



On Education

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

Conversations with Riccardo Mazzeo

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polity

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I

Between mixophilia and mixophobia

Riccardo Mazzeo I'd like to open this series of conversations by recalling the day almost two years ago when you first agreed to talk about education with me. It was a present you decided to offer to the 4,000 people who were going to gather in Rimini at our congress, The Quality of School Inclusion, in November 2009. You could not come to the congress because your absolute priority was to stay close to your wife, Janina, who was seriously ill. All the same, you allowed me and a cameraman to pay you a visit and record the precious video of your twenty-minute lecture.

You talked of the crisis of contemporary education, a very peculiar crisis because, probably for the first time in modern history, we are realizing that the differences among human beings and the lack of a universal model are going to be lasting. Living with foreigners, being exposed to the other, is nothing new but in the past it was believed that those who were 'alien' would sooner or later lose their 'difference' and be assimilated by accepting those universal values that were, in fact,

our values. But nowadays this has changed: people who move to another country no longer desire to become like the natives, and the natives in turn have no wish to assimilate them.

So what happens in a city like London, where there are almost 180 diasporas who speak different languages and have different cultures and traditions? It is no longer a question of being tolerant, because tolerance is another face of discrimination; the challenge is at a higher level, about creating a feeling of solidarity.

There are two opposite reactions to the phenomenon in contemporary cities: mixophobia, the typical fear of being involved with foreigners, and mixophilia, the joy of being in a different and stimulating environment. The two conflicting trends are more or less as strong as each other: sometimes the first one prevails, sometimes the second. We cannot say which of them will carry the day, but in our globalized world, interconnected and interdependent, what we do in the streets, in primary and secondary schools, in the public places where we meet other people is extremely important not only for the future of the place we live in but for the future of the whole world.

As you know, we have been working to achieve school inclusion for more than twenty-five years, convinced that educating all children together, including those with special needs, is the best training children can receive for mixophilia. We were also able to take up the challenge because Italy is the only country in the world where full inclusion has been in force for almost forty years. But on the one hand inclusion has never been fully applied, and on the other hand some Italian politicians are trying to discredit public schooling, where

‘communist teachers transmit ideas to our children that are different from the values we received from our parents’ (to quote Berlusconi).

In your *Conversations* with Keith Tester (2001) you quoted Santayana’s sentence ‘Culture is a knife plunged into the future’ and defined culture as ‘a permanent revolution’. Do you think education needs to be fed not only with knowledge but also with critical thinking?

Zygmunt Bauman Nothing to take away from your words, Riccardo, and not much to add! I fully agree with you that conversion and assimilation, that early modern recipe for dealing with the presence of strangers, is not on the cards in the present context of a multicentred and multicultural world. The need to develop, to learn and to practise the art of living with strangers and their difference *permanently* and *daily* is inescapable for another reason as well: however hard state governments may try to prevent them, migrants are unlikely to stop knocking at a country’s doors and those doors are unlikely to be kept closed.

‘Europe needs immigrants’: that was bluntly stated by Massimo D’Alema, currently president of the European Foundation for Progressive Studies, in *Le Monde* of 10 May 2011 – in direct dispute with, in his words, ‘the two most active European pyromaniacs’, Berlusconi and Sarkozy. Calculations to support D’Alema’s verdict could hardly be simpler: there are 333 million Europeans today, but with the present average birth rate (still falling all over Europe) that number will shrink to 242 million in the next forty years. To fill that gap, at least 30 million newcomers will be needed – otherwise our European economy will collapse, together with our

cherished standard of living. 'Immigrants are an asset, not a danger', D'Alema concludes. And so the process of cultural *métissage* (hybridization), which the influx of newcomers is bound to trigger, is unavoidable; a mixing of cultural inspirations is a source of enrichment and an engine of creativity – for European civilization as much as for any other. All the same, there is only a thin line separating enrichment from a loss of cultural identity; for cohabitation between autochthons (indigenous inhabitants) and allochthons (those arrived from elsewhere) to be prevented from eroding cultural heritage, it needs to be based on respect for the principles underlying the European 'social contract'. . . the point is that this unwritten and unsigned contract needs to be respected by *both* sides!

How can one secure this respect, though, if recognition of the social and civil rights of 'new Europeans' is so stingily and haltingly offered, and proceeds at such a sluggish pace? Immigrants, for instance, currently contribute 11 per cent to Italian GNP, but they have no right to vote in Italian elections. In addition, no one can be truly certain how many newcomers there are with no papers or with counterfeit documents who actively contribute to the national product and thus to the nation's well-being. 'How can the European Union', asks D'Alema, all but rhetorically, 'permit a situation in which political, economic and social rights are denied to a substantive part of the population, without undermining our democratic principles?' And since citizen duties come in a package deal with citizen rights, again, in principle, can one seriously expect the newcomers to embrace, respect, support and defend those 'principles underlying the European social contract'? Our politi-

cians muster electoral support by blaming immigrants for their genuine or putative reluctance to 'integrate' with the autochthons' standards – while doing all they can, and promising to do yet more, to put those standards beyond the allochthons' reach. On the way, they discredit or erode the very standards they claim to be protecting against foreign invasion. . .

The big question, a quandary more likely to determine the future of Europe than any other, is which one of the two contending 'facts of the matter' will eventually (but without too much delay) come out on top: the life-saving role played by immigrants in a fast-ageing Europe, a role few if any politicians thus far dare to emblazon on their banners; or the power-abetted and power-assisted rise in xenophobic sentiments eagerly recycled into electoral votes? The official ministerial pronouncements and statistics of voting intentions suggest one tendency, while the daily habits and slow but relentless 'subterranean' changes in life's setting and logic at the grassroots seem to point in another direction.

After their dazzling victory in the provincial election in Baden-Württemberg – leaving the social democrats trailing and, for the first time in the history of the Bundesrepublik, putting one of their own, Winfried Kretschmann, at the head of a provincial government – the German Greens, and notably Daniel Cohn-Bendit, are beginning to ponder the possibility that the German Chancellery in Berlin could turn green as soon as 2013. Who will make that history in their name? Cohn-Bendit has little doubt: Cem Özdemir, their sharp-minded and clear-headed, dynamic, charismatic, widely admired and revered co-leader re-elected a few months ago by 88 per cent of the party members who voted. Until

his eighteenth birthday, Özdemir held a Turkish passport; then he, a young man already deeply engaged in German and European politics, chose German citizenship because of the harassment to which Turkish nationals were bound to be exposed whenever they tried to enter the United Kingdom or hop over the border to neighbouring France. One wonders: who, in present-day Europe, are the advance messengers of Europe's future? Europe's most active pair of pyromaniacs, or Daniel Cohn-Bendit? Not being a prophet and believing that history is made by people and doesn't exist until it has been made by them, I can't answer that question. But it will have to be answered, in words as much as in deeds, by all of us alive at present. And it will be answered – by our choices.

For more than forty years of my life in Leeds I have watched from my window as children returned home from the nearby secondary school. Children seldom walk alone; they prefer walking in groups of friends. That habit has not changed. And yet what I see from my window has changed over the years. Forty years ago, almost every group was 'single colour'; nowadays, almost none of them are . . .

José Saramago: ways of being happy

Riccardo Mazzeo Reading what you say about the need, if the European ‘social contract’ is to be really effective, that autochthons and allochthons *both* respect it, and what you add in the following paragraph underlining politicians’ manoeuvres to sabotage the possibility of immigrants really reaching the standards needed to be ‘integrated’, I recalled the words José Saramago said to some friends about the economic crisis a few days before he died. He said that we all, governments and citizens, know what is needed to get out of the crisis, but being willing to do it is far from easy. And we are not inclined to take that step because in order to change our life we would have to change our way of living and this is something we usually ask to others to do, certainly not ourselves. For Saramago, the absolute priority is the human being, the other who is the same as I and has the right to say: ‘I’.

In his last *Caderno*, day 17 of July 2009, Saramago writes that each of us has a few stains of emigration

on his or her family tree, either one's father or one's father's father. Many Portuguese were drowned trying to swim across the River Bidasoa to get from Spain to France, a place they imagined as a paradise. The survivors had to submit to menial jobs, bear humiliation, learn unfamiliar languages, and suffer social isolation, but they proudly built a future for their descendants. Some of these people haven't lost and haven't wanted to lose, the memory of the bad times, and we must be grateful to those who successfully safeguarded the respect due to their past. A majority, by contrast, feel ashamed of having been ignorant and poor, and behave as if a decent life could begin for them only on the gorgeous day when they could at last buy their first car. The person who used to be exploited, and has forgotten it, will exploit other people; the person who used to be looked down on, and pretends to have forgotten it, will now do the same; and here they all are together, flinging stones at the people arriving at the bank of the Bidasoa. 'Verily I tell you', Saramago concludes, 'that there are ways of being happy that are simply hateful.'

Both you and Saramago have sometimes been accused of being pessimistic about the future of the world (because people don't understand, I suppose, that you state the preconditions for saving the world), but I see that Saramago was writing the Charter (Carta) of the Duties when he died, and it seems to me that drawing up such a document has to imply the word 'trust'. And to talk about you, I think of the last sentence of your first answer, like a beautiful poem, and filled with trust.

Zygmunt Bauman You bring me back to sombre and sad aspects of our being-in-the-world; and, alas, you are right again: 'a person who used to be exploited, and has forgotten it, will exploit other people; the person who used to be looked down on, and pretends to have forgotten it, will now do the same'. . . I have not yet found, though I keep looking for, a case of victimization that has ennobled its victims instead of stripping them of humanity (Janina concluded from her own cruel lessons that remaining human under inhuman conditions is the most difficult of feats). The memory of one's own suffering, and even the present-day phenomenon of a contrived, second-hand memory of sufferings not experienced first-hand, does not make people more generous, kind or sensitive to other people's pains. On the contrary, it prompts the descendants of victims to be cruel to the descendants of the perpetrators of cruelty, and it is used as a certificate of pre-payment for one's own insensitivity and a blank cheque for one's own inhumanity. Violence, inhumanity, humiliation and victimization set off what Gregory Bateson called 'schismogenetic chains', genuine Gordian knots ruggedly resistant to being broken or cut however artful the sword you brandish. Saramago focused on Portugal, the country closest to his heart, but the tide of xenophobia rising in Portugal is not an exception, but a rule. Once they turn into importers of labour, almost all countries that previously exported labour (such as Ireland, Italy, France, Sweden, Norway, Denmark or the Netherlands) manifest the same inclination. We can watch, thus far helplessly, a tide of neo-tribal sentiments swelling from Copenhagen to Rome and from Paris to Prague, magnified and beefed up by the deepening alerts and fears of

the ‘enemy at the gate’ and ‘fifth columns’, resulting in a ‘besieged fortress’ mentality manifested in the fast rising popularity of securely locked borders and doors firmly shut.

Gregory Bateson and his third level of education

Riccardo Mazzeo Thanks for mentioning Bateson's 'schismogenetic chains', admirably explained in your 2008 book *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* I had been impressed by Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, on which Richard Kopp based another book, *Metaphor Therapy: Using Client-Generated Metaphors in Psychotherapy*, which I edited and translated into Italian in 1998, finding it very useful in my activity as a counsellor. The principle of the metaphor as 'connecting structure' is vividly evidenced by the wonderful metaphors contained in your work, and the influence of Bateson's life on his theory makes me think of you, too. Your own dramatic experience in 1968 brought you to your second life in Leeds and induced you, thirty years later in Prague on the occasion of your *honoris causa* degree, to accept Janina's advice not to choose either the British national anthem, 'because in Great Britain you remained in a way a foreigner', or the Polish one, 'because Poland had deprived you of Polish citizenship', but to opt instead

for the European national anthem: ‘Alle Menschen werden Brüder’. You mentioned this episode of your life in *Identity*, with Benedetto Vecchi, and you devoted the last chapter of *Liquid Modernity* to the hard but fruitful condition of being uprooted and forced to get the hang of a new world: as Sartre stated, we are not what others make of us, we are what we do with what others have made of us.

Gregory Bateson had an awkward father, William Bateson, who was also the famous father of genetics. His eldest brother died in World War I, when he was a little boy, and this is something that can happen. But his other brother, Martin, committed suicide on the day of the eldest brother’s birthday, when Gregory was eighteen, and so their father’s expectations for a son to reincarnate him as a genius fell entirely on the only one remaining, Gregory.

Gregory Bateson’s ambivalence in trying to differentiate himself from his father and the impossibility of giving up his true interest in biology may have fuelled his later discovery of the ‘double bind’, an approach that changed psychiatry; his internal psychic conflict helped to drive his discovery of schismogenesis among the Iatmul, in New Guinea. He realized that schismogenesis was not the only possible option: his research in Bali, Indonesia, revealed that this model was not in force there, but the schismogenetic process had unfolded within his personality, cropped up in his intimate relations (after his marriage to Margaret Mead, he married again twice) and it remained the focus of his interest in culture and politics. We are all immensely grateful to Bateson for his insightful studies, but I mention his painful relationship with his father to introduce