of the region on the tracks – a serious and difficult task since the rolling stock was old and needed a lot of servicing.

At the time of Bauman's apprenticeship, there were only two categories of workers in many such Soviet installations – the very experienced, who were old, sick or both – and the beginners, too young or sick to join the Army. 'Things at the frontline (at those lucky moments when there was a definite frontline) went from bad to worse', Bauman writes:

> The Germans seemed to be set to cross the Volga. Almost everywhere, the Red Army was in retreat, losing many of its men and its arms. Nowhere else was the might of Germany being resisted. Russia fought alone the united industrial might of Europe. In our workshops the few old men and keen, but inept adolescents of my and still younger age took upon themselves to the job, on non-existing factories, of dozens of other specialised plants now bombed out of existence or hastily refurbished to serve the immediate needs of the army. The old craftsmen made miracles without complaint yet with a lot of intense, obstinate passion. If an important part or ingredient were missing, they would conjure up a substitute. We worked in buildings which themselves badly needed repair. The ventilators [had] long ceased to work, and the shops were filled with corrosive smoke and poisonous fumes. No one seemed to mind – least of all the old craftsmen, who knew all too well what this meant to their lungs. For me, awe and admiration are the feelings I remember best. I felt overwhelmed by the spectacle of human solidarity and dedication. I heard no grumbling and I did not grumble myself. We were all hungry and tired. We all spoke in hoarse voices and coughed up phlegm. We strained our eyes, bloodied and itching. Our hands were covered with burns and scars. Yet there was meaning in everything we did, and we had our share of joy and happiness when the impossible job was done and a dead locomotive was restored to life. After three months, I left the workshops with an injection of romantic utopia. . . . Not all inhuman conditions de-humanize. Some disclose humanity in man. (Bauman 1986/7: 41–2)

The experience left Bauman with a deep sense of admiration for the old workers who transmitted their knowledge with passion and patience to youths who gathered it in with great enthusiasm. Working conditions were difficult but the satisfaction of performing the tasks was enormous. Each restored train car was a needed victory at a time when the Red Army was on the defensive across the front. All of this went into the construction of an idyllic and utopian image of the universe of factory and workers, where men worked without competitive pressures, career struggles or rat race. The middle-aged men were gone, the war was everywhere, the country needed a huge effort, and they made it. Bauman saw something deeply human in

the relationships among workers in that environment. This experience could be seen as a kind of fieldwork – a practice that completed the theoretical basis of his communism, acquired in the Komsomol. It was an important life lesson.

Becoming a university student – an outsider once again

When the summer of 1942 ended, Bauman left the rail workshop to attend university in Gorki, the district's main city. Just before Bauman boarded the train on his journey, his father, to his surprise, placed a letter in his pocket. It was the kind of letter that many parents give their children on occasions such as this – an important and powerful message from a father to his only son on his departure from home.

From Bauman's manuscript, we learn:

> This was a love letter. I was leaving my parents now, starting my own and different life – and Father hastened to let me know all he had felt over the years, the role I played in his life and what sort of man he dreamed I'd be.
>
> There was also fatherly advice. Life wisdom father wished to share with his son. The only capital he could bequeath. His only gift. Remember – he wrote: your people, your people only, can appreciate you and your work. Remember – he wrote; you are a Jew, and you belong to the Jewish people. . . .
>
> My people? Who were my people? And why were they mine? Simply because 'I belong to them?' Must I belong? And do I really want to belong? And if I did want to belong, why it ought to be a nation – something I have been cast into without my participation, by other people's selection? And why must there be a selection? Selection means rejection, division, antagonism – precisely the things I suffered from and found most repelling. I could not know whether the Jews were in this respect different from other 'peoples'. . . . Perhaps all the suffering comes from the need to compare whose blood is redder. Perhaps the evil is in the comparing itself. Perhaps the real issue is to stop comparing altogether, once for all. I guess the evil sits in the very compulsion to select and in the curse of being selected. Once one wants to belong, one cannot help setting off others whom one refuses to admit as one's kin. Belonging cannot but mean dividing, and setting double standards. Where standards divide, morality ends. Drawing the line between us and them, we efface the line between good and evil. (Bauman, 1986/7: 42–4)

These were Bauman's reflections some forty-four years later, not necessarily what he was thinking on the road to Gorki. Yet it was

indeed so that, at this point in his life, Bauman chose to turn away from his father's advice of strong belonging to 'his people' and to make a life with a different philosophy. 'Above all, it shows how little I knew and understand at the time', he writes:

> I seemed to believe that moral will would overpower the dead weight of tribalism. And I seemed to be unaware that in the fight against the overwhelming odds, the moral will may well lose its only source of strength and only title to respect: its ethical purity. If that happens, there is little to choose between inhumanity of the will and inhumanity of the tribe. . .. All this I was still to learn, and learn the hard and unenviable way. (Bauman, 1986/7: 42–4)

We know from scientists who work on memory processes that people select the information they wish to keep, while discarding the rest. We are not like computers that save all data – emotions play a major role in this activity and remembering occurs through a selection process. What Bauman recalled best about this episode were the emotions provoked by reading his father's words. Yet the extract of the letter cited above offers a precious basis for analysing the process of Bauman's identity construction, the constant tension between the two aspects of his self-identification: as a Jew and a Pole. Bauman's was a continuing process of accepting their co-existence – a kind of 'impossible challenge' that he took on during his entire life. He disagreed with his father, and intentionally disobeyed – filial opposition that could be seen as a typical attitude of adolescent rebellion, or an example of the awaking agency that enables young adults to become independent.

Of course, it was not merely a rebellion against his father. Bauman was also taking a particular stand within a defined politico-historical context. The difficulty of the challenge was imposed by Bauman's situation. Being at once a Pole and a Jew was not a problem for him, but it was for the people in his environment. Yet he had made a decision. Not that it had come to him suddenly in the train. His stance undoubtedly resulted from a long process nourished by his previous experiences: rejection by Polish society, belonging to Hashomer Hatzair, acceptance by schools in exile, Komsomol activity. At this moment, Bauman was one of a not small number of young Polish Jews who believed that any return to the prewar situation would mean returning to the status of a second-class citizen. The belief in a better future defined Bauman's response to his father's careful advice. The advice was rejected.

This was to be one of several important turning points in Bauman's life. It occurred at a moment of departure and the beginning of adult life – a symbolic passage between childhood and manhood. Meditating upon Maurycy's letter on the train from Shakhunia to

Gorki, a distance of some 200 miles, Bauman was a young man in transition.

In autumn 1942, Bauman enrolled in the University of Gorki in physics, but his time there was short-lived. He might have remained for several years if he were a Russian citizen, but the infamous 'Paragraph 11' forbade foreigners from settling in Russian cities such as Gorki. The authorities discovered their mistake during the second month of his fall semester. As soon as they did, Bauman had to leave immediately, and study through correspondence.

The few short months in Gorki were no holiday. 'In the north of Russia winter starts early, and in the middle of October Gorki was a frozen city', Bauman wrote in his manuscript:

> There was no fuel, and central heating was set at a level barely sufficient to prevent bursting of water-pipes. We stayed in our coats all day long and did not take them off when we went to bed. I remember the difficulty of turning the pages of the book with hands never taken out of thick gloves without fingers. . . . [W]ith nineteen other students, I was allocated a bed in a room meant to accommodate four; most of the student halls had been converted into military hospitals. We did not mind the overcrowding; on the contrary this added a degree or two to the temperature of the room. The focal point of the room was an electric kettle, always kept boiling unless the electricity was cut off (as it was for at least eight hours every day). When writing essays or doing our equations, we warmed our hands pressing them to the kettle or to a cupful of hot water (Bauman, 1986/7: 44–5)

Life conditions were hard, but only a very small elite could enter the university, after a very strict selection process. Once accepted, students did not pay for their university studies, so what amenities they obtained in these harsh conditions were free, at least, under the system established by the October Revolution. Everything was free, but there wasn't much of anything. Power restrictions cut electricity for several hours a day. Conditions were crude. Long-time inhabitants of the region were used to them, but this was only Bauman's second winter in the area.[13] Not only the living conditions were hard – so was the social environment.

> Among the students, I was again the youngest. All others were either war veterans with wounds which disqualified them from further military service, or physically unfit who could not be enlisted. I was the only fit and healthy person; a circumstance which would have made me feel guilty, if not for the hope that my share of the war effort was still in front of me. I was not to be given time to contemplate my position, however. After two months of studying and freezing, the house administrator called me to her office to tell me that I had no right

> to live in a big and important city like Gorki and I must return to Shakhunia immediately. (Bauman, 1986/7: 45)

Those who didn't respect Paragraph 11 ran the risk of immediate deportation, usually to territories more frozen even than Gorki. Zygmunt took the train back to his parents' domicile, which in the meantime also had changed. The Baumans had moved to Vakhtan, where Zofia was offered the supervision of feeding hundreds of lumberjacks. Vakhtan was a small settlement lost amid woods and marshes, 15 miles farther north than Shakhunia. In this forest village, everything was made of wood: houses, roads, even sidewalks.

Bauman's new life involved studying university-level courses while working in the forest city. 'My love for physics ended very quickly', he recalled: 'I would spend no more than 10 days or two weeks on campus, and return only to take exams. I never attended courses again, there was no possibility of it. . . . I had textbooks, I was supposed to learn the material, then return to pass the exams, which were given orally at the time.'[14] In a biographical note written for the University of Warsaw, his then employer, in 1955,[15] Bauman blamed health reasons – rather than Paragraph 11 – for his departure from Gorki. He probably omitted the true cause to avoid giving any appearance of criticizing this rigid and unjust aspect of the Soviet regime. There was, however, some truth in his official declaration: suffering under the wartime regime of poor nutrition, Bauman contracted scurvy.

Archival sources provide a variety of accounts of Bauman's activities during this university-by-correspondence period. According to a military document found in the IPN files, from summer 1943 to January 1944, Bauman 'worked as a teacher at the Vakhtan Middle School'.[16] In our interview, Bauman said he was not a regular teacher but worked in the local library. A CV written for the Party, however, states that he was hired as a librarian in Vakhtan 'with the objective of becoming a teacher'.[17] Finally, in his extensive CV from 27 March 1947, there is again a reference to teaching: 'I started work in Lesprodtorg [national timber-production firm] . . ., after a few months I took the post of teacher at the Vakhtan school where I lectured mathematics in grades 6–8'.[18]

In his private manuscript Bauman focused on another important activity that took all his free time:

> Just how far Vakhtan was from everywhere else I learned the moment I entered the local library. To my utter amazement, I found there a full, unexpurgated chronicle of Soviet literary life since the early twenties. The successive waves of purges and auto-da-fes which maimed and truncated all public libraries I visited before, clearly bypassed this

> one. Nobody seemed to have cared about the danger of poisoning the minds of the forest people who communicated with the rest of the country only through trainloads of timber. The few months I spent in Vakhtan remained in my memory above all as the time of constant excitement and elation. At no other period of my life did I devour so many books. I swallowed full editions of Russian classics, printed in the times of scarcity and high hopes on newsprint, now yellow and crumbling. I devoured the Soviet literature of the twenties and the early thirties. I pored through long forgotten philosophical and historical debates of the country still free enough to disagree and debate. I read the authors whose very names had acquired the awesome power of sucking the person who pronounced them in public into the same non-existence into which they themselves had been cast. (Bauman, 1986/7: 45–6)

In the Stalinist USSR, all intellectual resources were constantly 'cleansed'. Freedom of speech did not exist and the authorities imposed the topics for discussion. Isolated as it was, Vakhtan's small library had escaped waves of 'purification', and Bauman was lucky to have access to these forbidden works without restriction. They would add to the large and diverse body of knowledge that young Bauman had accumulated despite the war and Soviet controls. This kind of activity – intensive reading of banned authors and forbidden literature – is one of the most important components of an independent education, and a basis for developing the capacity for critical thinking. It was a rare, almost impossible activity in this place and time: 'the nights belonged to books. I just imbibed them without digesting; I guess they needed time to incubate. But incubate they did. Slowly yet inexorably I began to see around me things I did not see before, even when looking them straight in the face' (Bauman, 1986/7: 46).

His reading would have a liberating power, opening his eyes to new worlds and perhaps offering a counterpoint to the powerful Stalinist propaganda. The books would help Bauman think differently, and provide a more nuanced observation of reality. Between the books and his prewar and refugee experiences, Bauman certainly would have perceived things differently from most inhabitants of Vakhtan. The Baumans lived in a village of forest people, whose job had great significance in the Soviet Union at that time. Timber was one of the country's major resources, and the war industries needed it desperately. Many villages existed solely to provide these wood products. They were often isolated, tiny communities – sometimes very cold places during the long winters. The work was dangerous and difficult. Bauman's father had become an accountant for the state forest company, and his mother became the manager of public catering at Lesprodtorg. Zygmunt managed to land a position with

the same company, as an organizational manager. With a 10th-grade certificate, he qualified as an 'intellectual employee', in the terminology of Eastern Europe – which enabled him to get a job less painful than those performed by physical workers:[19] 'This was severe winter, with temperatures never rising above minus 30C for several months. During the day I worked in an office or walked long forest paths to reach distant lumberjack outposts and collect reports on the number of trees felled and the volume of logs cut' (Bauman, 1986/7: 46).

At the Institute of Sociology in Warsaw in the 1960s, Bauman sometimes surprised his students by using examples from the forest industry in his lessons; he knew a lot about lumbermen, their tools and the different species of tree. His Sociology students were unaware that this knowledge came not through reading but, rather, life experience.[20] Many years after the forest job, it continued to influence Bauman's writing about social development and the lives of people working in difficult conditions.

He spent his final months in Vakhtan working in the forest office by day, while reading intensively at night. He did his best to get the latest news from the front and politics. During the war, the newspapers, especially *Pravda* (Truth), and radio were the two principal sources of information. It was from the radio that Bauman learned about a group of Polish communists, as he recalled in his manuscript:

> I heard on the radio (there were loudspeakers in every house, connected by cable to the only wireless set, kept in the local library) that in Moscow an Association of Polish Patriots was formed, and that the first action it undertook was to publish a newspaper *Free Poland* and a journal *New Horizons.* Immediately, I sent an application for membership and my subscription for both publications. The first copies soon arrived. I vividly remember the shock. The intoxication. The wild explosion of feverish fantasy. I read what I received from the first page to the last and back again. The titles of both publications merged in my mind [and] became one: Poland free, horizons new. Free Poland became my new horizon. With bated breath I read about the future dignity of my country. I read about things I knew before yet poorly understood: about community strife and hatred arising from poverty and injustice; about life without prospects and dreariness without end that rebounded in mutual suspicion and jealousy; about the nation tearing itself apart instead of coming to grips with its true problems, like lack of freedom and democratic rights. I read about things I did not think about before – about Poland of the future, a loving mother for her suffering children, a country of liberty and justice. I read about a dream country with room for everybody, however weak and wan. A country without hunger, misery and unemployment. A country in which one man's success will not mean another man's defeat. A new

> Poland, yet at the same time a Poland which for the first time will be true to herself. In an equal and confident society, Polish culture, Polish letters, Polish language would finally blossom and reach the heights never dreamt of before. A free Poland of new horizons would be the pride of the free world.
>
> I had my share of glasshouses. (Bauman, 1986/7: 46–7)

While this expression is unclear in English, in Polish it refers to the 1924 bestseller by Polish writer Władysław Żeromski (*Przedwiośnie* (The Spring to Come)), in which the protagonist, Cezary Baryka, a Russian-born Polish noble, obtains a patriotic education from books and stories. 'Glass houses' are the symbol of utopia, the idealized country, which shatters as Cezary comes to Poland for the first time and sees the huge disparity between reality and what he has learned from his father. In Żeromski's book, utopia could be built by revolution or through progressive hard work and social change. This, in effect, meant communism or socialism.

'I had my share of glasshouses', Bauman wrote. In other words, he bought into the dream of the believers, and clung to the ideal of a Poland of peace and justice. This 'intoxication', as Bauman described it, worked very efficiently upon the susceptible, and who could be more susceptible than a Jewish refugee, shivering in the temple-pounding frost of the Russian forest in winter, with little food and ever-present war? The ideas of the Union of Polish Patriots (Związek Patriotów Polskich – ZPP) conveyed by *New Horizons* and *Free Poland* presented an attractive mirage of a liberated Poland, a fantastic promise of a happy ending to a horrible war and prewar injustices. Bauman resonated deeply with the great diapason that sounded from the pages of *Nowe Widnokręgi* (*New Horizons*). I do not think this is surprising. In fact, it would be really incredible if this dream had failed to seduce young Bauman. Many older, more experienced people were taken in. The dream was beautiful, powerful, supremely alluring.

New Horizons was a socio-literary journal, published fortnightly,[21] edited by the Polish communist and writer Wanda Wasilewska (who also led the ZPP). With *Free Poland* (*Wolna Polska*), launched on 1 March 1943, it was, according to writer Stefan Jędrychowski,[22] one of two voices of the ZPP. Of course, the ZPP and its publications supported Stalin and, after the eruption of his conflict with the London-based government-in-exile, the ZPP became the Polish political partner of the Soviet government and the Red Army.[23]

In the middle of February 1943, the Polish communists Wasilewska, Hilary Minc and Wiktor Grosz were received by Stalin 'to discuss matters related to the further activity of the Polish left-in-exile'.[24] One of the results of this meeting was the publication of

journals 'to increase the possibilities for Communists and left-wing Polish activists to influence Poles in the USSR both from a propaganda and ideological view point' (Nussbaum, 1991: 184).[25] The first Moscow[26] issue of *New Horizons* (no. 6, 20 March 1943) covered the news about the 25 April breaking of diplomatic ties between the government-in-exile and Stalin. Number 9, which Bauman probably read in the forest of Vakhtan,[27] contained a speech by Wasilewska.[28] The following excerpt helps to explain how Bauman's thoughts were shaped in the context of his 'intoxication':

> [Polish Prime Minister Wladyslaw] Sikorski's government-in-exile does not represent the Polish nation. . . . We believe that in the near future we will be able to march shoulder to shoulder with the Red Army, demonstrating our love of Poland, our right to Poland, with weapons in hand under the Polish banner of Polish troops. . . . Remember that you represent Poland and the Polish nation – you represent it in the way that our nation's greatness and heroism, and the greatness and importance of the moment, require of us.[29]

During the summer and autumn of 1943, Bauman read enthusiastically about Poland's past, future and current events. He read articles in the two publications that were critical of the prewar government's policies and political system, on the conflict between the government-in-exile and Soviet authorities over the Katyń massacre,[30] on the Anders Army's departure to the Middle East – which Soviet media presented as a betrayal – and other issues related to the war, not excluding the campaigns of terror and extermination against Poland's Jewish population. He also read articles dealing with Poland's future, with its negotiated border on the Curzon Line,[31] and the creation of a Soviet-influenced political system organized around leftist values.

The Polish papers also carried daily news about Polish military units being prepared to fight alongside the Red Army. The Polish communists, on 8 May 1943, had officially compacted with Stalin to organize a Polish division. A communiqué stated, 'The Soviet Government has decided to comply with the request of the Union of Polish Patriots in the USSR to create a Polish division named after Tadeusz Kościuszko on the territory of the USSR, which is to fight jointly with the Red Army against the German invader. The formation of the Polish division has already been started' (Nussbaum, 1991: 185).[32]

This military unit became a kind of surrogate for the missing Anders Army, which merged with the British Military Forces. After travelling through Asia and the Middle East, the Anders Army took part in operations in North Africa and Southern Europe as part of the Allied Forces. To keep up the new Soviet–Polish unit's morale,

both Polish newspapers published inspirational speeches addressed to the soldiers. Bauman, who was nearly 18 years old, was influenced by the following words from Wasilewska:

> Beloved, dearest ones! We're going to the front. In a few days, we will start to march towards where all our dreams lead us – we will go to Poland. Our path leads straight to the country. . . . Soldiers! . . . I believe that the First Division will enter free Polish soil, will be the first to give our brothers the slogan: 'Grab your weapons!' I can hear these shouts already, I can see the tears of happiness and joy with which they will greet you there – at home. You will start the construction of a new Poland, Mother Poland, not a stepmother, a Poland in which men will be respected, a Poland that we dream about and are ready to die for. Today, your relatives and families that would say goodbye to you are not here with us. Therefore, take from me everything that your dearest could wish you. Receive from me the words of Poland's love for a Polish soldier who goes to win.[33]

It is no wonder that a speech like this would have inspired the young Bauman. Its tone was purely anti-fascist and nationalistic, and free of Stalinist cant. As Klemens Nussbaum noted: 'The paper avoided any kind of remarks that might betray its Communist profile. Its style was characterized by a very patriotic tone. National accord and unity were urged regardless of political opinions' (Nussbaum, 1991: 184). The trend to downplay communist language was perceptible at this time in most of the Soviet media. Włodzimierz Szer, Bauman's compatriot in exile, noted of the war context:

> It was obvious to the naked eye that as the Germans advanced, the primitive party propaganda changed in its definition of the nature of the war, which was no longer about the defense of Soviet power, communism and the Bolshevik party – these terms were rarely heard. Instead the deadly danger threatened Russia, our mother and country; and that was true. The sublime songs broadcast all over the radio talked about the holy nation's war.[34] (Szer, 2013: 126)

The battle of Stalingrad lasted five and a half months, and nearly all fresh recruits were sent into the fight. In early February 1943, the Soviets finally won, taking tens of thousands of German prisoners of war. The victory, psychological as well as military, was celebrated throughout the Soviet Union – the first major victory against the German Army. 'All Russia breathed a sigh of relief', Szer recalled:

> Hitler proclaimed national mourning and Stalin did something really clever in his own terms (not quite like him): he ordered a parade of prisoners of war on Red Square in Moscow near the Kremlin wall.

> They marched with their *Feldmarschall* [army chief] and generals, and threw the banners of their regiments, brigades and divisions . . . under Stalin's feet, who received the parade. All the newspapers carried photographs of this incredible military parade. (Szer, 2013: 128)

Zygmunt Bauman, home-schooling university student and tree counter in a small forest town, and a passionate reader of *New Horizons* and *Free Poland*, certainly must have celebrated this victory as well. It created a huge change in the lives of even ordinary people, as Szer recalled over fifty years later:

> After the Stalingrad victory, every daily message from the front in the newspapers ended with the words 'For Stalin, for Homeland'; it sounded just like 'For Tzar. For Russia'. Suddenly, in many places, churches were opened, under the principle of 'When in fear, God is there.' To Czykowka, where a small orthodox church had served for years as a warehouse for artificial fertilizers and other material, came an order from the regional [communist] party committee in Baranów to throw out fertilizers and clean up the building . . . church paraphernalia was brought in so people could celebrate their religion. I do not know where the objects of worship came from . . . people joked – or maybe it was not a joke – that they were brought from the Museum of Atheism. (Szer, 2013: 127)

In the Soviet Union in 1943, people experienced more freedom than previously, as all the regime's efforts were directed at the front – a popular front, moreover, with the Western powers – towards victory over Germany. All men over 18 were called up for the Red Army. In Europe, this threshold usually signifies the start of adult life, and during wartime, for innumerable families, it was a very sad celebration. Zygmunt's eighteenth birthday occurred on 19 November 1943. Even as a non-USSR citizen, he was required immediately to join up. Failure to fulfil this obligation was considered desertion. And, during the Great Patriotic War, desertion was punished by death. But no such idea entered Bauman's head. He'd been trying to become a soldier for months, and at age 18 he was all too ready to join the military. His initial assignment, however, was not to serve as a soldier in the Polish Patriot division, but rather as a militiaman in Moscow.