

Between Assimilation and Exclusion: Refugees in a double bind
By Professor Zygmunt Bauman

- Differences between asylum seekers, refugees and stateless people are purely administrative.
- Refugees can be seen as a “window” into wider issues, such as globalisation
- We live in a “liquid” modernity, i.e. the times in which we live are never the same and keep changing shape
- “Wasted” or “redundant” humans are a product of modernisation
- Firstly, the production of the social order, as we know it today, has also created minorities and outcasts
- Secondly, economic progress has led to a decline in labour force and less need for it
- Our planet became full – not in a demographic sense, but in a political sense
- This means, there are no “empty spaces” for redundant human beings to move to. They have no place in the world
- Europe has been the forerunner of modernity and used to send their “wasted” people to uncivilised, “empty lands”, such as Canada and Australia.
- But now that modernisation happens everywhere, wasted humans have become a universal phenomenon
- It used to be possible to find global solutions to locally produced problems, BUT now problems are produced globally. As Bauman points out, “Local solutions to global problems simply don’t exist.” But who is going to implement solutions?
- Globalisation has dismantled borders and communities, which has made humans more vulnerable
- Negative implications of globalisation are free trade, criminality, drug traffic, terrorism, etc.
- No collective action is made to liberate people since there are no institutions that deal with people that are being persecuted or displaced
- A “positive” globalisation has hardly started so we don’t have a clear prospect to find global solutions to globally produced problems
- Weak states are engaging in substitute solutions, such as “neighbourhood imperialism”: Ethnic cleansing, i.e. people are pushed away to make more room
- The Western weapon industry supports these processes of displacement and genocide
- Countries try to “sell” their excessive population away
- Refugees are like shipwrecks trying to get to the land. Their decision to leave their countries are not unfounded – they are rational. People simply seek bread and water where there *is* bread and water.

- Social problems should be resolved through a better provision of social services, but those services are slowly re-classified as implementing law and order. An example of this is the criminalisation of unemployment.
- The increased penalisation and mindset of exclusion leads to the classifying of people as "sub-human" and the creation of an "under-class", which means these people are underneath any class system and should be eliminated
- Example: Homeless people are being moved away from the city centres in order to make them invisible
- American phenomenon is the "hyper-ghetto": a place for people who do not have room in society
- We have anxieties about our own redundancy
- Refugees are a "god-sent" as they embody our fears and are everything that we are afraid of becoming
- Bauman: "They are in here, but not *of* here."
- Concept of "Narrenschiiffe" (Michel Foucault): Mentally ill people used to be put onto ships, which sailed the seas forever. The sea would thus be a "blank space", where these redundant humans could drift. According to Bauman, refugees embody precisely this "permanence of transitoriness".
- Many Palestinians are born into refugee camps and die in them. Refugee camps are nowhere places. There are camps along the Rwandan/Congolese border, which are actually bigger than townships, yet they do not appear on any map. Bauman calls this "territorially fixed extraterritoriality" and human beings' ultimate nightmare
- Despite their extraterritoriality, refugees are not free to move wherever they please. They can't cross border and have no way to go
- Again, there can only be global solutions to global problems, but no authority is there to stand for refugees and defend their human rights
- Refugees have nowhere to turn to and don't know where to complain
- There should be a divorce between politics and power
- The nation-state always trickles down to individuals rather than collectives
- Human rights lack muscles and teeth as they are still too linked to nationalities (for instance many French Jews during the war were protected by the French government, but only because they were French. No German or Eastern European Jews were protected from the Nazis.)
- The word "global community" is purely fictitious. There is no community. The term is only used for political purposes, for example, when Iraq was invaded
- Conclusion: All institutions were made to the measure of nation-states, but instead they should be made to the measure of humanity.