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Zygmunt Bauman's Window: From Jews to Strangers and Back Again

Bryan Cheyette
University of Reading, UK

In 1986, the year in which I moved to Leeds, Janina Bauman published *Winter in the Morning: A Young Girl's Life in the Warsaw Ghetto and Beyond* (Virago, 1986). I had just completed my doctoral thesis at the University of Sheffield via the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. My thesis was on racial representations of 'the Jew' in British culture and my head was full of new approaches to the historiography of European antisemitism. After an exploratory visit to test out my suitability, I quickly became a neighbour of Zygmunt and Janina. There began a conversation—focusing on Zygmunt Bauman's largely ignored Jewish turn (1986-1996)—that lasted for nearly a decade.[1]

As Zygmunt Bauman acknowledged, *Winter in the Morning* had a profound and lasting impact on him – the first among many of Janina Bauman's readers (along with Griselda Pollock and Janet Wolff): 'I suddenly realized that I had absolutely no understanding about this event' (Bielefeld, 2002: 115). Announcing his metaphorical thinking, the Preface of *Modernity and the Holocaust* understands the 'lessons' of the Holocaust (in relation to social theories of modernity), as a 'window, rather than a picture on a wall. Looking through that window, one can catch a rare glimpse of many things otherwise invisible' (Z.Bauman 1989a: viii).[2] In his Amalfi Prize acceptance speech, Zygmunt Bauman extended the metaphor: '*Winter in the Morning*… opened my eyes to what we would normally refuse to look upon' (Z.Bauman 2000a: 208). Hannah Arendt defined metaphorical thinking, after Aristotle, as seeing 'similarities in dissimilars' (Arendt, 1971: 102-03). There is, in other words, an ethical dimension to metaphorical thinking as it goes beyond the similar, the known, the accepted, in search of a better (albeit 'dissimilar') world. The window enabled Bauman to view the horror of the Holocaust as an 'awesome potential' for barbarism within modern civilization (Z.Bauman 1989a: viii-xiv). This was the largest of his windows and it served as a warning.

Zygmunt Bauman understood that to view human beings with attentive eyes – what Jorge Semprun (a survivor from Buchenwald) called a 'pure fraternal look' (Semprun, 1963: 75-76) – was the basis of moral behaviour. Even a 'rare glimpse' can humanize those who have been

dehumanized. Emmanuel Levinas, taking his cue from the victims of concentration camps, is cited by Bauman in his Amalfi Prize speech: 'Moral behaviour… is triggered by the mere presence of the Other as a *face*, that is, an authority without force' (Z.Bauman, 2000a: 214). The treatment of the stranger, the other, the vagabond (occasional metaphors for 'the Jew') as fully human, or authorities without force, is the foundation of Bauman's ethics. My argument is that Bauman had to first experience power as a practitioner before he could understand the systematic production of those who are deemed less than human. One reason why his work is so compelling, I want to show, is that Bauman is able to write from the position of both the powerless and the powerful. He has experienced the world from both of these ethical and unethical perspectives.

While I engage with Zygmunt Bauman's biography (not least as it impinged on my own lived experience) this is not an autobiographical reading of his work. The notes of caution sounded by the late Keith Tester (2001: 3-4), one of Bauman's earliest and best interlocutors, should certainly be taken seriously. Tester's later summary of Bauman's life-history, however, makes clear that some social theorists have more lived experience than others and this is clearly the case with Bauman *par excellence*: 'By the time he was twenty, Bauman had confronted anti-Semitism, Stalinism, Nazism and warfare' (Tester 2004: 1)[3].

No wonder Zygmunt Bauman did not discount the 'private biography' of the sociologist in his inaugural lecture at the University of Leeds: 'In the professional life of a sociologist his most intimate, private biography is inextricably entangled with the biography of his discipline; one thing the sociologist cannot transcend in his quest for objectivity is his own, intimate and subjective encounter-with-the-world' (Z.Bauman, 1972: 185). There is a critical distinction to be made here between the life story or 'private biography' and the encounter with the world that is lived subjectively. Bauman seeks to understand the pattern of such subjective encounters in a general way which is the basis of cultural rather than quantitative sociology[4]. His encounter-with-the-world *in extremis* cannot be easily transcended, certainly not under the sign of objectivity. Soon after his inaugural, he made clear that 'meaning is accessible only together with experience' (Z.Bauman, 1978: 226), which is why Bauman's silence about his own life-story is not outside of interpretation.

His reticence about engaging with his early life experience as part of the Soviet power-structure, and the extent to which his Jewishness rendered him powerless, is freighted with import. Zygmunt Bauman understood the power of silence better than anyone as he has argued with

reference to the dire consequences of globalization: 'The price of silence is paid in the hard currency of human suffering' (Z.Bauman, 1998a: 5). It was not just Janina Bauman's biography that inspired his 'Jewish turn' but the fact that, after four decades, she broke the silence that had enveloped her escape from the Warsaw Ghetto and Nazi-occupied Warsaw. Her silence, as their daughter Lydia Bauman has shown in her review of her mother's memoir, was profound as it included the family as a whole: 'I never told my husband and daughters the full story of my survival' (J.Bauman, 2006: xi)[5].

Zygmunt Bauman's response, after reading Janina Bauman's account of her survival for the first time, after four decades, was equally profound. *Winter in the Morning* inspired an engagement with Jewish history and culture which at other times was a purely negative experience forced on him by an all-encompassing and totalizing antisemitism. From his family's escape from Poznań in 1939, to the anti-Jewish purge of the Polish Army in 1953, and his forced exodus from Warsaw in 1968, Bauman largely experienced his Jewishness as a form of suffering. In his last interview he sums this up with the memory of being bullied 'throughout my schooling' in Poznań which was: 'permanently, daily… in the company of the other two Jewish boys among the pupils' (Z.Bauman, 2019: 39). These cruel experiences became more rounded during his decade-long Jewish turn as he began to understand his own life-story in the context of more general Jewish history and the history of Central Europe (Tester, 2004: 111)[6]. My article is divided into three parts focusing broadly on Warsaw, Leeds, and Jerusalem as contexts for Bauman's Jewishness under the sign of totalitarianism, exile, and globalism. These are the social, cultural and political contexts in which I locate his shifting and evolving metaphorical thinking and some of his more extreme experiences of power and powerlessness.

Warsaw: Under Totalitarianism

Janina Bauman's second book, *A Dream of Belonging: My Years in Postwar Poland* (1988) is the place where Zygmunt Bauman is represented in all of his splendour as a captain in the Fourth Division of the Soviet-backed Polish First Army: '… there he was, smart and radiant, walking straight towards me. With a broad smile that seemed to bring golden sparks to his eyes' (J.Bauman, 1988: 40)[7]. Bauman's advancement from his relatively poor Jewish family in Poznań (the son of a failed shop-owner) to a captain in the Polish army, awarded the Military Cross for acts of Valour in May 1945, was startling. His background could not have been more different from Janina Bauman's acculturated bourgeois and professional family (lawyers and doctors) in Warsaw. He even had to apologize to the Communist authorities for her bourgeois upbringing so

that he could obtain a marriage certificate (J.Bauman, 1988: 46-47). They also survived the war in radically different ways. Zygmunt Bauman, at the age of fourteen, fled with his family in 1939 to eastern Poland (managing to catch one of the last Russia-bound trains) and then deeper into the Soviet Union where he completed his schooling, began university, and joined the Polish Army in 1943 at the age of 18. At the time of the Warsaw Uprising, in the summer of 1944, Zygmunt Bauman was with the Fourth Division 'on one side of the river, Janina on the other' (Bielefeld, 2002: 113) escaping her fate. Their loving marriage over six decades was an all-too human response to that structural divide between the living and the dead, the human and the non-human (Z.Bauman, 2013).

Bauman was injured soon after the Warsaw Uprising in the summer of 1944 but recovered a year later to take part in two particularly fierce battles, alongside the Red Army, for Kolberg and Berlin. In 1946, he joined the Communist Party and rose rapidly to become, after five years, one of the youngest Majors in the Polish Army. In 1953, however, at the age of twenty-eight, two years after his promotion to Major, he was dismissed from the army after a perennial 'de-Judaizing' purge. This was a result of his father having made a number of enquiries at the Israeli embassy about the possibility of emigration (J.Bauman, 1986: 105).

What this brief biography indicates is that Zygmunt Bauman was a staunch Communist at an early age, and that his Jewishness in the Soviet Union was less consequential than it might have been: 'I was Jewish but nobody took any notice. I joined the Polish Army, returned to Poland and felt myself to be Polish' (Bielefeld, 2002: 114). Given that over a million Jewish and non-Jewish Poles were killed in the Soviet Union during the war, the relative lack of interest from the Soviet authorities in his family's background was life-saving. That he was a member of Komsomol, the Soviet youth organization, would surely have helped his family's chances of survival. The majority of the 250,000 Polish-Jews remaining after the war (out of 3.5 million in 1939) were in the Soviet Union. Many emigrated from Poland in the early post-war years. After surviving the Warsaw Ghetto, and being hidden in the Polish countryside, Janina Bauman's mother and sister planned to immigrate to Israel, not unusually, and she was expected to follow suit. That was why her husband-to-be employed some 'anti-Zionist propaganda' (Bielefeld, 2002: 114) to persuade her to stay in Poland where they married in 1948:

> Unflinching in his faith, yet sound and clear in his reasoning, [he] explained that there would be no room for anti-Semitism, or any other racial hatred, under Communism – this

> fairest of social systems, which would guarantee full equality between human beings regardless of language, race or creed. We were particularly lucky, he stressed, to have been born at the right time and in the right place to become active fighters for this noblest cause. The greatest of historical changes was happening before our eyes, here and now. […] Running away would be a betrayal (J.Bauman, 1988: 49).

Zygmunt Bauman's own recollections as a witness to enormous historical change ('before our eyes') reinforced this account: 'Poland was a completely underdeveloped country before the Second World War. There were eight million unemployed, no hope, an unimaginable social inequality. And we had the idea of creating a new Poland, with all our energy' (Bielefeld, 2002: 113-14). While he understood that people commit 'grave mistakes' in the Party's name, he believed that Communism was the 'most powerful agent of social justice and had to be implicitly trusted. You cannot make a revolution without accidentally hurting some of the innocent' (J.Bauman, 1988: 77). Towards the end of his life, these words came back to haunt Bauman when he bore 'full responsibility' for being part of the Internal Security Corps (KBW) in 1945 (for three years at the age of nineteen) as this was the function of his army unit. As Aida Edemariam (2007: 2) has argued, such 'educational' or 'propaganda' work – writing pamphlets for soldiers – had 'human consequences' as the Iron Fist of Stalin's Soviet Union was brutally subduing Ukrainian opposition and remnants of the Polish Home Army. Bauman was a short-lived Warsaw-based 'political officer' (J.Bauman, 1988: 45) involved in 'counter-espionage' (Edemariam, 2007: 2) in the Stalinist Internal Army (1945-1948).

These revelations from Zygmunt Bauman's early adult years have resulted in a good deal of Polish antisemitism of the 'Żydokomuna' or 'Jewish-Communist' variety. Despite such abuse, which haunted his later years, it is clear that Bauman was not simply a 'victim of totalitarianism' (Jacobsen and Poder, 2008: 6) as is commonly thought. Up until the age of 28, not unlike a few hundred other Polish-Jews, he was actively on the side of Soviet-inspired Communism[8]. To this extent, Bauman was a latecomer to Jaff Schatz's inter-war 'generation' of Polish-Jewish Communists who 'condensed in their life stories the twisted history of the movement as a whole' (Z.Bauman, 1990a: 175). Aleksander Smolar, a Polish-Jew who began as a staunch member of various young communist organisations and ended as one of the purged faculty from Warsaw University, summarizes his and Bauman's early political biographies. Their precarious straddling of boundaries is evident:

> The Jews, grateful to the USSR for saving their lives, socially isolated, culturally uprooted, aware of the resentment or hostility of their environment but dreaming of equality, fraternity, and of giving a good lesson to the 'forces of reaction', made excellent material for the new [Soviet] power (Z.Bauman, 1996: 584).

After being purged from the Polish army in 1953, Bauman and his family were under state surveillance for the following 15 years until they were forced out of Poland in March 1968. As Tester (2004: 6) notes, the 'Communist state in Poland made it nigh-on impossible for one to be Jewish and a builder of the purported *new world*'. This, I believe, is to what Bauman is alluding in his enthusiastic review of Schatz's *The Generation* when he speaks of 'the unbearable pressure to resolve in their personal lives the contradictions produced societally' (Z.Bauman, 1990a: 175)[9]. This lived ambivalence – on all sides of the Polish / Jewish / Soviet / Communist divide – has informed a good deal of Bauman's work not least when it comes to human collusion with, and resistance of, systemic power. By 1965, Bauman was publicly defending the right of students at Warsaw University to criticize Polish socialism. With the publication of his first book, *Leninism and the Problem of Democratic Centralism* (1957), he had long since openly adopted a revisionist Hegelian Marxism (Brzeziński, 2015: 6-7). The support of his students led directly to his dismissal in March 1968. In just two decades Bauman's life-story had run the full gamut from Communist protégé to Communist outcast as *both* legislator *and* interpreter (Bauman, 1987).

It is the lived experience *in extremis* of Zygmunt Bauman's crossings from insider to outsider that is reflected in his metaphorical thinking. As early as *Sketches in the Theory of Culture* (1968) – the book manuscript confiscated as he left Poland – he was writing from the perspective of the marginal: 'The margins of meaning are to an equal degree the Achilles' heel of culture, and its eternal fate. Cultural systems constantly run from the margins and are simultaneously endlessly creating new margins' (Z.Bauman, 1968: 117). This confiscated book was the culmination of work on consumerist culture written throughout the 1960s (Brzeziński, 2018: 77-94). Bauman's preoccupation with cultural marginality was long-standing. His *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978), for instance, is the philosophical apotheosis of the outsider's perspective: 'The totality with which any historical era becomes matter-of-fact, for those who live in it, disappears when looked at by an outsider; it splits into a multitude of facts' (Z. Bauman, 1978: 221). Most crucially, the links between these disparate 'facts' are no longer 'pristine' (*ibid.*)[10]. Here we have an early statement of the outsider or stranger whose presence disrupts and makes impure received categories and supposed 'pristine' or universal ways of understanding the world. Instead of the

insider's perspective, viewing particular experience from the perspective of totalizing systems, Bauman locates the general in the particular (and back again).

Even at this early stage, Zygmunt Bauman was 'finding human values shared outside the space-time of the nation state' (Stonebridge, 2018: 69). Nearly two decades later, Bauman (1996) applied the romantic notion that art was the 'visible embodiment of ideas' (Z.Bauman, 1978: 9) in the work of those alienated and isolated Polish-Jewish poets who, after 1968, could not find a life outside of Poland. This essay was an important rejoinder to another (Z.Bauman, 1969), an understandably gloomy response written soon after his exile from Poland where he imagined any remaining Polish-Jews living in medieval-style ghettos. In that spirit, Marci Shore (2006: 376) argues that 'these poets were destroyed by Marxism, by the choices they made to embrace Marxism'. A more optimistic Bauman (1996: 589) shows, however, that these art-works maintained a rich, private life, untainted by totalitarianism as these poets were the 'avant-garde of their people: a reluctant yet, by necessity, innovative vanguard' (Stonebridge, 1988: 7-8). Such counter-cultural textual homelands are at the heart of Bauman's conception of exile. The remnants of Polish-Jewry, most notably Adolf Rudnicki and Julian Strykowski, can be found in the 'retreat and shelter of the Polish language'. Bauman here is drawing on George Steiner's idea of a 'Textual Homeland' in relation to an exilic Jewish history. (Steiner 1985: 304-27) Elsewhere he related a 'pluralizing hermeneutics' (Z.Bauman and Obirek 2015: 6) to biblical exegetics in stark contrast to its universalizing conventions.[11]

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Polish antisemitism switched for a while to a form of philosemitism, which enabled Zygmunt and Janina to return to their birth-place in 1989 (Z.Bauman 1989c: 46-7). A few years after his return, he was no longer fooled by the warm embrace of the Polish nation-state: 'though split into anti- and philo-Semite camps, the Poles in their majority agreed on the *otherness* of the Jews' (Z.Bauman, 1996: 589). Such 'allosemitism' led to the deification of Rudnicki and Strykowski: 'Their language, originally a shelter, has become the temple of a nationwide cult. Their books are sold out the day they are published. Readers love them, and critics lavish praise on them. For whom do they write? Who reads them? What for?' (*ibid*.).

Bauman's (1996: 595-6) answer to these haunting questions is that these figures and other 'refugees' can only be understood in relation to their always vulnerable textual homelands. What their works reveal is a secret Polish-Jewish history: 'their unfulfilled hopes, promises received but

not kept, and first and foremost their dreams in a world of moral purity… If it is true that assimilation arrived from the outside as a painful pressure, it is also true that it was filled from the inside by the ethical urge'. These were the border zones of culture, between modernity and postmodernity or assimilation and a placeless ethics, which he traced at length in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Z.Bauman, 1991).

The story of Zygmunt Bauman under totalitarianism is a story of contingency and ambivalence (how could it be otherwise?). It begins with Bauman, the insider, who was a witness to 'the greatest of historical changes happening before [his] eyes' (J.Bauman, 1988: 49). This was a window through which the 'victims', 'casualties' and the 'innocent' could be discounted (however 'heart-breaking') in the name of creating a 'better world' (J.Bauman, 1988: 77). He made this argument when Janina Bauman, much to her distress, accidently betrayed a co-worker who was sacked from the state-backed Polish Film Institute. As we have seen, Bauman's own father inadvertently betrayed his son by enquiring at the Israeli embassy for an emigration visa. By March 1968 some of their closest friends, as Janina Bauman (1988: 193-95) recounts with horror, signed letters denouncing Zygmunt Bauman or remained silent in their hour of need. Many others, however, supported them by visiting their home. Forced into the position of outsiders, refused eye-contact by those they thought of as friends, meant that the Baumans experienced the 'privatization of the public sphere' (Shore, 2006: 371). This collapse of the public into the private was a foundational experience that, I believe, influenced much of his social theory. As Gross (1988: 120) rightly maintains, 'The real power of a totalitarian state results from it being at the disposal of every inhabitant at a moment's notice'. The shift from humanity to inhumanity could not have been easier.

Once in exile, Zygmunt Bauman diverted his gaze from the 'greatest of historical changes' (represented by the working class) to the exile, the stranger, the refugee and, eventually, 'the Jews' who were for a short while (*pace* Shelley), in the guise of Rudnicki and Strykowski, the 'unacknowledged legislators of the world' (Z.Bauman, 1978: 9). Here he was closest to Arendt (1941: 141): 'Refugees from every nation, driven as they are from country to country, have become the avant-garde of their own people'. Nearly three decades after being expelled from Warsaw, Bauman could imagine a counter-life as if he had remained trapped in creative misery not unlike his Polish-Jewish compatriots. This small window, overlooking a time and place of inner-exile, was a prefiguring, as we will see, of those living in liquid modern times (Z.Bauman 2000b: 202-16). That is why, in his eighth decade, he could think of his intellectual project in the

following terms: 'I came to believe that the non-sequiturs, ambiguities, contradictions, incompatibilities, inconsistencies and sheer contingencies for which human thoughts and deeds are notorious should not be viewed as temporary deficiencies… They are rather the crucial, constitutive features of the human modality of being in the world' (Z.Bauman, 2008: 235). That which was once marginal became 'constitutive'.

Leeds: In Exile

For Janina and Zygmunt, Leeds was a place of exile where they could recollect in tranquillity. It was where he completed his 'first trilogy' *Culture as Praxis* (1973), *Towards a Critical Sociology* (1976), and *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978) and eventually detached himself from university management, the last institution to keep a hold of him. Once retired, Zygmunt Bauman had yet another life. The catalyst for his intellectual rebirth was Janina's memoir *Winter in the Morning*. It precipitated a sustained and profound engagement with his and other forms of Jewishness which included his continued engagement with Polish history and culture, the history of 'allosemitism' and the Holocaust, Central Europe, and the failure of European nation-states to assimilate the Jewish stranger. Jewish jokes, the Hebrew Bible, and the textual homelands of many and varied Jewish intellectuals were also part of the mix. Zygmunt Bauman's largely forgotten articles of this period, in stark contrast to his books, viewed this project unashamedly through the many-faced prism of Jewish history, creativity, assimilation, estrangement and exile[12].

Between 1986 and 1996, Zygmunt Bauman wrote his 'modern trilogy' *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), and *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991). These works constructed a 'solid' modernity with 'the Jew' as its prototypical stranger (partially ingested by the nation-state) and the exemplar of human waste (those vomited out by civilized society) that Bauman has been exploring ever since. His Jewish turn, however, had an inbuilt tension as Bauman wanted to incorporate the particularity of Jewish history into a more general social theory of modernity. Given that the conceptual Jew was 'ambivalence incarnate' (Z.Bauman, 1998b: 153) there was always an alternative Jewish history which could be invoked.

Two laughter-less Jewish jokes (the opposite of Bauman's laughter-full humour[13]) illustrate these alternatives. They also give a sense of the flavour, range and intimacy of his supplementary 'Jewish' pieces. The first joke can be found in an obscure article in *Polin* (then a new journal) on Polish-Jewish history which Bauman helped to promote (Z.Bauman, 1989b: 21-26):

> Two years of my childhood were marked with my Grandfather's heroic yet vain attempts to introduce me to the treasures of biblical lore… I remember next to nothing from his lessons. One story, however, carved itself in my brain and deeply haunted me for many years. This was a story of a saintly sage who met a beggar on the road while travelling with a donkey loaded with sacksful of food. The beggar asked for something to eat. 'Wait, said the sage, 'I must untie the sacks'. Before he had finished unpacking, however, the long hunger took its toll and the beggar died. Then the sage started his prayer: 'Punish me, O God, as I failed to save the life of this man' (Z.Bauman, 1988a: 297).

I describe this as a 'Jewish joke' (however bleak and cosmic) as being a good person and doing good things are not necessarily the same thing. The joke is also on the young Bauman whose spurious rationality causes him to look down on his unenlightened (still in the ghetto) Grandfather Izak: 'The shock the story gave me… clashed with the mental drill in which my school teachers subjected me… The story struck me as illogical (which it was), and therefore wrong (which it was not). It took the Holocaust to convince me that the second does not necessarily follow from the first' (Z.Bauman, 1988a: 297) that, in other words, perfectly rational behaviour can result in evil.

A few years after this article, Bauman explained that the biblical Job (a good person who was continually punished) demonstrated that rationality did not lead to ethical behaviour: 'How could [God] break the link between virtue and reward or sin and punishment?', Bauman asks in the spirit of his grandfather (Jeffries, 2005)[14]. It was the gap between rationality and ethical behaviour that structured *Modernity and the Holocaust* and his later work. The suffering of both Job and the devout beggar dramatize the limits of rationality which is why the joke haunted the once enlightened Bauman: 'Job's life-story was a gauntlet thrown down to the very possibility of the creatures endowed with reason… feeling at home in the world' (Z.Bauman, 2011: 111-12). It was the inability of the Enlightenment project to overcome 'inexplicable perils' (Jeffries, 2005) that resulted in Bauman eventually distancing himself from empirical, fact-based sociology. This was a conscious methodological choice. That is why he became an Arendtian pariah (Arendt, 1944: 99-122) interpreting many and varied systems of thought. In the guise of a pariah, Bauman was an exiled Jewish intellectual and outsider-figure *par excellence*.

The second joke is taken from Arendt, one of Bauman's favourite interlocutors. In 'We Refugees', Arendt (1943) witnessed a 'highly educated German Jew' addressing a 'gathering of German Jews who had recently escaped across the Rhine': 'We have been good Germans in Germany and therefore we shall be good Frenchmen in France' (Z.Bauman, 2009a: 122). The mirthless joke, needless to say, is that both the speaker and the audience do not acknowledge that the promise of assimilation ('good Germans') had long since failed which is why they had to escape across the Rhine in the first place. As Bauman comments, the audience did not laugh as it was 'not a laughing manner for them but a matter of life and death. That they did not feel like laughing... was the ultimate triumph of the great European journey into the *continent of nations*' (*ibid*.). Rather than the singular pariah figure, this laughter-less cruel joke encompassed the majority of *parvenu* Western European Jews before the war. Arendt's *parvenus* were insider-figures who believed in the promise of assimilation or full integration into the nation state and were mere 'legislators'. As Bauman (1991a: 144) argues: 'Till the end, it was only a relatively small… minority which saw through the self-delusion and declared the project of assimilation dead and buried'. This minority within a minority is a version of Arendt's *pariahs* or Bauman's interpreters.

Bauman's 'modern trilogy' incorporated the outsider and insider perspectives of both *pariah* and *parvenu*. How could one build a general social theory, however, on the shaky foundations of a few pariah Jewish intellectuals? Whereas Bauman's Jewish articles stressed the specificities of uncategorizable individuals and non-national social groups, his trilogy erred on the side of more general concepts. The tension between the general and the particular (sociology and history) was at the heart of *Modernity and the Holocaust*. The particularities of the *Jewish* other (the original European stranger) was hidden under the sign of modernity:

> [B]y attacking modernity head on Bauman was calling into question the faith which most institutionalized sociology had placed in modernity, and by implication challenging it not only to treat the Holocaust seriously as an object of enquiry but to allow the Holocaust to affect its core categories and concepts. In other words, while Bauman's sociology of the Holocaust appears vulnerable to the charge that it sociologizes the Holocaust out of existence by its neglect of its purported object, part of his point is to call into question the status of a sociology which would do such a thing. (Fine and Turner, 2000c: 3).

Bauman has summed up *Modernity and the Holocaust* as follows: '… for every German who killed his victims with pleasure and enthusiasm, there were dozens and hundreds of Germans and non-Germans who contributed to the mass murder no less effectively without feeling anything about their victims and about the nature of the actions involved' (Z.Bauman 2002: 60). Depending on which window we look through we see either Jewish victims (killed mainly in the bloodiest of contingent circumstances) or a cold-blooded state-driven modernity realizing its genocidal potential[15]. Bauman's exclusive focus on modernity is what Fine and Turner critique when they speak of sociologizing 'the Holocaust out of existence by its neglect of its purported object'. Their critique is especially acute when we recognize that the historiography that Bauman relied on, which did locate bureaucratic desk killers at the heart of the genocide, has been surpassed. Most recent historiography foregrounds the many millions killed by bullets in trenches and ravines in the *bloodlands* of East-Central Europe as well as those murdered in industrialized death camps (Snyder, 2010)[16]. Historians tend to stress the local conditions leading to mass murder which can downplay the extent to which this bloodshed was ideological and state-sponsored[17]. As Fine and Turner argue, however, without Bauman's stress on modernity it would have been impossible for sociology to 'treat the Holocaust seriously as an object of enquiry' in the first place.

The same tension between Jewish history and social theory (or the Jew and the stranger) can also be found in *Modernity and Ambivalence*:

> The exile, displacement, ambiguity and non-determination happened to be the lot of the Jews just before it turned into a universal human condition. It was, to be more precise, the lot of a few transitory Jewish generations, suspended in the empty space between a tradition which they already left and the mode of life which stubbornly denied them the right of entry. It was in that empty space that the ultimate contingency and ambivalence of the human existential predicament, and the ensuing curse and blessing of self-constitution and meaning-formation, had nowhere to hide, and thus forced their way into the vision of the human condition—nakedly, ashamedly and obtrusively. It so happened that the homeless Jewish intellectuals were the first to stagger (or rather be pushed) into the place of no hiding. (Z.Bauman, 1991a: 158)

Bauman's pariah's or 'homeless Jewish intellectuals' are those such as – Arendt, Benjamin, Derrida, Freud, Kafka, Marx, Simmel – who were first forced into the non-places of modernity.

In contrast to this *avant-garde*, the experiences of the mass of *parvenu* Jews ('a few transitory Jewish generations') are dismissed as socially conservative as they are fooled by the dream of integration into the European nation-state. The foregrounding of radical intellectuals in *Modernity and Ambivalence* results, as Ben Gidley has maintained, in a failure to engage with wider Jewish resources for political action. According to this argument, Bauman is in danger of writing out the history of Jewish socialism, and other forms of radical politics, in the name of an abstract 'universal human condition'[18]. An order-driven modernity paradoxically excludes the particular Jewish history on which it bases its generalizations (Feldman, 1988: 171-187).

As with *Modernity and the Holocaust*, those aspects of *Modernity and Ambivalence* which Bauman omits (after downplaying German-Jewish history as mere 'case studies') can be found in his supplementary articles. For instance, Bauman (1988) speaks of 'pariah minorities' (rather than individual pariahs) who are able to engage in a 'frontal assault on the very principle of discrimination' (Z.Bauman, 1988b: 70). Arendt's *pariahs* are understood in the wider context of 'the Jewish "special relation" with modern socialism' (1988b: 71). In this article, socialism is not just a form of modernity associated with assimilation but is regarded, from a working-class Jewish perspective, as an alternative to assimilation. A 'ghettoized' Jewish community, both working class *and* estranged, does not follow the parvenu logic of national assimilation. What I now want to show is some of the ways in which the paradigmatic narratives of Jewish history within 'solid' modernity – from the ghetto, assimilation, and ambivalence, to homelessness, rootlessness, and annihilation – informed Bauman's account of 'liquid' modernity.

Global Jerusalem

In 'Thinking in Dark Times' (*pace* Arendt), Bauman imagines a 'cityscape' made up of exiles:

> …the impossibility of feeling at home [in] our liquid modern world in which everyone, though mostly unknowingly, shares in the condition of being in exile… Almost everything that one can say in trying to convey the exile's amorphous and vaguely threatening condition can also be said of all other men and women exposed to the new liquid modern cityscape. (Z.Bauman 2005: 137-38)

Earlier in the book Bauman acclaims the 'condition of being in exile' as a form of 'emancipation' within liquid modernity. To be emancipated within 'solid' modernity, as Bauman (1991) had shown, was to be assimilated or integrated within the nation-state. With the power of the nation-

state dissipated, the exile can become a force for liberation in our commodified times as the exile, by definition, is 'the archetypal condition free of exchange' (Z.Bauman, 2005: 42-43) As always, this freedom was experienced initially by intellectuals and artists before becoming a more widespread potential: 'Exile is to the thinker what home is to the naïve; it is in exile that the thinking person's detachment, his habitual way of life, acquires survival value' (*ibid*.). This 'survival value' is located throughout the cityscapes of the developed world and also becomes Bauman's personal manifesto:

> The resolute determination to stay 'nonsocialized'; the consent to integrate solely with the condition of non-integration; the resistance – often painful and agonizing, yet ultimately victorious – to the overwhelming pressure of the place, old or new; the rugged defence of the right to pass judgement and choose; the embracing of ambivalence or calling it into being – these are, we may say, the constitutive features of 'exile'. All of them – please note – refer to attitude and strategy, to spiritual rather than physical mobility (Z.Bauman, 2000b: 208-09).

Bauman emphasises that the condition of exile, in the commodified world of cityscapes, is 'spiritual rather than physical' metaphorical rather than actual. For actual exiles one has to have a more global sense of 'humanity on the move':

> On the way to the camps, their future inmates are stripped of every single element of their identities except one: that of a stateless, placeless, functionless and 'paperless' refugee. Inside the fences of the camp, they are pulped into a faceless mass, having been denied access to the elementary amenities from which identities are drawn and the usual yarns from which identity is woven (Z.Bauman, 2007: 39-40).

There is a high degree of consistency in Bauman's metaphorical thinking not least in his use of binaries (Davis 2008: 107). Liquid modernity is made up of exiles and refugees which have very different functions. One is on the side of emancipation, the other on the side of suffering; one determines and resists while the other is functionless and placeless; one thinks critically while the other is 'pulped into a faceless mass' and barely lives.

Following the 'modern trilogy', the dialectic between refugee and exile is once again articulated with the undecidable strangeness of the conceptual Jew resulting in lethal dehumanization, on the

one hand, and *avant garde* cultural critique on the other. The conceptual Jew, as Bauman attests, also resisted such binaries in the name of universalism: 'I propose that the conceptual Jew has been historically construed as the universal "viscosity" of the Western world' (Z.Bauman, 1989a: 40): 'the Jews have been the prototypical strangers in Europe… Their strangeness was not confined to any particular place; they were *universal* strangers' (1989a: 85); 'Jewish singularity is the only universal there is; all universality is Jewish' (1989a: 191). The status of this form of racialized universality is, however, limited. It is clearly time-bound, located within the history of solid modernity, and refers just to one version of the 'Jewish' stranger.

Before Bauman's Jewish turn, many other versions of 'the stranger' peopled his work from the 1970s onwards (Marotta, 2002: 46-48). This strand of thought, written from the perspective of the outsider, was summarized as follows: 'the way of resolving the noxious problem of marginals is hardly limited to a specific cultural tradition or historical epoch' (Z.Bauman, 1973: 107). The early universal stranger was outside of particular traditions and histories a position which he returned to in his later work: 'There are universal and extemporal problems when there are "strangers in our midst"—appearing at all times and haunting all sectors to a similar degree' (Z.Bauman, 2016: 9). Does this mean that Bauman's Jewish turn was merely an excursus, one of his oft-repeated detours from the universally traveled main road? Could one even find the small Jewish window in a house full of windows? These questions were already answered by Bauman as he was completing *Modernity and the Holocaust* which, when he looked outside, was a time when actual existing socialism was imploding:

> The 'Jewish question' is a window into the question of *perestroika*. What one sees through this window is that—contrary to many a black and white vision—the stake of the struggle is not just the emancipation of Soviet society from the dead hand of Communist bureaucracy; or the victory of those who want society to shut up or those who want it to speak up; but also the things which that society will choose to say and do once it is allowed to choose (Z.Bauman, 1988c: 15).

Written a year before the fall of the Berlin Wall, as the Soviet Empire in East-Central Europe was beginning to disintegrate, is one of Bauman's more prescient articles. Its first target is a naïve liberal perspective that assumes that Soviet reforms will result in a version of western democracy in Russia. His evidence against this assumption is the extent that Russian nationalists (and nationalists throughout Eastern Europe not least in Poland) hated western liberalism and are

saturated with antisemitism as a result of this hatred. Here is an example of such nationalism cited by Bauman (1988c: 11): 'With whom do you side? With the knot of protesting intelligentsia, a suspect majority of whom are Jews or "Judaizers"? Or with the mass of their unhappy, drunken and demoralized people…? Only nationalism can regenerate and raise this people from the dust of alcoholism and degradation'. The nationalist reaction to *perestroika* is predictably manichaean in contrast to Bauman's warning against a 'black and white' response to the prospects of Russian restructuring. The 'Jewish Question' is a window onto these anti-liberal possibilities – what 'society will choose to say and do once it is allowed to choose' – rather than an end in itself.

Bauman's Jewish window discovers 'many things otherwise invisible' but is not reduced to the newly visible. That is why Bauman is *not* a supersessionist constructing the 'Jewish Question' as 'old' (part of 'solid' modernity) to be transcended in our 'new' liquid modern times (Cheyette, 2017: 424-439). As he argues in *Wasted Lives* (Z.Bauman, 2004: 22-23), waste is an 'indispensable ingredient of the creative process' but this 'miraculous act of extracting the new from the old, the better from the worse, the superior from the inferior' is merely 'instrumental'. Such modernizing processes result in yet more waste (to be accounted for) rather than a neoteric understanding. This argument was more than twenty-five years in the making and became Bauman's methodology: 'Generalizing rather than mere evolutionary superseding is the way to get through to alien forms of life' (Z.Bauman, 1978: 221). For that reason Bauman rejects the notion of 'post X' thinking as a suitable category for sociological analysis as it must mean 'something that has left "X" behind is over and done with' (Gane, 2004: 18) which does not apply to multiple versions of modernity. Rather than a linear form of supersessionism, Bauman's metaphorical thinking proposes that the 'solid' and 'liquid' variants of modernity are interrelated (moving from past to present and back again) which is why he begins with an historic figure such as Walter Benjamin who, in attempting to 'escape Nazi-dominated Europe', noted that 'legal exception and legal norms had exchanged places, that the state of exception had become the rule' (Z.Bauman, 2011: 127). Such are the hidden 'lost possibilities' (Z.Bauman, 1993: 47-57) when interpreting received historical narratives.

Benjamin's 'legal exception' under Nazism prefigures Giorgio Agamben's version of a universal 'state of exception' under liquid modernity which 'tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government within contemporary politics' (Z.Bauman, 2011: 127). These global 'states of emergency' (such as the 'war against terror') illustrates the extent to which liquid forms of racism and exclusion relate to their solid precursors: 'a spectre hovers over the planet: a spectre

of xenophobia. Old *and* new, never extinguished or freshly unfrozen and warmed-up tribal suspicions and animosities have mixed and blended with the brand-new fear for safety distilled from old *and* new uncertainties and insecurities of liquid modern existence' (Gane, 2004: 36 – my emphasis). The task of the sociologist, according to Bauman, is to understand the interrelationship between these two old *and* new phases of modernity. I believe that by taking into consideration Bauman's engagement with his lived and unlived Jewishness as part of the continuous present, rather than locating it exclusively in the past, we can shed light on the period of interregnum somewhere between 'solid' and 'liquid' modernity[19]. Bauman's metaphorical thinking included the ghetto, the camp and the stranger as non-places and non-people inside and outside the Jewish experience. His refusal of any kind of linear narrative and of any kind of identitarianism or communal fixity meant that he neither left the 'Jewish Question' in the past nor foregrounded it in the present. He was aware, however, of its changing nature in liquid modern times (old *and* new uncertainties and insecurities) particularly as three 'Jewish Questions' haunted his later years: Holocaust-inspired victimhood; Israeli treatment of the Palestinians; and Polish antisemitism.

In an unusually acerbic essay, Bauman locates the present-day 'ghost' of the Holocaust as a dangerous form of identity politics:

> What the [Nazis] failed to accomplish when alive, they may yet hope to achieve from the grave. They did not manage to turn the world against the Jews, but in their graves they can still dream of turning the Jews against the world, and thus– one way or another–to make the Jewish reconciliation with the world, their peaceful cohabitation with the world, all the more difficult, if not downright impossible. The prophecies of the Holocaust are not quite self-fulfilling, but they do fulfil–render plausible–the prospect of a world in which the Holocaust may never stop being prophesied, with all the deleterious and disastrous psychic, cultural and political consequences which such prophecy is bound to bring forth and propagate (Z.Bauman, 2000c: 15).

Here, he writes in the spirit of those who oppose the eternal victimhood of the Jews as a nationalist form of identity politics[20]. Being 'possessed' of the Holocaust means seeing the world as 'one-dimensional': 'The only dimension which the ghost of the Holocaust renders visible to the eyes of the possessed (while effacing or removing from sight all other dimensions) is that measured by the degree of Jew-resentment. The world, though, is multidimensional' (Z.Bauman,

2000c: 15). In the twenty-first century, the Holocaust is in danger of becoming one-dimensional, the smallest of windows which assumes that Jews, not least in Israel, are eternally powerless: 'I suppose that my Jewishness is confirmed by Israeli iniquities paining me still more than atrocities committed by other countries' (Z.Bauman, 2004: 11). Looking back at his time in Israel, and the reasons why he left in 1971, Bauman stated in an interview that: 'I was afraid that the new generation at the time was growing in the belief that the state of war and military emergency– treated as a "state of emergency"– was becoming a normal, natural condition' (Shapira, 2013)[21]. Once again old *and* new forms of states of exception apply.

In the same interview, he relates Israeli policies of exclusion to Jewish history: '…the idea of a separation wall as a solution [to the conflict with the Palestinians] would not have occurred to Israeli leaders were it not for ghetto walls being so deeply ingrained in the Jewish collective memory'. Bauman has evoked the ghetto (in its various incarnations) for over fifty years: 'Ghettoization is an organic part of the waste-disposal mechanism. The ghetto serves not as a reservoir of disposable industrial labour but a mere dumping ground for those for whom the surrounding society has no economic or political use' (Z.Bauman, 2001: 120)[22]. That he invoked 'the ghetto' at a time when he had rejected a 'post-X' postmodernity points again to the extent to which Jewish history enables him to traverse the old/new or pre/post frontierzone between solid and liquid forms of modernity.

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, when visiting Polish universities (usually to receive honorary doctorates), Bauman was the object of abuse as a '*Żydokomuna*' or 'Jewish-Communist' by ultra-nationalist xenophobes[23]. He was once again in exile from Poland and he refused any more honours. One of the most common forms of post-War Polish antisemitism (Gross, 2006: 192-243) was, in a cruel repetition of history, again applied to Bauman. However hard his 'sociological hermeneutics' (Gane, 2004: 23) attempted to generalize from Jewish experience he was driven back into the particular. He could not escape his fate, in the words of Hannah Arendt (1944: 297), of being an old-new 'Jew-stranger', both particular and universal. His pluralizing hermeneutics, however, always moved back and forth and back again from the specific to the general. Such is the extent to which his encounter-with-the-world as a Jew (and as a Stranger) turned into a rather large window in his many-windowed house of metaphors.

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[1] This essay is a companion piece to my 'The Dignity of Janina Bauman: A Personal Reflection' *Thesis Eleven* 54 (2011): 51–62. My thanks go to Mark Davis, Jack Palmer and Griselda Pollock for their most generous contributions to this article.

[2] I am grateful to Julia Hell who has stressed the significance of Bauman's use of the visual as a metaphor (J. Hell 2010: 125-54).

[3] See Keith Tester for the ways in which Bauman's version of modernity was influenced by his life under Stalinism (K. Tester 2004: 82-106). For a more general discussion of Bauman's uses of his life-experience see M. Davis 2008: 9-30.

[4] I am grateful to Griselda Pollock for this argument.

[5] Lydia Bauman reviewed *Winter in the Morning: A Young Girl's Life in the Warsaw Ghetto and Beyond* (1986) on the grounds that her mother's life in the Warsaw Ghetto was as much a revelation to her as to everyone else (L. Bauman 1986: 59-61).

[6] For Bauman's most sustained account of Central Europe see (Z. Bauman 2013: 67-82). See also Izabela Wagner-Saffrey's forthcoming biography of Zygmunt Bauman who looks in detail at the antisemitic history of Poznań, Bauman's birth-place.

[7] Janina Bauman, *A Dream of Belonging: My Years in Postwar Poland* (1988) changes the names of the main protagonists to protect their friends and relatives still living in Soviet-ruled Poland. Zygmunt is thinly disguised as Konrad in the memoir.

[8] See Gross 2006: 226-31 for a detailed analysis of around 400 Polish-Jews (accounting for regular purges) in the higher echelons of Soviet-backed organizations. Numbers are tiny when compared to the ubiquity of the 'Żydokomuna' discourse.

[9] Bauman, generalizing from the Polish-Jewish experience in his liquid phase, refers to Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society* (1986). Beck argued that it was the task of all human beings within a 'new modernity' to find 'biographical solutions to systemic contradictions' (London: Sage, 1992), 137. I am grateful to Mark Davis for this point.

[10] For an extension of this argument based on Bauman's sociological hermeneutics see Davis's article in this Special Issue.

[11] In a 2009 interview on 'A Fluid Society and the Jews' Bauman describes the Hebrew Bible (a routine reference in his later years) as uniting 'its interpreters in a shared focus of attention [which] does not demand consensus… The Bible provides unity without demanding uniformity; it is a standing invitation to thinking and to take responsibility' (Z. Bauman 2009b: 4-5). This is what he meant by 'pluralizing hermeneutics'.

[12] I have referred to a large selection of these articles on Jewish themes but there are still many more that could have been included. The Bauman Institute, University of Leeds, has a comprehensive collection of this work. Jack Palmer kindly helped me track down many of the most important items.

[13] Irena Bauman testified recently to her father's life-long sense of 'Jewish humour' at a symposium at the Bauman Institute, University of Leeds (16-17 January, 2019).

[14] Bauman's grandfather Izak plays a surprisingly active role in his discussion with Stanislaw Obirek (Z. Bauman and S. Obirek 2015) *passim*.

[15] For an extension of this argument see Jack Palmer (2018).

[16] See David Cesarani (2016) for an account of this new historiography.

[17] Norbert Elias, for instance, in *The Civilizing Process* (1939) speaks (after Weber) of the State's 'monopoly in the exercise of physical force' (xiii) in the contemporary period which emboldened individuals to engage in racial violence against targeted populations as this was seen as legitimate and state-sanctioned. *The Civilizing Process* influenced Bauman and it is worth noting that it was written in German during the rise of Nazism while Elias was in exile in London. Pollock and Davis once again have helped me focus this argument.

[18] I am most grateful to Ben Gidley for letting me have sight of his unpublished 'Modernity and Jewish Experience: On Zygmunt Bauman's Sociology of the Jewish Question'.

[19] It is not a coincidence that Bauman (2009a) entitles his lecture and subsequent essay, 'Jews and Other Europeans: *Old and New*' (my emphasis). See also Mark Davis (2011).

[20] See, for instance, Esther Benbassa (2010).

[21] Bauman is referring to a Hebrew-language article which he wrote for Ha'aretz in August 8, 1971, 'Israel Must Prepare for Peace'.

[22] For the earliest reference to the ghetto that I can find see Bauman (1969). I plan an article on 'Bauman and the Ghetto' tracing the radically different (and not so different) ways he uses the word over his oeuvre.

[23] In 2013, for example, Bauman turned down the Honorary Doctorate at the University of Wrocław. This event was targeted by the far-right *Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski* (NOP, National Rebirth of Poland). Following the announcement of the honorary doctorate Bauman was attacked on social media with comments such as 'I cannot stand the Jewish Bolshevik,' 'Death to the Zionist plague of mankind' and 'Down with Judeo-Communism', according to the *Gazeta Wyborcza*. See https: //www.jta.org/2013/08/19/global/polish-philosopher-rejects-honorary-degree-over-anti-semitic-attacks [Accessed June 5 2019].