

Emissaries from the lesser world

Over a decade before the current wave of refugees, Zygmunt Bauman used to quote western gutter press in his writing: *This immeasurable human river is poisoned with disease and terrorism which threatens our way of life. Blair must say 'enough', repeal the Human Rights Act and begin the detention of all illegals until their status and history can be verified.* Anti-immigrant sentiments are not new, but their power has intensified greatly over the recent years. Enmity towards immigrants, however, always presents a certain paradox: on the one hand, it is necessary to secure the borders but on the other, we seek access to cheap human labour force. This way those who are excluded also become the exploited.

Sated residents of the West are not interested in the reasons for which other people migrate from their homelands, why they might be moved to attempt to breach our borders. Immigrants are the bearers of bad news. They remind us of the fragility of our own safety, security and privilege – and that of our entire existence.

Similar dismissal stigmatises homeless children or drug addicts. The underclass is a vivid illustration of the depth to which people can stumble, fall or allow themselves to be pushed – writes Bauman in *Collateral Damage*.

Whilst we deal with the 'detritus' of our own societies through ostracism, when it comes to arrivals from other nations, we do it through the mechanisms of state. Therein lies another paradox because whilst we want to reduce state control to allow the invisible hand of free market to aid the development of capitalism, at the same time we expect state protection when it comes to immigration. Although there is a group of arrivals who appear to engender our compassion – war refugees. Others who suffer poverty or hunger, often as a result of western interests in the natural resources of their homeland, in other words those described as "eco-

nomic migrants" do not have a place inside our fortress. Is it possible that we must count Hunger Games among the grand principles guiding developed western democratic societies? *Three quarters of the world are desperately poor and will inevitably travel here to gain share in our wealth. [...]. One could say: 'fuck poverty', but it's somewhat suicidal* – said Andrzej Stasiuk in an interview with *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Western compassion has stalled. How are we to view the Other? As a threat? Can someone's poverty, misery or calamity be a threat to us? Or are we again talking about the threat to the emotional comfort of the wealthy, sated Westerners who do not want to assimilate bad news?



Refugees on the beaches of the Spain island Fuerteventura. Fot. Juan Medina

So far our Ministry of Interior Affairs decided to blanket block entry of such foreigners into Poland. In 2016 majority of refusals to enter pertained to Chechens. Those camping in the Brzesc train station have now been refused 46 times. Among them are families with small children who have been living at the station for over half a year. Volunteers from the National Forum of Independent Education and the International Humanitarian Initiative opened a democratic school in the camp. They are trying, at all costs, to provide these children with a place to play and learn in very difficult circumstances. According to the authorities Chechen immigrants pose a threat to the Polish state, despite the fact that, after the second Chechen war, 90 000 Chechens under international protection did not institute sharia law nor did their presen-

ce ever collide with our legal system. Today's Chechnya is a totalitarian state in which kidnappings and torture are an everyday occurrence. It appears that this is not a sufficient reason for the current government to tolerate the presence of Chechens on our soil.

To make matters worse changes are being planned to the resolution regarding providing sanctuary to foreigners on Polish soil. Plans which were not made known either to the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights or the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The proposed changes amount to limiting the ability of individuals to seek asylum in Poland. This means that people escaping war, hunger, severe poverty who find themselves in our country, will not have the same right to life as the rest of us. Will we concede even more power within our fortress to security services, so they may protect us from the 'deluge of others'? Or will we find it in ourselves to make a simple human gesture?

The fact that such gestures are getting ever rarer can be seen in the decision of the Polish government to refuse entry to 10 Syrian orphans, supposedly because they represent a terrorist threat. The children were to spend some time in Sopot at the invitation of the city authorities willing to provide health care needed due to war injuries and psychological trauma. Presumably supporters of PiS (Law and Justice Party) won't forget to pray for children during the next church mass.

Meanwhile the tragedy of Syrian and other refugees in Greece continues: thousands of people are camping in tents in freezing weather. There have recently died of cold. They are left to their own devices, surviving only with the help of a few volunteers. Will Europe slide back the bolt?

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