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Metaphor and the Sociological Imagination of Zygmunt Bauman

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Abstract

Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017) consistently oscillates between the roles of sociologist and novelist throughout his works, and, unlike many other sociologists, he makes conscious and deliberate use of metaphor. The aim of this article is to examine the metaphorical concepts in Zygmunt Bauman's imagination by employing the "metaphor identification method" and drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Lakoff and Johnson as well as Paul Ricoeur. The findings of the study reveal that Bauman employs metaphors at both the ontological and methodological levels. For Bauman, metaphor is not merely a descriptive tool, but a *research strategy* for examining abstract and intangible aspects of human life such as inequality, globalization, ethics, suffering, love, solidarity, and oppression. The overarching and central metaphor in Bauman's thought is liquidity. His other metaphors are subordinate to the metaphor of liquid modernity and are coherently interconnected within this conceptual constellation. He believes the old order is collapsing in the transition from solid to liquid modernity, but the new has not yet been born. Moreover, many of Bauman's metaphors exhibit temporal, spatial, and binary characteristics. These metaphors allow Bauman not only to describe the complexities of modern society but also to make them *experientially accessible* and *intellectually comprehensible*. Bauman's notion of a liquid society can be seen as a metaphorical extension of concepts such as Giddens's "late modernity," Ulrich Beck's "risk society," and Lyotard's "postmodern." However, Bauman reconfigures and re-narrates these ideas through a distinct theoretical framework inspired by Paul Ricoeur.

Keywords: Metaphor, Bauman, Imagination, Solid Modernity, Liquid Modernity.

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1. Introduction

The origins of metaphor and allegory can be traced back to periods preceding ancient Greece, and their roots lie more in philosophy and theology than in literature. Most allegories are religious and have been narrated as stories and parables in monotheistic traditions. Thinkers like Plato (428-348 BCE) held a dual and complex attitude toward metaphor. At times, Plato employed metaphor, most notably in the Allegory of the Cave, yet at other times, he strongly criticized it, arguing that poets lead the soul astray and therefore should have no place in the "ideal city" (Plato, 370 BCE/2000).

Others, such as Aristotle (384–322 BCE), viewed metaphor as an ornament of speech. He was the first to systematically articulate the concept of metaphor in his two seminal works: *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. In *Poetics*, Aristotle categorized metaphor into four types: (a) from genus to species, (b) from species to genus, (c) from species to species, and (d) by analogy. Among these, he considered the fourth type—the analogical metaphor—as the most significant. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle compares metaphor to simile, offering his famous example: "He is a lion." This formulation was echoed for centuries in the traditions of rhetoric and eloquence. For instance, he notes: "The relationship or proportion between elements A and B is like that between C and D," which implies a form of analogical reasoning (Aristotle, 1909: 63).

Some thinkers, such as Max Black (1909–1988), emphasize the interactive aspect of metaphors. For him, metaphor is a tool for meaning-making and thinking, composed of a primary subject (the *principal* subject) and a secondary subject (the *subsidiary* subject). The primary subject is what the metaphor is about, while the secondary subject is that which is used to describe the primary one (Black, 1962: 39). Lakoff (1941) and Johnson (1945) also argue that the use of metaphor is not confined to the realm of literary studies; rather, it permeates everyday life, including the domains of thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003: 259).

In the texts of social sciences and sociology, terms such as *symbol* and *representation* have often been preferred over the concept of *metaphor*. Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), Jean Baudrillard (1927–2007), and others have primarily employed the concept of representation, whereas sociologists of the symbolic interactionist school, such as Herbert Mead (1863–1931) and Herbert Blumer (1900–1987), have emphasized the notion of the symbol.

Nevertheless, classical and modern sociologists have used metaphorical concepts—consciously or unconsciously—because most concepts in the social sciences are abstract. Sociologists have frequently resorted to metaphorical expressions to make such concepts more concrete and comprehensible.

Social theorists have not held a uniform stance on metaphor. Initially, metaphor was not regarded as particularly significant, often limited to rhetorical function or accepted as a harmless conceptual or analytical device. However, resistance to metaphor declined over time, and its usage expanded among modern sociologists. Zygmunt Bauman, the Polish sociologist, emphasized the use of metaphors in the social sciences. Some have even referred to him as a *"poet of sociology"*, and his analyses make extensive and notable use of metaphor (Wolff, 2013: 176).

Bauman was fully aware of the metaphors he employed and deliberately utilized them in his analyses of social phenomena. In his view, metaphor is not merely a decorative or rhetorical tool, but a *mode of knowing*—akin to what Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996) terms an "*absolute metaphor*". For Bauman, metaphors are more than conceptual or explanatory instruments; through them, he gives voice to socially excluded individuals (Jacobsen, 2013: 211). Within Bauman's lens, metaphor acquires a critical and emancipatory quality. The use of metaphors provides researchers with the opportunity to access the key to understanding Bauman's concepts and theories and to advance in the process of deciphering them.

2. Research Objectives

Metaphors are a linguistic form of interdisciplinary thinking and, through imagination, transfer concepts from one conceptual domain to another. The primary aim of this article is to understand and reconstruct Bauman's perspective on metaphor, as well as to examine the metaphorical foundations of his core concepts from an interdisciplinary approach—a synthesis of sociology, metaphorical linguistics, and social philosophy. Furthermore, the article seeks to identify and analyze the various types of metaphors present in Bauman's works.

3. Significance of the Study

Analyzing Bauman's metaphors allows scholars to bridge the gap between abstract

theoretical frameworks and the lived experience of everyday life, offering a more tangible understanding of existence in a volatile and liquid modern world. Metaphors not only reveal Bauman's worldview but also clarify his epistemological stance. In this context, liquidity emerges as a central key to interpreting Bauman's theory, linking core concepts such as love, identity, consumption, politics, and responsibility. Furthermore, metaphors provide a rich array of concepts, ideas, interpretations, and hypotheses, thereby broadening and deepening the scope of understanding.

4. Literature Reviews

According to the reviews, no research with a metaphorical approach has yet been carried out on the works of Zygmunt Bauman in Iran. However, several studies have been conducted outside Iran from a metaphorical perspective. The most notable of these include:

Internationally, several scholars have engaged with the metaphorical dimensions of Bauman's thought. Ion Cosmovici (2016), in *"The Embedding Metaphor: The Emotional and Sensitive Dimensions of Zygmunt Bauman's Scientific Metaphors "*, analyzes Bauman's contribution to developing more innovative approaches for understanding contemporary social and political phenomena.

Similarly, Antony Bryant (2013), in *"Bauman's* Challenge: Metaphors and Metamorphoses*"*, contends that Bauman's notion of *liquid modernity* evolves into a complex web of mixed and sometimes contradictory metaphors surrounding themes such as flow, transformation, instability, and collapse.

Kieran Flanagan (2013), in his article *"Bauman's Travels: Metaphors of the Token and the Wilderness "*, focuses on Bauman's use of the concept of the *token* as a metaphor.

Michael Hviid Jacobsen (2013), in *"*Metaphormosis: On the Metaphoricity of Zygmunt Bauman's Social Theory,*"* emphasizes Bauman's unique ability to blend critical insight with metaphorical and literary prose. According to Jacobsen, Bauman's work incorporates three key types of metaphor: Chronology, juxtaposition, and opposition.

Despite the contributions mentioned above, Bauman's metaphorical dimensions remain underexplored. Few attempts have been made to systematically decode

Bauman's foundational metaphors—internationally or in Iran, where his metaphor-based thinking continues receiving limited scholarly attention.

5. Theoretical Framework

Numerous studies have been conducted on the role of metaphors in forming and developing sociological theories. Terminology and conceptual systems contribute to the advancement of science, and together they facilitate metaphor-making and conceptualization. A metaphor, in essence, results from the fusion of two conceptual domains. New meaning emerges from the juxtaposition and integration of these domains—often drawn from areas that do not appear to share obvious similarities. There is no clear-cut boundary between these domains, as a single concept may serve as the basis for multiple metaphors, and metaphors can give rise to new concepts. A single term may function as a literal concept in one context and as a metaphorical expression in another. Such terms are referred to as *metaphorical concepts*.

According to Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), the primary function of philosophy and sociology is the creation of new concepts. Each concept refers to other concepts in a relational network. As Edgar Morin (1920) and Edward Said (1935-2003) have pointed out, we are constantly witnessing the *migration* or *journey* of metaphorical concepts from one domain to another—whether explicitly or implicitly (Yaghoobi, 2025).

Friedrich Nietzsche (1944-1900) also highlights this phenomenon from a genealogical and critical perspective. He argues that many truths and concepts have become so familiar through repeated use that they have lost their original vitality—like coins whose inscriptions have been worn away, leaving behind only their metallic form. In Nietzsche's words, *truths are "a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms"* (Nietzsche, 1999: 146). In this sense, we inhabit an endless game of metaphors built upon other metaphors, ultimately resulting in *meta*-metaphors. Concepts, then, are products of metaphorical activity. All concepts possess metaphorical qualities, though this metaphorical nature is not categorical but exists along a spectrum or continuum. Thus, from Nietzsche's genealogical view, truth is a forgotten metaphor.

Within the paradigm of sociology, metaphors serve instrumental roles and act

as frameworks through which social phenomena can be analyzed (Goffman, 1956).

Durkheim approached metaphor from a different angle. In his view, in modern societies, scientific and sociological theories have, in a way, replaced metaphors, allegories, and proverbs that were prevalent in traditional societies. He believed that traditional communities possessed a rich reservoir of proverbs and metaphors. Still, no new proverbs were created in industrialization, and even the existing ones gradually faded. Their meanings eroded over time so that few people today can understand them.

Rabert Nisbet (1913-1996) contends that sociologists have crafted numerous conceptual portraits—such as Marx's bourgeoisie**,** Weber's bureaucracy, Simmel's metropolis and lifeworld, Tönnies's Gesellschaft**,** Durkheim's organic society, and others—to concretize and depict modern society. However, Nisbet also argues that the origins of themes and motifs are inherently multiple:

"Behind the themes of art and science, then, lie, in many cases, myths and metaphors. But I do not limit themes, even the grandest and oldest in human consciousness, to either myth or metaphor. The sources of themes are multifold, found in ordinary experience, perception, and observation; but also in self-awareness and introspective thought" (Nisbet, 1977: 34).

In Bauman's works, metaphors serve two primary functions. First, they support his critical sociology. Second, they function as a means of *defamiliarization*—estranging the ordinary and taken-for-granted aspects of the social world. As Bauman notes, "Familiarity is the staunchest enemy of inquisitiveness and criticism – and thus also of innovation and the courage to change. In an encounter with that familiar world ruled by habits and reciprocally reasserting beliefs, sociology acts as a meddlesome and often irritating stranger … [It] defamiliarizes the familiar" (Bauman, 1990: 15).

Metaphors thus play a dual role: they *defamiliarize* the familiar and *familiarize* the unfamiliar. They are among the most effective tools and scaffolds for imagination and understanding (Davis, 2013: 204). In summary, metaphors provide a reservoir of concepts, ideas, images, and hypotheses that enhance and enrich human understanding and imagination (204).

Metaphor and conceptual systems play a crucial role in opening up theoretical understanding. Metaphor is one of the key processes involved in *terminologization*

and *term creation*. There exists a close relationship between metaphor and concept: metaphors contribute to the creation of concepts and the construction of conceptual networks, while concepts also influence the development of metaphors. Both serve essential roles in rendering reality imaginable and concrete (Lakoff and Johnson 258). George Lakoff (1941) and Mark Johnson (1949), from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, argue that a single metaphor in language can manifest in multiple metaphorical expressions. They define metaphor in its conceptual sense as a mapping between a source domain—the literal meaning—and a target domain, which refers to the metaphorical meaning. In other words, any concept from the source domain can be employed to describe a concept in the target domain (Lakoff & Johnson 258).

According to Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), imagination is inherently linguistic and metaphorical. That is, through imagination, the mind transitions from one level to another—namely, from the level of external realities to the level of meanings. Imagination mediates meaning and the sensible, operating through and closely connecting with language and its metaphorical function.

Unlike cognitive sciences, Paul Ricoeur, following Kant (1724-1804), regards productive imagination as the primary source of the creation of new meanings and semantic innovation. According to Ricoeur, productive imagination operates through schematism, which means the core task is to combine and synthesize scattered elements, gathering them into a coherent whole (Ricoeur, 1984: 39).

Ricoeur believes that imagination, aided by language and metaphor, plays a vital role in meaning-making. Language reconstructs semantic fields through imagination, since language inherently possesses creative and generative power. This innovative power stems from the metaphorical nature of language, which serves as the source of semantic multiplicity and enriches language, enabling it to generate new meanings and articulate novel relationships (Ricoeur, 1978: 148).

Thus, language narrates through imagination. As Ricoeur puts it: *"Narration is the re-expression of what has already been expressed, and the reinterpretation of what has already been interpreted"* (Ricoeur, 2015: 80).

From a hermeneutical perspective, Ricoeur views metaphor as a means for meaning-creation, deepening experience, and suspending conventional or clichéd meanings. The dominant theoretical framework of this article will be based on the

cognitive theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, as well as the philosophical perspective of Paul Ricoeur.

6. Research Methodology

While metaphor analysis originates in cognitive linguistics, it has increasingly been applied in an interdisciplinary and comparative fashion within fields such as sociology, discourse studies, philosophy, and psychology**.** In this sense, metaphor functions not only as a subject of scholarly investigation but also as a methodological bridge that facilitates cross-disciplinary analysis and interpretation. For Bauman, metaphor did not have a purely ontological aspect, but also a methodological function. He was aware of the challenges and contradictions of the metaphorical method. Still, he believed that these limitations were not unique to the metaphorical method but also existed in other methods, such as surveys, interviews, or participant observation:

"There are no methods without deficiencies, and every method causes certain methodological difficulties for the researcher … A razor blade and an axe are equally precise instruments, but when it comes to deforestation, the axe is much better. The axe is a powerful tool just as the razor blade, but it is much better to use a razor blade than an axe for shaving" (Jacobsen 213).

From a methodological standpoint, this qualitative research uses a descriptive-analytical approach. The data were collected using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP). To collect the data, Bauman's primary works were studied multiple times—these include: *Liquid Love* (2006), *Liquid Times* (2007), *Liquid Modernity* (2012), *Retrotopia* (2017), *Postmodern Ethics* (2003), *Sociology and Everyday Life*, *Thinking Sociologically* (2019), *What Use Is Sociology?* (2014), *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978), *Liquid Birth* (2017), *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (2011), *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), *Zygmunt Bauman* (2005), *Liquid Sociology* (2013), and *44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World* (2010).

This method was proposed by a group of nine metaphor researchers led by Gerard Steen and known as the Pragglejaz Group (Steen, 2010: 4). For data analysis, metaphorical analysis was employed to identify, categorize, and interpret Bauman's key and auxiliary metaphors—such as *liquid modernity*, *liquid love*, *interregnum*,

etc.—to reveal how these metaphors shape his sociological imagination and core concepts.

7. Research Questions

The fundamental research questions addressed in this article are as follows:

- What is Bauman's narrative or understanding of metaphor?
- What are the major metaphors in Bauman's sociological thinking?
- What structural relationships exist between his sociological concepts and metaphors?
- What is the connection between Bauman's ontological and methodological uses of metaphor?

8. Discussion

8-1. Bauman and His Intellectual Context

Zygmunt Bauman was born into a Jewish family on November 25, 1925, in Poznań (present-day Poland). One of the metaphorical–sociological roots of Bauman's thought can be traced to the works of Karl Marx. Drawing on the ideas of Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Simmel, Bauman laid the foundations for emancipatory sociology (Kaesler, 2015: 92–94).

In Bauman's research, metaphors were never incidental or unconscious; instead, they were deliberate, continuous, and systematic. According to Hans Weihinger (1852–1933), since we are unable to have direct and complete access to the reality or objective experience of the world, we are forced to interpret and understand the world in the context of "as if" through concepts, structures, and metaphorical representations (Jacobsen 198).

He thought at the intersection of sociology and literature—perhaps more than any other sociologist—and approached social phenomena through a distinctly metaphorical lens, incorporating literary, linguistic, semiotic, and rhetorical elements into his theoretical writings.

When asked in an interview with Keith Tester which books he would take with him to a deserted island, Bauman listed works by Robert Musil, Georges Perec, and Jorge Luis Borges, without naming any classic sociological texts (Bauman, Jacobsen

& Tester, 2014: 26). This reveals the literary underpinnings of his sociological imagination.

For Bauman, metaphors were not merely decorative elements but rather **"**research strategies**"** employed to explore abstract and intangible dimensions of human life, such as inequality, globalization, ethics, suffering, love, solidarity, and oppression. Without strict adherence to scientific norms such as precision, coherence, or correspondence, Bauman deployed metaphors for creativity, description, and interpretation, often drawing from diverse sources.

Today, many of these metaphorical types and dualities have become integral tools within the sociological toolbox. Sociology—like all forms of human cognition—has always used metaphor. In Bauman's "liquid sociology," this use became more explicit and self-aware (Davis 6).

By employing the concept of liquidity as a guiding metaphor, Bauman liberated the sociological imagination from the constraints of rigid methodological rules governing "how sociology should be done". His metaphors enabled a deeper exploration of social reality, beyond the limitations imposed by positivist or conventional methods.

According to Bauman, the term *society*, as the core concept of sociology, is fundamentally a metaphorical construct that emerged alongside the rise of scientific-social discourse. This metaphorical concept is synonymous with "company", evoking notions of companionship, fellowship, and friendly social interaction with others (Davis 30). In Bauman's view, *society* as sociology's central concept is a "successful metaphor"—a metaphor that, over time, loses its metaphorical origin and ceases to be perceived as such (Jacobsen & Tester 88).

This metaphor refers to an abstract totality in which individuals share not necessarily friendly, but intimate and close relationships. Bauman differentiates between two types of human experience**:**

1. Objective experience, which is shaped by an individual's interaction with the world; and
2. Subjective experience, which refers to what one *goes through* during this interaction—a co-creation of perception and interpretive effort that resists full objectification or expression.

The former can be seen as a report from the external world about the subject; the latter arises from within and relates to one's private thoughts, emotions, and interpretations, which can only be conveyed through self-reporting (Bauman, 2014: 28).

These two types of experience are closely related to two forms of modernity: *Solid modernity* aligns more with objective experience, whereas *liquid modernity* resonates with subjective or lived experience.

The metaphor of *liquid modernity* in Bauman's thought thus captures a world in which human experiences increasingly take on the form of lived, inner, and subjective experiences—ephemeral, inseparable from the act of living itself, unstable, and requiring constant reinterpretation.

8-2. The Central Metaphor: The Metaphor of Liquid Modernity

The overarching and central metaphor in Bauman's thought is *liquidity*—or, more precisely, *liquid modernity*. All his other metaphors are essentially subordinate to this central figure. He employed the term "liquid modernity" to describe a world in constant flux. Importantly, by "liquidity," Bauman refers not to the watery quality or fluid substance per se, but to the *transience* and *instability* of social relations (Kaesler 104). In other words, unlike solids, liquids do not retain a fixed shape and are not easily bound by time or space (Bauman, 2012: 17).

Furthermore, Bauman's concept of liquidity echoes Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's famous claim in *The Communist Manifesto*, that "all that is solid melts into air". What was once stable, durable, and solid in past societies is now fragile, mobile, and dissolving (Davis 30). Bauman distinguishes between two stages of modernity: the first, associated with the metaphor of *solid modernity*, and the second, *liquid modernity*. However, the defining feature of modernity, from its inception, has been the "melting of solids". In liquid modernity, a new set of solids is cast into the melting pot.

Solid and liquid modernity metaphors correspond roughly to what Anthony Giddens terms "early" and "late" modernity. However, Bauman diverges from other theorists in his interpretation of the shift. He argues that postmodernity is not a complete rupture with modernity, but rather an *extension and intensification* of its latent or

marginal tendencies. In Bauman's view, values such as *choice*, *pluralism*, *critical awareness*, *reflexivity*, and *agency*—typically associated with postmodernism—are rooted in the modern ethos.

Nonetheless, a deep tension persists between these two phases. "Modernity revolves around the production of order, borders, and classifications. It seeks certainty and transparency; it reveres formal rationality, laws, typologies, categorizations, clear boundaries, uniformity, and universality. Postmodernity, on the other hand, embraces multiplicity, ambiguity, uncertainty, contingency, and ephemerality. It is a relentless critic, a disruptor, and a rebel" (Seidman, 2007: 256).

Bauman's metaphor of liquidity, or "aquality," conveys the sense of *disorder* that defines contemporary modern life. These challenges are not primarily political or moral, but *epistemological*. They represent new dilemmas that cannot be solved with old frameworks. These are everyday problems that we must constantly confront.

In solid modernity, a coherent and organically unified social totality was presumed—a state of balance. In liquid modernity, however, order is transient and accidental. "All order that can be found is a local, emergent and transitory phenomenon; its nature can be best grasped by a metaphor of a whirlpool appearing in the flow of a river, retaining its shape only for a relatively brief period and only at the expense of ncessant metabolism and constant renewal of content" (Bauman, 1992: 189).

Bauman emphasizes that the metaphor of *linear progress*, which dominated solid modernity, no longer applies in liquid modernity. "The postmodern condition is a site of constant mobility and change, but no clear direction of development. The image of Brownian movement offers an apt metaphor for this aspect of postmodernity" (189).

To elaborate on the contrast between solid and liquid modernity, Bauman employs spatial metaphors, particularly that of dwelling. He also highlights the mathematical metaphors used in each period (191-192).

Furthermore, Bauman invokes the *metaphor of rootlessness* to describe the existential condition of social agents in liquid modernity. The being of agents is neither determined nor fixed; rather, it is uncertain, unstable, and without roots.

He also utilizes the assemblage metaphor to portray social actors' lives,

asserting that individuals do not follow coherent or pre-established goals. Instead, their identities are self-assembled piecemeal and contingent (194).

In his analysis of the transition from solid to liquid modernity, Bauman employs another metaphor: the "interregnum". This transitional period is itself a metaphor drawn from Gramsci's famous statement: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Bauman, 2010: 118). In the transition to liquid modern society, too, the old order is disintegrating, while the new has yet to be born.

8-3. Sub-metaphors

8-3-1. The Metaphor of Liquid Time

In solid modernity, dualistic distinctions and structured binaries dominate the organization of knowledge and social order. However, in *postmodernity*, existing theories strive to distance themselves from the foundational metaphors and conceptual frameworks of modernity. Whereas in solid modernity, history was conceived as a unilinear process—universal, rational, and systematic—none of these assumptions holds in postmodernity. As Bauman puts it: "Neither can the very master metaphor that underlies them be sustained: that of the process with a pointer" (Bauman, 1992: 188).

The transition from "solid" to "liquid" modernity has generated an unprecedented environment for pursuing individual life projects. Individuals now face a set of challenges never encountered in previous eras. Social forms and institutions no longer endure long enough to solidify; thus, they can no longer serve as reliable frameworks of reference for human actions or long-term life plans. As Blackshaw emphasizes, individuals must now discover alternative ways to organize their lives (Blackshaw,2005: 418).

They are compelled to assemble an endless series of short-term projects and episodic engagements, none following a coherent sequence that would allow concepts like "career" or "progress" to retain their meaning. The loss of continuity and structure in modern social life, captured in the metaphor of liquidity, transforms the self into a *project manager* of disconnected experiences rather than a *subject* with a unified life narrative.

8-3-2. The Metaphor of Retrotopia

According to Bauman, there are three types of utopias. The metaphor of the Guardian Utopia represents the premodern society, where inhabitants see themselves merely as guardians or custodians of the existing divine order. The Gardener Utopia metaphor refers to a utopia that aims to actively and decisively shape, organize, and manage the social world based on grand designs and initial blueprints for a better society, enforcing order at any cost. Finally, the contemporary Liquid Modern Utopia is described as the "Hunting Utopia", where any attempt to plan, mold, or organize has long been abandoned, and everyone primarily pursues individual life projects and immediate gratification (Bauman, 1989: 102).

Bauman has no real quarrel with the premodern Guardian Utopia. In this utopia, the guardian's sole desire is to preserve whatever exists without dreaming or daring to intervene or disturb the natural or divine balance. In brief, it is a paradise based on maintaining the status quo.

However, Bauman sharply criticizes both the solid modern Gardener Utopia and the liquid modern Hunting Utopia, albeit for different reasons. Early on, he compared solid modern society to Jeremy Bentham's panoptic prison—the desire for meticulous surveillance of all movements within the social habitat (Bauman, 1988). Later, the critical idea emerged that solid modernity—its technology and bureaucracy—created crucial preconditions for the Holocaust crimes (Bauman, 1989: 139). For this reason, solid modern society and its utopia were imbued with what Hannah Arendt called the "totalitarian tendency".

Retrotopia is thus a metaphor for a return to utopia or a return to the future. It calls for rethinking the condition of modern humanity—a society that once heard promises of progress, prosperity, freedom, salvation, and the establishment of heaven on earth but was confronted instead with a hell of violence, tribalism, inequality, loneliness, and self-alienation. On this matter, Bauman writes: "A firm ground thought to provide, and hopefully guarantee, an acceptable modicum of stability and therefore a satisfactory degree of self-assurance" (Bauman, 2017: 20).

Bauman further argues that retrotopia derives its stimulus from the hope of reconciling, at long last, *security* with *freedom* (21). Hence, Bauman's retrotopia is a striving toward a freer, more equal, more democratic, and more livable society.

In response to the undesirable conditions of modernity, he metaphorically warns: "We – human inhabitants of the Earth – are in the either/or situation: we face joining either hands, or common graves" (191).

8-3-3. The Metaphor of the Gardening State and the Gamekeepers' State

Bauman links the metaphor of the modern state with the metaphor of the "gardener state" and draws on the metaphor of juxtaposition. In premodern society, the gamekeeper's state existed. He describes premodern society as decentralized and fragmented. Premodern societies consisted of self-sufficient communities, each with its traditions and way of life (Seidman, 2007: 252). Gradually, these societies became unable to adequately respond to the intensifying social problems and chaos of humanity. The gamekeeper states, "is concerned with organizing mobility, ensuring sufficient reserves for hunting in a specific location, but does not deal with the details of raising each animal in each location" (Urry, 2021: 403).

However, the gardener state is a product of modern society. Such a state not only desires to govern, protect its citizens, and ensure welfare and economic prosperity, but it also seeks to tame and control human disorder (Seidman, 1989: 256). Modernity relativizes all its past and present rivals and thus turns the very notion of relativity into a rival itself: "Relativity itself as an adversary; as a spoke in the wheel of progress, a demon to be exorcized, a sickness to be cured" (Bauman, 1992: 12). He believes the gardener state "The society it rules as an object of designing, cultivating and weed-poisoning" (Bauman, 1989: 29). Bauman considers modern society not as an Eliasic but a Hobbesian society. "Obviously, the Hobbesian world has not been fully chained, the Hobbesian problem has not been fully resolved" (29).

It is in line with the gardener state's policies that the Holocaust occurred. The removal of weeds in the modern gardener's state is a metaphor for the victims who were uprooted, killed, and exiled. Bauman uses the metaphor of "legislative intellectuals" in contemporary society and "interpretive intellectuals" in postmodern society (Bauman, 2003: 21). The modern state needed legislative intellectuals to invade non-Western lands that were virgin, undiscovered, and unknown (Bauman, 2007: 14).

The legislative intellect strives to build the world based on principles, laws,

rules, and general norms. Although the Enlightenment may praise individualism and diversity, it practically adopts a repressive approach. Its enemy is the real forms of individuality, multiplicity, and uncertainty (Seidman, 2019: 255). With the transition of society from modernity to postmodernity, its concepts and metaphors change (Bauman, 1992: 188). Legislative intellectuals lose their authority and adopt an interpretive role. Instead of legislative intellectuals, new cultural elites such as gallery owners, mass media managers, publishers, and cultural entrepreneurs replace them. These elites serve consumer culture and the market. In contrast, interpretive intellectuals defend plurality, ambiguity, doubt, uncertainty, randomness, and transience (Bauman,1987: 5).

The post-gardener or watchman state is a kind of return to the gamekeepers' society, where the state has no interest in details but monitors and protects instead of gardening. states are merely concerned with managing their reserves so that they can appear in times of necessity and crisis (Urry 403).

In modernity, the struggle against chaos is the most important and effective weapon. Modernity also has a vision of the world, called the world order. Bauman believes that in the new society, seduction and repression are two new tools of legitimacy. Therefore, he employs metaphors from Marx, Foucault, and Weber to explain liquid modernity and formulates it in a new way: "Both need intellectually trained experts, and indeed both siphon off, accommodate and domesticate an ever-growing section of the educated elite" (Bauman, 2004: 97). Seduction is the primary tool of integration in the consumer society. Seduction occurs when the market succeeds in making consumers dependent on itself. Bauman considers the second tool of power to be "Repression stands for 'panoptical' power, best described by Foucault" (98).

8-3-4. The Metaphor of Liquid Love

There is a logical connection between the metaphor of *liquid love* and the metaphor of *liquid modernity*. Bauman follows the theme of liquid love within the context of liquid modernity. The central element in the metaphor of liquid love is the relationship:

"The hero of this book is Der Mann ohne Verwandtschaften- the man with no bonds, and particularly no bonds as fixed as the kinship bonds used to be in Ulrich's

time" (Bauman, 2006: vii). He believes that in liquid modernity, the quantity and quality of relationships have changed. Old relationships were based on kinship, but in the contemporary world, virtual relationships have replaced real ones:

"Unlike 'real relationships', 'virtual relationships' are easy to enter and to exit. They look smart and clean, feel easy to use and user-friendly, when compared with the heavy, slow-moving, inert messy 'real stuff'" (xii). The fluidity of such relationships is encapsulated in Bauman's metaphorical electronic formula: "You can always press 'delete" (xii).

He holds that thinness or dilution is the fundamental trait of network-based contacts, because deepening such relationships might involve risks. Bauman equates the *thickening* of these ties with a metaphor from daily life: "Imbibed in concentration, they are nauseating and may prove dangerous to their health -like Ribena, relations should be diluted when consumed" (x).

He also refers to the simplicity of these network-based interactions—chat rooms, where there's always someone to reach out to and as easily leave behind. Bauman likens the ease of establishing and cutting off relationships to the contents of a "top pocket: "They may try 'top pocket relationships', of the sort they 'can bring out when they need them' but push deep down in the pocket when they do not" (x).

This ease of forming and dissolving relationships demands regular inspection. Bauman uses another metaphor from machines: "That relationships like cars, should undergo regular MOTs to make sure that they are still roadworthy" (x).

Bauman's view on social bonds in the contemporary world echoes Anthony Giddens' metaphor of the 'Janus face' of modern social relations—holding both promises and dangers, opportunities and limitations. "You gain something, you lose something else" (xii).

8-3-4. The Metaphor of Liquid Fear

Bauman argues that fear, like many other things, is subject to cultural norms. In his view, we live in an age of fear. One cannot open a newspaper or turn on the television without encountering a story about fear. These stories, according to Bauman, fall into three broad categories:

1. Public fears – such as fear of unemployment, or fear of aging;

2. Fears threatening the body and property – such as fears related to health issues caused by unhealthy food, fear of excessive sun exposure, or fear of being unable to repay one's mortgage;
3. Fears threatening one's position in the world – such as fear of immigration or fear of imminent terrorist attacks (Blackshaw, 2006: 272).

Bauman further classifies fear metaphorically into two main types: solid fear and liquid fear. In this metaphorical mapping, fear becomes a conceptual domain (target) concretized through the source domains of solidity and liquidity. According to Bauman, the nature of fear changed significantly after September 11**.** Governments became more security-sensitive and implemented anti-terrorist laws that increased state control over citizens—especially minorities and Muslims—in ways that contradicted the principles of democracy, such as liberty, generosity, and tolerance.

Bauman emphasizes that in liquid modernity, fear penetrates all existential dimensions of human life**.** Unlike the more stable and localized fears of the past (solid fears), liquid fears are vague, omnipresent, and difficult to manage**.** They lack a clear origin or endpoint and often target invisible or unpredictable threats**.**

He further explains that one of the key reasons for the transformation, such as fear in modern societies, is the decline of grand narratives and traditional sources of authority. In such a vacuum, fear of an enemy—real or imagined—gains traction because political leaders rely on fear to sustain their power. We now live in an age where fears have shifted from collective existential threats to the sphere of individual life politics, becoming entangled in the private anxieties of men and women. (373).

8-3-5. The Metaphor of Liquid War

The metaphor of liquid war is closely connected to Bauman's other metaphors. In his book *Retrotopia*, Bauman highlights a fundamental shift in violence. Historically, war was primarily characterized by direct invading nation-states into foreign territories. However, in liquid modern society, the nature of warfare has profoundly changed.

Bauman explains that Western countries now avoid deploying ground troops in military interventions. Instead, they rely on sophisticated military technologies such as modern fighter jets, drones, precision-guided weapons, and aerospace sensors to strike their targets. The emphasis has shifted from territorial conquest to remote,

technologically mediated violence**.**

Bauman asserts that war has become liquid in the contemporary era: "In what I call liquid warfare, modern states shy away from the burdens and responsibilities of controlling and administering territory because they believe they have more cost-effective means of control. Modern military technology enables them to decide when and where to attack, to strike the enemy with high precision while being inaccessible to any meaningful counterstrike. They rely on hit-and-run tactics, similar to central principles of guerrilla warfare, where mobility and speed trump sheer mass" (Bauman, 2017: 22).

In this sense, liquid war shares key features with liquid modernity: decentralization, unpredictability, impermanence, and substituting direct control with indirect, flexible, and often invisible forms of domination.

8-3-6. The Metaphor of Liquid Responsibility

In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Bauman uses the metaphor of liquid responsibility to explain the mass killings that occurred in Nazi concentration camps in the process of anti-Semitic violence. This metaphor is closely related to the gardening metaphor of Nazi politics**,** where Jews were regarded as weeds to be eliminated. Here, racism functions as a form of social engineering, aimed at realizing the pure and liberated German spirit. Within this ideological framework, there was no room for anything other than the German spirit**.**

In this analysis, multiple interwoven metaphors are at play. The state is metaphorically portrayed as a designer and engineer, closely connected to the Christian metaphor of "spirit". As Bauman writes:

" It was that kingdom which had no room for anything but the German Spirit. It had no room for the Jews, as the Jews could not be spiritually converted and embrace the *Geist* of the German *Volk.* This spiritual inability was articulated as the attribute of heredity or blood" (Bauman, 1989: 89).

According to these narrative templates, Jews were constructed as "the Other", which served as the ideological pretext for unleashing extreme violence against them.

Responsibility for the killings was situated in a complex and fluid environment**,** making it practically impossible to pinpoint a specific agent. Bauman explains:

"Once responsibility has been shifted away by the actor's consent to the superior's right to command, the actor is cast in an *agentic state* – a condition in which he sees himself as carrying out another person's wishes. Agentic state is the opposite of the state of autonomy" (187).

In the bureaucratic organization**,** Bauman argues, responsibility is passed on to someone else to conceal the essence of the act**:**

"Collective perpetuation of cruel acts is made all the easier by the fact that responsibility is essentially 'unpinnable', while every participant of these acts is convinced that it does reside with some 'proper authority*" (*188*).*

In this sense, liquid and anchorless responsibility becomes a precondition for unethical or unlawful behavior. In practice, this means that moral authority is eroded—not by being openly denied, but by being rendered irrelevant.

9. Conclusion

In Kant's (1998) epistemological framework, *a priori* categories are subjective and fixed structures that exist in the mind independent of experience. Later, Alvin Gouldner (1970) categorized such assumptions into two types: the "domain assumption" and the "world hypotheses". Influenced by this line of thought, Zygmunt Bauman also emphasizes the necessity of a priori cognitive frameworks for understanding the world. However, unlike Kant, he argues that such frameworks are not fixed or universal; instead, they are historically, culturally, and socially constructed, and they play a major role in shaping the sociologist's imagination (Jacobsen 199).

Influenced by this line of thought, Zygmunt Bauman also asserts the necessity of *a priori* cognition for understanding the world. However, unlike Kant, he maintains that these cognitive frameworks are not fixed and universal but historically, culturally, and socially constructed and play a major role in the sociologist's imagination (Jacobsen 199). Bauman refers to metaphors as a research strategy for investigating abstract and intangible dimensions of human life. For him, metaphor is not merely an ontological concept but also a methodological tool.

Furthermore, all of Bauman's metaphorical concepts can be categorized into three distinct types: temporal, spatial, and binary. This tripartite typology expands on Roman Jakobson's (2010) classification of Bauman's metaphors into historical,

contiguity-based, and contrastive types.

Bauman uses temporal metaphors to interpret historical and social realities, especially in analyzing early and late modernity. During the 1980s, he initially distinguished between modern and postmodern societies, and later introduced metaphors such as *premodernity*, *solid modernity*, and *liquid modernity* to capture the historical transitions of the West. In Bauman's view, time functions differently across these periods: pre-modern time possesses a mythical and cosmic character, shaping many of the corresponding social relations. Modern time, by contrast, is metaphorically represented by clock time, emerging alongside industrialization and the rise of capitalism, where punctuality, work schedules, and efficient mobility became central. Postmodern time, on the other hand, is more liquid—intertwined with instantaneous time and expansive digital-social networks. In this era, social institutions lack the temporal stability to solidify.

Bauman's notion of retrotopia also carries a temporal character: it refers to the modern or postmodern individual's turn toward nostalgic dreams of the past, rather than hope for the future.

Alongside temporal metaphors, Bauman's work features spatial metaphors, which, as Paul Ricoeur (2015) suggests, offer new configuration modes. Examples include: life trajectories as *nomads* or *pilgrims,* globalization as *global borderlands, and* utopias conceived through the figures of the *watchman*, *gardener*, and *hunter.*

These metaphors are not purely spatial; instead, they are spatio-temporal, or, as Lakoff and Johnson (2003) put it, spatialized time metaphors. Embedded within these metaphors are underlying themes of movement, flow, and transformation, which are especially relevant to modern and postmodern societies and differ significantly from the more static worldview of premodern times.

This shift gives rise to a new conceptualization of society—a deterritorialized world where people become rootless, always on the move. In such a space, human beings lack clear destinations, and their movement symbolizes psychological homelessness and existential dislocation. This condition brings with it new contradictions and tensions. In line with Gramsci, Bauman argues that in the transition from solid to liquid modernity, a liminal phase exists—a state in which "the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born." (Bauman, 2010: 118).

A third category of Bauman's metaphors is binary oppositional metaphors, which resemble the structuralist emphasis on dualities. These metaphors have an attributive function that connects unrelated concepts. Examples include: Intellectuals as *legislators vs. interpreters* (Bauman, 2003), Mobility and globalization as *tourists vs. pilgrims* (Bauman, 1988a), Marginalized groups as *weeds* and *human waste* (Bauman, 1989), Historical epochs as *solid vs. liquid modernity* (Bauman, 2012), Life paths as *nomads vs. pilgrims* (Bauman, 1955), Utopian figures as *watchman, gardener, hunter* (Bauman, 1989, 2003), Lifestyles as *drifter, tourist, player* (Bauman, 1995) (Jacobsen 204).

These metaphors highlight Bauman's use of imagery to articulate and critique the dynamic, fragmented, and uncertain nature of life in late modernity. What emerges from Bauman's works is that the central metaphor in his thought is "liquidity." His other metaphors are subordinate to this core metaphor, forming an interconnected system that functions as a bridge between abstract theories and the lived experiences of individuals in today's unstable world. For example, the metaphors of "solid" and "liquid" illustrate the transition of society from rigid order to a dynamic and fluid world. "Liquid love" serves as a metaphor for instability in human relationships. The concept of "human waste" refers to the experience of marginalization—those who do not fit within the logic of a consumerist and liquid society become "disposable." Furthermore, the "railway station" metaphor conveys the temporal and spatial dimensions of liquidity.

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