Liquid Love*, and *Liquid Surveillance*. The series also includes books that do not have “liquid” in the title.

*Liquid Love* includes an account of the difficulties of life at the time of liquid modernity in which social ties lose their permanence. It is also an essay about searching for a balance between loosening those ties and preserving something permanent.

In *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure*, Bauman shows the dangers to the Old Continent that are prompted by the expansion of the market and the replacement of social rights gained over the decades with security procedures of a repressive kind.

In *Liquid Fear* he reconsiders the promises of certainty, control and security brought by modernity, and its paradoxical effect in today’s times: omnipresent uncertainty and fear.

In *Consuming Life* he reminds us once again that our former, productive society has been replaced by a consumer society, and that citizens have been replaced by consumers. This change has remodeled democracy, politics and many other areas of life; it has plowed up our ways of shaping our identities, relationships and social divisions.

In *Liquid Times* he continues to reflect on the loss of fixed points of reference in human life. Forms of social coexistence and public institutions fluidly replace each other. For example, fewer and fewer people have one and the same job throughout their lives, while more and more are forced to complete a large number of short-term professional projects, and are constantly having to adapt to changing conditions.

“Zygmunt is known everywhere, but they love him best in southern Europe: in Italy and Spain, and in Latin America,” says Griselda Pollock. “When he died, the loudest wailing was from those places.”

These are countries and regions where progressive, socially engaged culture is deeply rooted. In Italy crowds of people who sing the anti-fascist protest song *Bella ciao* came to Bauman’s public events, in Spain it was those who love the poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca, murdered by the fascists, and in Latin America it was those who wear Che Guevara T-shirts and carry placards that say: “A different world is possible”.

Not many essayists, sociologists or philosophers who write serious books on serious matters can boast that their work is permanently on sale in almost every good bookstore worldwide. Over the years I have come upon Bauman’s books in many Latin American and European countries, and also in Kenya.

I was impressed by a little altar composed of at least a dozen of his books in Rio de Janeiro’s old Santa Teresa district, which is imbued with a decadent artistic spirit. The bookseller did not know much about the author; he just raised his hands and said something like, “Bauman is a giant”. He was convinced Bauman was an Englishman.

Pollock told me that one of Bauman’s grandsons, Alex, son of Irena and Maurice Lyons, was once wandering around a godforsaken little town in Latin America, and even there he spotted one of his grandfather’s books in a tiny bookstore.

João Manfio, with whom I spoke during the pandemic through a messaging app, wrote his doctorate at the University of São Paulo on the educational potential of Bauman’s works. His research included studying the readership and citation of Bauman’s books globally and in Brazil. The book most often cited worldwide is *Liquid Modernity*, and the Spanish take first place in quoting it.

Within the university environment in Brazil the greatest popularity is enjoyed by *Globalization and Postmodernity and its Discontents* (which has the greatest number of citations). Apart from that, *Amor Líquido (Liquid Love)* was a Brazilian bestseller; according to Manfio's information it sold 300,000 copies.

"The book was definitely guaranteed success by the title and the cover," says Manfio. "The cover showed a beach and a heart drawn on the sand, with the ocean in the background. My hypothesis is that those were the first impulses for buying the book; possibly the readers thought it was one of those self-help books on 'how to live'. The accessible language undoubtedly encouraged people to read it too."

Manfio notes that there is plenty of misunderstanding around Bauman in Brazil, especially among academics. Some of them do not regard him as a serious scholar. According to Manfio, one of the Marxist sociologists calls Bauman's essays "airport literature". Manfio thinks one of the reasons is that the Brazilian academics regard topics such as love as unworthy of a serious sociologist.

From the many conversations that Manfio conducted with colleagues at various academic institutions, it emerges that some of Bauman's critics are not familiar with the content of the books they criticize. They often limit themselves to rolling out the standard phrases, "liquid this, liquid that", but they do not know how they develop.

One Catalan newspaper columnist jeered: "now it turns out we have all read Bauman"<sup>6</sup>—we just have to throw in the idea that something is liquid and we are guaranteed social or media success as wise, erudite people.

Sometimes the misunderstandings are prompted by Bauman's ideological declarations.

"He once said that he was inspired by both liberal and socialist thought," says Manfio. "Among Brazilian academics, where sociology is dominated by Marxism, this was very badly received. On another occasion, when he said 'I shall die a socialist', he prompted enthusiasm."

The misunderstanding is easily explained. Brazil is a country with painful experience of the neoliberal experiment of the late 1980s and 1990s—the Brazilians associate liberalism of every kind with nothing but its extreme version of recent decades. Bauman held the same critical opinion of neoliberalism—the model elaborated in the period of the Thatcher and Reagan governments—as the Brazilian Marxists, as they could have found out by reading his book, *Globalization*, for instance. The declaration that he felt himself to be both a liberal and a socialist belongs to another order. Bauman explained it in a conversation with his late disciple, Keith Tester.

"Security of livelihood, that *conditio sine qua non* of the human right to dare to fulfil one's potential, and freedom, that ability to act on that right, are two values which cannot be traded off completely without putting paid to human dignity."<sup>7</sup>

These two programs and two ways of thinking—socialist and liberal—do not exclude one another "unless ossified into dogmas or transformed into windowless fortresses through years of trench war". There is no ideal balance between freedom and justice and security; reconciling these values is like trying to square a circle. It is not worth renouncing either of them—that is a good recipe "for a life full of doubts and difficult, never unambiguously good, choices".

Meanwhile in Argentina *Liquid Modernity* was a major bestseller.

"This and Bauman's subsequent books owe their popularity to their accessible language, popular metaphors, and way of communicating with the reader," says Lucas Rubinich, a sociologist from Buenos Aires.

"In Argentina, just as in Brazil, some of the sociologists say that Bauman's books may be suited to demanding and well-informed readers, but for the beach," he tells me. "This is an unfair, patronizing attitude. Bauman accurately identifies many phenomena and human anxieties. His analyses are profound."

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<sup>6</sup> Josep Maria Fonalleras, "Líquidos" ["Liquids"], *El Periodico*, January 11, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, Keith Tester, *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001, p. 155.

“He is best known for his works on the decomposition of stabilized societies,” writes the Spanish academic and blogger Javier Aristu. “What he called ‘liquid modernity’ means the decline of our sense of certainty and of the underpinnings that created the social model sometimes known as the welfare society, the welfare state, the social pact. Bauman attacks the forms and aims of new, wild capitalism, deregulated, with no temporal or territorial boundaries.”<sup>8</sup>

To those who regard him as a guide, he introduces light and wisdom. He never raises his voice. He transmits the knowledge needed for a change in the state of affairs—he regards shouting as an ineffective weapon in this task.

He has a perfect sense of modern people’s feelings of uncertainty, and knows how to communicate with them, which is yet another source of his popularity. In his analyses he avoids abstraction and conceptual juggling. The human being is always at the center of his thoughts—weak, lost, without signposts.

“He was the voice of protest, he had the courage to talk about injustices, ill-treatment and suffering,” says Pollock. “He talked about great ideas and everyday problems. He read the newspapers, spoke to people in order to understand what they thought, how they felt, and how they lived. He refused to shut himself within the walls of an academic institution. His writing is full of compassion.”

While formulating pessimistic diagnoses, Bauman does not wring his hands in despair at the world’s injustice. Instead—in the words of Keith Tester— he wonders how to restore humanity to people. “The point is that humans do not *have* to be inhuman even if they live in social and historical circumstances which make the cruel treatment of the other seem to be easy and without consequence. It is always possible to choose to be human, it is always possible to choose to be moral.”

At the end of *Liquid Modernity*, in his own words Bauman states that neutral reflection, as opposed to engaged reflection, is impossible, meaningless, immoral. It is like closing one’s eyes to injustice and refusing to accept joint responsibility for the fate of others.

In Poland during the first decade of the political and economic transition, as a critic of neoliberal capitalism Bauman was entirely absent. What did the Polish intellectuals, most of whom held liberal views and worshipped the free market, need with someone who was iconoclastically suggesting that modern humanity’s worries came from the expansion of freedom and the reduction of security areas, and not from state oppression?

When the founding fathers of the Third Polish Republic suggested to the shipwrecked survivors of the transition that they should “fluently” requalify and “become more flexible”, Bauman pointed out that “there is nothing more humiliating than poverty”. And that “there is no poverty more humiliating than the kind one has to suffer when living among people set on rapid and constantly growing self-enrichment”, “amid an orgy of innumerable temptations”.

In Bauman’s thinking poverty is “a meta-humiliation of sorts, a soil on which all-round indignity thrives, a trampoline from which ‘multiple humiliation’ is launched”.<sup>9</sup> It is the source of both dreams of change, egalitarian projects, and also nationalist populisms, governments that treat one disease with the help of another that is even worse. Bauman does not agree to the acceptance by the satisfied of a situation where someone else makes a sacrifice—in accordance with the conviction that such is life, and the world is often imperfect.

In the early 1990s, during the triumph of the doctrine of “shock therapy”, as symbolized in Poland by Leszek Balcerowicz, Bauman shared views of this kind with an audience in Warsaw. As sociologist Tomasz Majewski mentions in a debate in the monthly journal *Znak*, Bauman gave a lecture “with strongly anti-Thatcherite tones and approving references to the ideas of Rosa

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<sup>8</sup> Javier Aristu, *Semblanza de Zygmunt Bauman*, <https://pasosalaizquierda.com/semblanza-de-zygmunt-bauman>.

<sup>9</sup> Bauman and Tester, op. cit., p. 154.

Luxemburg". He prompted consternation, if not outrage among some of those present. Here was a world-famous sociologist, who instead of bringing news from the treasure house of Western liberal thought, was resurrecting a thinker glorified in the days of People's Poland.

"I cannot remember any discussion from that period about Bauman's ideas as a critic of market globalization and the negative social, political, and economic aspects of post-modernity," says Majewski. "After the Polish public's first clash with Bauman when he criticized Margaret Thatcher a 'cohesive image' of him was constructed that was purged of skeptical elements toward capitalism, and left out his social ethics."<sup>10</sup>

The next generation would take up criticism of capitalism at the start of the new century. Only for the new generation would Bauman be a guide, as a critic of capitalism, a supplier of stories and arguments, and a diagnostician of their anxieties.

*Translated from the Polish by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*

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<sup>10</sup> Tomasz Majewski, in: "Anioł historii boi się o przyszłość" ["The angel of history fears for the future, a discussion"], *Znak* nr 752, 2018.