

REVIEWS—REPORTS

Błażej Przybylski (rev.): Zygmunt Bauman, *On Education. Conversations with Riccardo Mazzeo*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław 2012, pp. 152.

At the beginning of this year, a new book by Zygmunt Bauman, one of the most read Polish authors – intellectualists of 20th and 21st century, has come out on the Polish market. This time it gives an occasion to read the conversation of our sociologist and philosopher with Riccardo Mazzeo. It concerns among others the education. The author examines in his thoughts the condition of modern society and education; he predicts the directions of changes and possible developments. As always, he makes reference to many issues and subjects, manoeuvring greatly through the intricacies of present times, called by himself liquid ones. He discovers and describes old and new threats which are in front of people embroiled in different sort of dependencies, risks and uncertainties.

Deliberating on the crises of present education is one of the main themes. Before, in modern times, education was possible to be planned, be given objectives and its consequences were predictable. Information,

knowledge, and news were given once and for all. Their longevity and everlastingness used to ensure stability and balance. In post-modern times, people face previously unknown incertitude, risk, and briefness. Fashionable and useful products lose their attraction day after day. Solutions that are valid today become outdated and anachronistic tomorrow. Current rules, values, and principles may soon become outmoded. We are forced to act, function, and live in a space that is given to us without having any important influence on its shape and the direction of its development. The constantly changing world requires adoptive skills from today's youth, that contemporary education needs to address. "And the only, unchanging objective of education equally in the past, nowadays as for the future, is to prepare youth to live in reality which they enter. To get prepared, young people need to get some hints and instructions, practical knowledge possible to get used... In order to satisfy this condition of "practicality", good education has to stimulate and promote opening and not closing of the "mind" (p. 31). Only people open to others, arising opportunities and possibilities, and are skilled in doing and making right decisions in such an uncertain present world may

succeed. Nowadays, the ability to discard useless information is a more valuable skill than storing it. The stocking and storing of knowledge and information seems to be pointless since they are uncertain and eclipsing constructs. Too great intensity of information limits abilities of memory by hindering simultaneously competence to adapt and respond to further market demands. The citizen, Zygmunt Bauman reminds us, is reduced to the role of a consumer. In the age of supermarkets, shops are where citizens find a way to vent their emotions and express their anxieties. This is also the place where they look for solutions to problems and escape from the ills of everyday life. Quick and unpredictable changes of strategy and tactics are forced upon the consumer. Education does not respond to the challenges of liquid presence. The remarkable sociologist reminds us "that all or almost all modern heroes of history of the "from-rags-to-riches type" on whose side the luck was and who made a fortune worth billions thanks to one lucky idea... did not have full education... These are the very people who embody the idea of successful life" (p. 47). This rule does not suggest though the abandonment of knowledge and fight for education the best possible and of the highest quality. The level of education has constituted selection criterion and a tool to segregate in the fight for the most attractive workplaces for a long time. Today, neither education nor the readiness to devote oneself to work ensures success. Fundamental meritocratic assumptions do not mean a lot when it comes to the whole

crowd of well-educated and unemployed young people. "Within our societies in which economy is allegedly stimulated by knowledge and information and education ensures economic success, we observe that knowledge does not result in success and education does not lead to knowledge" (p. 80).

In the eyes of Zygmunt Bauman, the world is chaotic, unorganized, complicated, and dangerous. The reader may fault the author for presenting an assessment of modern times that enhances anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. Yet, his outspoken criticism of the present, which Zygmunt Bauman voices, results from his concern for the fate of future generations. The responsible and involved thinker wants to warn younger generations against failures that seem to be inevitable. The professor lectures about the threats that the 21st century person will face next and he does this on many levels and in a slightly eclectic, but still in a limpid way. In his study, he sketches a bleak vision of the world. He does this in such an evocative manner to make us think about the surrounding "liquid" reality. He provokes one to ponder and calls for an "awakening" and taking effective measures for changes within the educational system and in the way of thinking about education.

The world is based on inequalities, exclusion, and marginalization. Dominant voices about capitalist prosperity, the land of happiness where the success depends on education and effort put in it, become nowadays ridiculous and unsubstantial. The instilled belief that success is within a human's

reach has become an illusion. Bauman calls today's youth a "generation of outcasts". Each time period and each change brings about new outcasts, because sudden transformations require adaptive skills and abilities to deal with new and unknown situations and conditions, which not everyone possesses. Therefore not everyone is able to maintain their social status. Solutions and attitudes that were applied before do not produce the desired effects today. There is always a part of society that cannot and is unable to cope with consequences of changes, "yet, it happens rarely that the fate of an outcast falls to the whole generation. Maybe this is the situation we witness today" (p. 53). Nobody has prepared the youth for the perspective of life in the world of constant uncertainty, insecurity, and threats. High prices, solid education, and increasingly sophisticated CVs are not sufficient to fulfill one's ambition. The new world guarantees neither that one's dreams will come true nor that one will find a job. Graduates are not (and will not be) awaited by desired posts. Doing next internships, they can expect neither a job that meets their qualifications nor fulfils their aspirations. Zygmunt Bauman perceives young people leaving universities today as "the first post-war generation which will need to confront the prospect of social degradation" (p. 54).

The future of younger generations and their chances for a fulfilling and satisfying life is, according to Zygmunt Bauman, is slight. Young people, left to their own devices, need to manage the unknown and strange world on their own. Neither politi-

cians nor legislators express any greater interest in the problems confronting the current youth. They do not notice the need for a decisive intervention in the current system of education. Negative phenomena resulting from the essence of post-modernism are supposed to be dealt with individually. In several books, Professor Bauman has already referred to Ulrich Beck's words concerning the "reconciliation of system contradictions on the biography level". Also, in the interview with Riccardo Mazzeo, he alludes to humans being entangled and rooted in social systems that should be coped with through collective efforts. Once again, Zygmunt Bauman urges effective collective measures against, among others, institutions that have long ago ceased to care about society.

The Polish sociologist seeks the causes for the degradation of the younger generations, growing inequalities between the rulers and the ruled, as well as the rich and the poor in the Arab revolts. Previously, the recently deceased Stephen Hessel had published a short book entitled *Time for Outrage*, which became a declaration for all the outraged, displeased, and disappointed. In the book, the author writes: "It is true that the reasons for outrage may seem today less clear and the world less complicated. Who orders, who decides? It is not always easy to find differences among trends that dominate us. We have nothing to do anymore with a narrow elite undertakings of which we understood thoroughly. Today it is a vast world in which we feel clearly existing inter-dependencies. We live in a world of mu-

tual links which has never existed until now. And In this world there are unsupportable things. In order to notice them one has to look around intently and search carefully. I tell the young: do some search – you will find. The worst attitude is ignorance, to say yourself »I cannot do anything, I barely manage to survive myself« Acting this way, you deprive yourselves of one of the factors which makes you human beings”. Young people organize themselves, protest, and demonstrate against the rule of out of control capitalism. They demand a more democratic society. Government and big corporations do not care about the ordinary citizen; the human being is reduced to economic utility and deprived of dignity and the meaning of life. Bauman calls such a creature and other similar social transformations in the whole Western world “like a swarm, political parties and alliances are ephemeral creation, they gather easily but they are hard to be kept in the same shape long enough to become institutionalized” (p. 93). The sociologist does not believe in the power or effectiveness of grassroots initiatives. In his view, they will not eliminate the reasons for protests. Even the most intense and the grandest of passions cannot be foundations on which a new alternative society might be built. Bauman comments on the protests by “the Outraged”, Arab Spring, and London riots. All of these revolts have one feature in common; the people involved are young people excluded from and devoid of financial wealth. In London and Spain, these are usually underprivileged consumers, who can plainly see

the opulence of the wealthy. The causes of protests and frustration remain untouched. Social inequalities don't decline; an omnipresent and all too clear image of a consumerist lifestyle creates more bitterness and fear of exclusion. When describing the motivations and behaviors of London rebels, the Polish sociologist claims that “young people did not protest against consumerism but they made an effort (a fruitless and doomed to fail one) to join at least for a short moment crowd of consumers from which they got excluded. Their riot was unplanned, unorganized, a spontaneous burst of cumulated frustration which can be explained from a point of view of “causes” and not “goals”. It does not seem that “what for” played any role in this orgy of destruction” (p. 102).

On one hand, Zygmunt Bauman calls for collective action, but he does not believe that existing social movements can bear the burden of changes. One should agree with the author's assessment concerning the causes of English “underclass” riots postulating no positive values or creative concepts. The protests were merely a sign of the need to participate actively in the consumer society. The demands of at least two other movements, which have recently gained greater popularity, can be interpreted differently. “The Outraged” from Spain and the American “Occupy Wall Street” movement suggest more constructive plans of action that describe goals, predict the consequences of the requested changes, as well as indicate the causes and directions of action. Both of the mentioned movements, apart

from frustration and outrage, bring alternative visions of social order. They do not fight for power, but support the concept of constructing a more democratic world that is able to respond to real threats and challenges, which had previously been ignored by politicians and capital. They loudly protest against the dominance of money both in everyday life and in strategies and experiences of collective actions, including educational ones. Focusing on the public sphere, they fight for a real, creative participation in shaping and constructing it. They also contribute to a different narration in the media by propagating contents that were omitted and excluded until now. Still, Zygmunt Bauman does not notice in those movements a sufficient potential and enthusiasm to implement the necessary changes. But, one cannot deny their ideological zeal, which may become a driving force for the desired transformations.

Bauman often refers to the problem of emigration – the question that is nowadays debated lively and generating great controversy and disputes. Borders in the “global village”, not only geographical ones, are becoming less and less visible. We hear people communicating in different languages on streets. On the way to the church, we meet non-Catholics. We queue in the shop behind a homosexual couple. Our children attend classes with Turkish and Iranian kids. Our daughter goes out with an Indian guy. Female friends flirt with handsome Arabs. Our boss is Russian. We are bombarded by multiculturalism and foreignness. Yet, most of us are unable to adapt to the new

conditions of life with new “strangers”. The vision of cooperation with different nations is a terrifying and painful option for the majority of the population. It is only a minority that appreciates the opportunity to cohabit with people from various cultures, which are supposed to diversify, beautify, improve, and change us. Until today, no unique way of dealing with multiculturalism has been worked out yet. Foreignness still provokes incertitude, fear, and the inability to find one’s own place. Complexity means the inclusion of races, points of view, and lifestyles. Neither homogenization nor assimilation work well. Therefore, the sociologist of world renown calls for “constant and everyday development, learning and practicing the art of cohabiting with others and their different natures” (p. 11). It seems that there will be an increasing number of “aliens” coming. “A cultural hybridisation”, in Zygmunt Bauman’s words, is inevitable. The cooperation and coexistence of various nations and ethnic groups must be based on some universal rules, which will be respected by both parties. Both sides have to have equal social, economic, and political rights guaranteed. Without equality, it is hard to expect the respect of “the social contract”.

The appeals by Zygmunt Bauman for holding direct and extensive discussions with “foreigners” cannot be ignored. Poland, a country (still) relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, has no chance to become more diversified and culturally richer in the future, as demographic and economic indexes show. Today, even though minorities constitute just a small percentage of the so-

ciety, it is impossible not to notice and ignore social tensions resulting from the cultural and ethnic diversity of our country that arise more often. The origins of these anxieties come from a lack of knowledge and fear of “strangers” and “foreigners”. An inevitable necessity to adapt to the coming changes expressed by Bauman requires strong actions, including rendering the idea of multiculturalism one of main trends in the internal policy of the country and a priority in education. The unavoidable phenomenon of “multiculturalism” should be followed by practice which will prepare the society to face other cultures. The coexistence of different nations and cultures “under the same roof” demands not only tolerance, but also respect of “foreignness” and the ability to act jointly. Zygmunt Bauman clearly and undoubtedly draws attention to the lifelong need to learn about ourselves, as well as others.

At the end, professor Zygmunt Bauman, following Tim Jackson, suggests three-stage program to fix post-modern reality: “Making people realize that the economic growth has its limits, belief (enforcement?) of capitalists in being driven when sharing profits not only by “financial conditions” but also social and environmental benefits which community can bring, and “change of social logic” of government so that it provide people with stimulus inducing to the improvement and enrichment of one’s life differently than only in financial way”. Bauman hopes that next generations will know how to better cope with the complicated and stressful world. He criticizes the condition

of today’s institutional education. He disapproves of placing educational systems on the market and reducing government spending on education. Those trends so characteristic for modern times may, according to him, show decreasing interest by the present elite in educating their successors and a lack of care about the future generations. Succeeding governments give up the traditional duty to educate the society, they desert and abdicate in favor of poorly determined market force. The author is also against raising university fees, which is supposed to be “stealing from the country unpolished diamonds”. Thus, next millions of young people will be excluded and deprived of the access to education.

A right conclusion of Bauman’s opinion about traditional educational institutions is the last sentence of a sub-chapter entitles “In search of a real “cultural revolution”. It seems that opportunities to exercise some influence by modern educational system are really limited and they are more and more subject to rules of consumer market games, but still, their transforming power might be great enough to become one of hopeful factors of such revolution” (p. 38). Contrary to the dominant pessimistic feelings, Zygmunt Bauman let his readers believe a little bit in the power and effectiveness of education.

The book’s unquestionable advantage is the ease with which it can be read and the clarity of the subchapters, which are typically only a few pages in length. The author, because of his clear presentation of ideas, has the opportunity to reach a large audience, including those outside the world of

science who usually do not read sociological or philosophical publications. Encouraged by a small volume of the books, the readers will be willing to get familiar with reflections of the modern world made by this remarkable thinker. Looking at the work in a traditional way, it is more literary than scientific. The form of interview heightens dynamics of thoughts and deliberations. Zygmunt Bauman extends, comments, and supplements the statements of his Italian interlocutor, answering questions and removing doubts at the same time. The reader unfamiliar with the author's previous works will be surprised by the excessive pessimism or the tragic nature of descriptions of reality that appear from time to time since it does not go with statements released on every day basis on TV or in movies. Regular readers and experts of Bauman might find repetitiveness and predictability of his ideas expressed in the interview as a kind of weak point of the book. The author, in one of his previous publications, has already presented his deliberations and thesis concerning the world of liquid modernity. He also comments on the most recent political and social event in the same clear and sometimes controversial way. The critical point of view on issues from recent weeks and months renders the book extraordinarily up-to-date and even more intriguing.

The latest work of Zygmunt Bauman is worth recommending to all readers that want to have a look at the condition of the present world, human beings who are not satisfied with the current form of democ-

racy, as well as those who do not perceive or do not want to perceive the imperfections of social life. The book is interesting, inspiring, and provocative. It elaborates cross-sectionally on Zygmunt Bauman's ideas and theories over many years. The review refers only to some of the issues and deliberations of participants in the discussion within which a much broader spectrum of problems and concepts are brought up. The title, *On Education*, also narrows the range of questions and phenomena raised by interlocutors. The book also discusses globalization, consumerism, politics, and many other problems and social phenomena on which Zygmunt Bauman has been working for several years.

Reviewing the book of such a great sociology and philosopher, whose contribution to the promotion of humanities is immeasurable, constitutes a difficult and risky challenge for a young reader. After all, Professor Zygmunt Bauman is an authority that remarkable intellectualists and world-renowned experts of modern times try to match. His popularity extends beyond the world of science. His surname constitutes already the best recommendation to read other works of his impressive achievements. Personally, I was honoured to participate in one of his lectures and become familiar with his powerful narrative style and erudition. I impatiently wait for further publications of this author. I hope that we will have one more opportunity to confront our perception of the world with his visions, concepts, and thoughts in yet another book. Fortunately, he is an extremely productive writer.

Readers will certainly enthusiastically welcome the reviewed work, similar to all of the books previously written by Zygmunt Bauman. It remains to be seen whether the publication will spark discussions about the indispensability of changes and the desired shape of modern education among important figures in politics, sociology, and pedagogy. Will it be inspiring enough to trigger changes though?

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Sylvia Maria Zakrzewska (rev.): Ryszard Radzik, *Białorusini – między Wschodem a Zachodem* [Belarusians – Between the East and the West], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2012, pp. 262.

Is There a Belarusian Nation?

There are few researchers in Poland who have chosen the development of the Belarusian nation and its identity as their object of inquiry¹. Increasingly, readers may acquaint themselves with scientific studies concern-

ing the Belarusian minority in Poland, including the identity of its members². Considering this, introducing the book *Białorusini – między Wschodem a Zachodem* by Prof. Ryszard Radzik is particularly valuable.

The author of *Białorusini – między Wschodem a Zachodem* chose the analysis of the process of nation building and the national identity of the contemporary Belarusian society as the purpose of his research. Prof. Ryszard Radzik is an academic whose research interests mainly include ethnic problems, nation-building processes in the region of the East-Central Europe, and the problems of multicultural societies. The fact that the author had been dealing with the subject of nation-building processes for many years, especially in the borderlines of the former Republic of Poland, as well as with the subject matter of national identity, shows his high competence in this respect. He is the author of many articles and studies in which the issues concerning the aforementioned area of research are brought up³.

¹ It is worth to mention books such as: R. Wyszyński, *Narodziny czy śmierć narodu. Narodotwórcze działania elit białoruskich i buriackich po upadku ZSRR* [The Birth or the Death of a Nation. Nation-Building Endeavors of the Belarusian and Buryat Elites after the Collapse of the USSR], Warszawa 2010, pp. 288; M. Nocuń, A. Brzeziecki, *Ograbiony naród. Rozmowy z intelektualistami białoruskimi* [Robbed Nation. Talks with Belarusian Intellectuals], Wrocław 2007, pp. 212.

² E. Czykwini, *Białoruska mniejszość narodowa jako grupa stygmatyzowana* [Belarusian Minority as a Stigmatized Group], Białystok 2000, pp. 360; A. Sadowski, *Pogranicze polsko-białoruskie. Tożsamość mieszkańców* [Polish-Belarusian Borderlands. Identity of the Inhabitants], Białystok 1995, pp. 270. M. Bieńkowska-Ptasznik, *Polacy – Litwini – Białorusini. Przemiany stosunków etnicznych na północno-wschodnim pograniczu Polski* [Poles – Lithuanians – Belarusians. Transformations of Ethnic Relations in the North-East Borderlines of Poland], Białystok 2007, pp. 175.

³ It is necessary to mention the following book: *Kim są Białorusini?* [Who Are the Belarusians?], Toruń 2002 (also 2003 and 2004), pp. 243.