

Recenzje / Review

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***Obcy u naszych drzwi* [*Strangers at Our Door*], by Zygmunt Bauman, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2016, ss. 96.**

***The Sun, the Sun Blinded Me*, by Anka Sasnal and Wilhelm Sasnal, premiere: July 2016, the 69th Locarno International Film Festival**

Back to the blinding sun

“**A**ll in all, as things stand now and promise to be standing for a long time to come, mass migration is unlikely to grind to a halt: neither for the lack of prompting nor for the rising ingenuity of attempts to stop it. [...] We can park our chair on the beach as often as we please, and cry at the oncoming waves, but the tide will not listen, nor the sea retreat” (Bauman, 2016, p. 11)¹ – this sentence, the tone of which is so characteristic for *Strangers at Our Door* by Zygmunt Bauman, could provide the shortest review of the new movie by Anka and Wilhelm Sasnal. The premiere of their *The Sun, the Sun Blinded Me* took place two months after the publication of Z. Bauman’s latest book, dedicated to the phenomenon of migration and refugees as a part of historical dynamics. The Sasnals’ film, at least in some respects and, of course unintentionally, can be considered an artistic illustration of “moral and migration panic” diagnosed by Z. Bauman in *Strangers at Our Door*, that has been shaking Europe since 2015. *The Sun, the Sun Blinded Me* is an extremely literal portrayal of the thesis that the refugees escaping “from the bestiality of wars and despotism or the savagery of famished and prospectless existence have knocked on other people’s door since the beginnings of modern times” (Bauman, 2016, p. 14). The black man from the Sasnals’ movie, having arrived in Poland from an unknown country not so much knocks on the door but rather, once brought to a flat of a young Pole, does not want to leave it, keeps drawing attention, is still present – sitting on the floor or on the doorstep, constantly making the “host” think about his “guest”. Suddenly, another Stranger appears in the life of Rafał, the alienated employee of a corporation, living in the empty heart of a big city. Tracking Rafał’s decisions, his handling of the unexpected visitor, we recognize in them “the anxiety

¹ Z. Bauman cites from: Winder, 2013, p. xiii. Translating all the citations from *Obcy u naszych drzwi* [*Strangers at Our Door*] by Z. Bauman have been agreed with the original: Bauman, 2016b.

process” that was so clearly captured by Z. Bauman when he noted that: “Those people with whom we are used to cohabiting in our neighborhoods, on city streets or in work places, we divide ordinarily into either friends or enemies [...]. Of strangers, however, we know much too little to be able to read properly their gambits and compose our fitting responses – to guess what their intentions might be and what they will do next. And the ignorance of how to go on, how to deal with a situation not of our making and not under our control, is a major cause of anxiety and fear” (Bauman, 2016, pp. 14–15). When a continuous increase of the tension between Rafał and the refugee seems to be unavoidable, it is just then that it turns out that the Pole was only experiencing a panic attack, imagining that he was imprisoned in his own home with an unknown black man, that he did not know how to talk to the Stranger, felt strangled in his presence, that he tried to fight him, but the bizarre scuffle only intensified his powerlessness. Rafał was terrified by his “vision” of the acceptance of the responsibility for another human being and as Meursault from the novel *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, on the plot of which the storyline of the movie was based, blinded by the sun murdered the refugee, whom he met, in fact, not in his own apartment, but on the beach... Z. Bauman in *Strangers at Our Door* tries to prove that the policy of “hastily erected walls, barbed-wire fences” (Bauman, 2016, p. 8) may only be able to ensure some temporary, provisional “solutions.” The directors of *The Sun, the Sun Blinded Me* present the same conviction. The refugee, the Stranger, who poisoned the comfort of Rafał’s life order living so intensely inside the Pole’s psyche, though “erased from reality,” murdered as an inscrutable being, did not disappear. When Rafał goes to jail the Stranger still accompanies him in a small cell, staring into the eyes of his own murderer.

Having acquainted ourselves with *Strangers at Our Door* and *The Sun, the Sun Blinded Me* we notice that the work of A. Camus has cut deep into the thinking of both the Polish sociologist and the Polish artists. The recognition that in his writing Z. Bauman broadly borrows from many philosophers, novelists or essayists is not anything new. The author of *Liquid Modernity* has very often emphasized, especially in his writings or statements from recent years, that the Camusian “I rebel, therefore we exist” (Camus, p. 22) not only provides him a kind of consolation, protects him from haughtiness and impassivity, but can also be an invaluable source of hope for our difficult times. “If I did not feel like that, I would cut short any disputes or refuse to engage in them; I would give up worrying about what others think and get on with my own business” – the thinker admits, emphasizing his fidelity to the ethical considerations of A. Camus (Bauman, Obirek, 2015, p. 44; see: Bauman, 2010, pp. 182–185; Bauman, Kubicki, Zeidler-Janiszewska, pp. 174–177). The principal characteristic of Z. Bauman thought, which can be summarized

as follows: “The truth is that to be human does not mean accepting the world as it is given, or accommodating to it as best as one can. Rather, the lesson here is that being human may require a negation of the prevailing orthodoxies of the social world” (Davis, 2008, p. 40), is a derivative of, inter alia, deep rumination over the contents of A. Camus’ *The Rebel* (Tester, 2014, pp. 46–47; Bauman, Tester, 2001; Tester, 2002). In the pages of *Strangers at Our Door* those “orthodoxies” are mendacious, deceitful, politically motivated and fear and hate provoking campaigns whose main slogan is that “some evil threatens the well-being of society” (Bauman, 2016, p. 8). Whereas, concerning the Sasnals, they always wanted to work together on a movie connected with *The Stranger* by A. Camus, seeing a man of XXI century in the character of Meursault from A. Camus’ masterpiece (Camus, 2012). The directors noticed their similar loneliness and alienation on many levels. A. Camus’ 1942 novel helped many generations of readers develop the answer to the question: “who is the Stranger?” Now came the time for recourse to this work as to the, among others, starting point for the diagnosis of the figure of the Stranger existing in the Polish mentality. “There occurred the matter of immigrants – we wanted to take a stand [using the story written by A. Camus]” – during the meeting with the audience after the Polish premiere of *The Sun, the Sun Blinded Me* the artists explain that life on the edge of reality, this specific type of lack of involvement (accompanied by paralysis at the thought that some event could disrupt the routine of our days) was a safe haven for the figure from A. Camus’ novel just as it is a safe haven for Rafał (Sasnal, Sasnal, 2016; see: Sasnal, Sasnal, 2016b; Majmurek, 2016).

Without problems we detect yet another similarity between the matter of the recommended book and the movie. Z. Bauman weaves a lot of citations from newspaper articles into the six chapters of *Strangers at Our Door*, risking “an involvement with an all too ephemeral *politics of the day* discourse” (Schneider, 2016), and *The sun, the Sun Blinded Me* is a movie as much brave as hazardous, because it can appear to be most of all a journalistic comment on contemporary events which take place in Poland and Europe. It is worth mentioning that A. Sasnal put in the scenario a lot of repeated clichés or absurdities overheard via Polish television or the Internet. Z. Bauman’s book does not give us clear clues on how to dialogue to prevent people from choosing indifference in the face of “migration panic”. The Sasnals do not discover anything new about our situation, presenting the same popular symptoms of the “migration confusion” which we all know from TV and the Internet, if not from our environment. Yet for everyone who believes that from a deep awareness a wise practice emerges, an intellectual and artistic encounter with Z. Bauman and the Sasnals will certainly bring a lot of benefits. After reading *Strangers at Our Door* and watching *The Sun, the Sun Blinded Me* it is im-

possible not to ask yourself the questions: why am I taking side with A. Camus as Z. Bauman and the Sasnals do, or why does holding on to A. Camus' strategic principle seem to me a regrettable utopian idea?

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