

## Chapter 2

# Voice and the Generalised Other in the Ethical Writings of Zygmunt Bauman

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### Introduction

According to Zygmunt Bauman most sociological narratives tend to ignore moral and ethical issues in relation to issues of cultural belonging and mechanisms of cultural exclusion. In contrast, in Bauman's work ethical and moral problems have been recurrent concerns, and can be found in every aspect of his writing from his understanding of the Holocaust to later concerns about the transition of a solid to a liquid form of modernity, consumption, the Other and ambivalence. In his conversations with Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Keith Tester, Bauman explains that the 'moral law inside me' as identified by Immanuel Kant 'is to me an axis around which all other secrets of the human condition rotate' (Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester 2014:68). Bauman's ethical concerns are Other directed in that whatever constitutes ethics should be beyond ourselves and our own desires and self-interest. Bauman's ethical stance was most clearly outlined initially in *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) and *Life in Fragments* (1995) in which he identifies the place of contemporary of morality within what appears to be the post ethical, post-legislative postmodern/liquid modern condition. The chapter explores how, what Bauman identifies as the 'moral law inside me' and how this shapes our relationship with the Other. Bauman goes on to draw upon Emmanuel Lévinas's opinion that the 'primal scene' of morality is sphere of the 'face to face' and that *being with the Other* and *for the Other* should form the basis of contemporary ethics. The chapter will explore how Bauman's underpinning acceptance of Kant, which manifests itself most forcefully in Bauman's underpinning anthropological conception of culture that leads to a misunderstanding of Lévinas within Bauman's ethical writing. For Bauman the moral capacity of people that allows them to form communities is established via a cultural link between self and Other in which the moral self becomes its own interpreter of the needs of the Other. The Other is not unknown to us as a specific human individual Other, rather we come to understand the Other as type of person or set of characteristics, not a unique individual. The chapter examines the possible negative consequences of conceiving the Other as a generalised Other; Bauman's account of the adiaphorizing effects of social processes that encourage moral irrelevance and dehumanization of the Other and the possibilities of a renewal of an ethical life via the creation of a new public sphere.

## **Bauman, Buber and the Other**

It is commonly assumed that Zygmunt Bauman's work is concerned with giving voice to the excluded Other. Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Sophia Marshman suggest that Bauman's metaphors are inherently moral 'they give voice to the voiceless, they recall us to our inescapable human and moral responsibility for 'the Other' and, in addition, that 'Bauman's work on postmodernity/'liquid modernity' has been dedicated to providing a voice for the "new weeds"; the poor, the indolent, the socially excluded, essentially those flung to the margins of society by the unstoppable march of global capitalism and consumer society (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008:22). In a similar fashion Tony Blackshaw suggests that Bauman's metaphors 'provide him with a means for giving voices to the socially excluded' (Blackshaw 2005:76). Bauman himself has also made it clear that the silencing of the voice of the Other is a central aspect and precondition for genocide (Bauman 2009:98): 'Whenever and wherever an omnipotent force stifles the voices of the weak and the hapless instead of listening to them, it stays on the wrong side of the ethical divide between good and evil' (Bauman 2009:96). Bauman has also warned against 'abstract standards imposed from without' upon the Other and describes the damaging consequences for managing the Other without a voice in the following terms:

But as one could only expect in the case of an asymmetrical social relation, quite a different sight greets the eyes when the relationship is scanned from the opposite, receiving end (in other words, through the eyes of the 'managed'), and quite a different verdict is then voiced (or rather would be voiced, if people assigned to that end acquired a voice) it is the sight of unwarranted and uncalled-for repression, and the verdict is one of illegitimacy and injustice (Bauman 2009:196-197).

The central focus of *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) is an evaluation of what Bauman understands by 'the postmodern perspective' or the 'postmodern moral crisis' much of which remains applicable in Bauman's liquid turn writings. Liquid modernity is identified by Bauman as a contemporary interregnum; a period of transition without clear direction in which the solid modern ways of working are no longer effective, but new ways of working have yet to be devised. For Bauman the way out of the contemporary interregnum is by the creation of a new public sphere rooted in moral proximity. Taking his starting point from Emmanuel Lévinas, for Bauman moral responsibility involves 'being for the Other before one can be with the Other'. Being with and for the Other is 'the first reality of the self, a starting point rather than a product of society' (Bauman 1993:13). This principle for engagement with the Other is said to have no foundation, cause or determining factor.

However, there is an inability in Bauman's work to draw upon Lévinas effectively because of two overlapping underpinning assumptions that Bauman makes: first, his underpinning Kantian perspective on morality and second his underpinning anthropological conception of culture. Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (1958) provides an informed critique of Kant's epistemology that had a significant influence on Lévinas's ethical stance in relation to the Other; a stance that has been ignored by Bauman. Buber makes a distinction between I-It and I-Thou. These terms describe two possible ways of being in relation to the Other. For Buber, the self is always in a relation of some description with the Other. The central issue is how the self will relate to the Other. In the I-It mode of being which Bauman adopts, the self considers the Other as an object of his or her activities and thoughts and fails to understand the true presence of the Other. In contrast, the I-Thou/I-You mode of being involves mutuality between the self and other, a 'meeting' between self and other; in which the self is affected by the relation just as much as the Other is

the primary word I-Thou can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the Thou as I become I, I say Thou. All real living is meeting (Buber 1958:11).

Buber uses the term 'between' to describe an ontological category where a 'meeting' occurs between self and Other; a 'the narrow ridge between subjective and objective where I and Thou meet' (Buber 1955:204). It is 'a sphere which is common to them but which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each' (Buber 1955:203). It is here that 'genuine dialogue' takes place between self and Other and this is central to Buber's conception of inclusion. When 'genuine dialogue' occurs 'each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them' (Buber 1955:19). If the self 'turns' towards the standpoint of the Other, and if the other 'turns' toward the standpoint of the self, genuine dialogue can arise:

The extension of one's own concreteness, the fulfilment of the actual situation of life, the complete presence of the reality in which one participates. Its elements are first, a relation of no matter what kind, between two persons, second an event experienced by them in common, in which at least one of them actually participates, and third, the fact that this one person, without forfeiting anything of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other (Buber 1955:97).

The moral law that Kant identified within the person is described as a categorical imperative; underpinning the categorical imperative is what Kant refers to as 'duty'. For Kant the action is the same whether the person is acting from duty or acting in accordance with duty. The difference relates to the motivation underpinning the action. However, the categorical imperative is not in itself moral, because its use does not involve thinking about morals. The individual is assumed by Kant to act without agency, rather the self acts because it is their duty; even if the action is against the self's own interests or desires. In a similar fashion, Bauman argues that morality has a 'primal' status that pre-dates socially constructed rules of proper behaviour and assumes that people are existentially moral beings. This does not mean that people are by their nature 'good' but it does mean that evil presents itself as a distortion of our moral responsibilities. Making our position both uncomfortable and our responsibility for the Other ambivalent. The Kantian subject regards the Other beings as an 'It' rather than a 'Thou/You'. Kant is primarily interested in discussing human freedom within the context of what he considered to be the universal validity of moral principles within a transcendental sphere, and Kant has little interest in the interactions between real persons. For Kant the 'I' is not meant to be me as an first-hand, individual person but me as a rational member of a 'kingdom of ends' which because of its universal nature, also includes the opinion of myself within an abstract idea of a community – with a pre-established harmony, regulated by practical reason, common to all members that guarantees universality. In Bauman's work, 'kingdom of ends' becomes the anthropological conception of culture. In Kant's ethics there is no conflict or strain between individual autonomy and universalism; because 'we' as the plural form of 'I' and the will of rational beings is as such universal. The 'kingdom of ends' provides the universal perspective of rational members of the community. Accepting a universalizing procedure requires observance of the rule and asking how I would feel if I were in the position of the Other. However, this is not the same as taking into account the real opinions and feelings of a concrete Other. As such Kant's philosophy has difficulty coming to terms with a concept of alterity. In contrast to the attitude of the Kantian subject where the attitude of an I toward the Other is that of an It, for Buber when we enter into a relationship with a You, we engage in a dialogue with an actually existing whole person and as such transcend the Kantian universal perspective provided by the 'kingdom of ends'. The I-Thou/I-You relation is 'unmediated' in that there is no prior knowledge or preconceived conceptual understanding of You.

## **Culture**

In the introduction to the second edition of *Culture as Praxis* (1973/1999) Bauman explains that an influential conception of culture emerged from orthodox anthropology which looked at culture

as providing regularity: 'an aggregate ... a coherent system of sanction-supported pressures, interiorized values and norms, and habits which assured repetitiveness (and thus also predictability) of conduct at the individual level' (Bauman 1973/1999:xvii). Although in his liquid turn writings Bauman strongly rejected the continuation of anything like a 'structure of society' or a 'culture' in the orthodox anthropological sense, he also understands that human interaction has a non-random quality. Bauman does not escape this view of culture in the orthodox anthropological sense of 'the way we do things around here' in his social analysis and ethical writings. The role of the sociologist for Bauman remains the task of coming to an understanding of the non-random quality of human interaction. It is this non-random quality of human interaction that allows us to have an understanding of 'we' the people who share the culture. Apart from the practical problem that without an understanding of culture, the Other could not be encountered through consciousness, Bauman understands the role of culture as an important resource in the processes of creating an individual's social identity as distinct from personal identity and which underpins the processes in the formation of the Other. If we want to capture the nature of cultural identity Bauman explains, we need to accept that 'identities retain their distinct shape only in as far as they go on ingesting and divesting cultural matter seldom of their own making. Identities do not rest on the uniqueness of their traits, but consist increasingly in the distinct ways of selecting/recycling/rearranging the cultural matter which is common to all' (Bauman 1973/1999:xliv). Bauman remains a sociologist and does not reject or ignore the concept of culture in social life. Culture is more than simply common knowledge or customary ways of behaving, the practice of the way we do things around here. Our understanding of 'humanity' is a cultural project with Bauman's ethical writings, as are the skills of dialogue and negotiation. Individual people rely upon knowledge of how to deal with situations and culture provides guidance on duty, on how to behave in any given situation, the responses we can expect from those around us and if we choose to behave in one way rather than another what responses we can expect. Our cognitive frames of reference, the resources that underpin our ability to interpret the world around us are shaped by the culture we are socialised into.

In its conceptual role as a sociological conception of Kant's 'kingdom of ends', Bauman's conception of culture provides the tools for consciousness – knowledge, cognition, language. To think beyond culture is beyond a person's cognitive power and ability. Culture also provides ontological solidarity, a foundation to the 'we' experience that allows us to view people like us, who share our culture, as the same and not as the Other. The appearance of the Other is never a pleasant surprise because it damages the perception of the world as 'our' world. We now know that the other also exists in the world but they are not part of the 'we' relationship: 'moral selves may be dissolved in the all-embracing "we" – the moral "I" being just a singular form of ethical "s/he"; whatever is moral when stated in the first person remains moral when stated in the second or third' the first

premise when considering moral phenomena is 'to treat the "we" as the plural form of "I"' (Bauman 1993:47).

For Bauman a moral life must have an objective aspect beyond feelings of pleasure and personal satisfaction. Bauman's refusal to engage with, or listen to the voice of the Other is seen most clearly in Bauman's views on sexuality. Sexuality is a central aspect of the affective aspect of human life. It is unclear why some of the behaviours identified by Bauman in relation to sexuality are necessarily immoral. Eroticism and the conscious enjoyment of sexual relations, for example are identified by Bauman as immoral even when the activities are engaged in by consenting adults. As enjoyment when 'severed from its age old-integration with reproduction, kinship and the generations' makes identity fragment into episodes and prevents a cohesive life strategy to emerge and leads to the floating of responsibility. The enjoyment of sexuality in this manner:

denies the moral significance of even the most intimate inter-human interaction. As a result, it exempts core elements of human interrelationships from moral evaluation. It adiaphorizes the parts of human existence which the adiaphoric mechanisms of bureaucracy and business could not (nor did not need, or wish, to) reach (Bauman 1995:269).

Bauman's unsupported comments on sexuality suggest that he views such activities as warranting a 'primal' exclusion and demonstrate that he makes a distinction between 'good' desires and untamed or 'bad' desires; and that such 'bad' desires should be rejected and excluded from the public sphere into the realm of the 'private'. What Bauman is doing here is the recreation of the 'closet' in liquid modern form; and as such attempting to undermine one of the success stories of life politics, the politicisation of the personal in the area of sexuality. Effective participation in the public sphere is not possible if exclusion on the basis of sexuality is permissible. Since Michel Foucault's work on sexuality, it is no longer possible to look at sexuality solely in terms of the natural cycle of generations. Life politics is a politics of the first person with a focus on quality of life issues in relation to personal identity.

### **Bauman, Ethics and the Other**

In *Life in Fragments* (1995) Bauman builds upon his discussion of the place of morality within the post ethical, post-legislative postmodern condition. Solid modernity signals the end of God's commandment and the emergence of reason as the basis for legislating morality. Solid modernity contained within it an impulse or desire for 'societal self-improvement' based upon the 'urge to construct a perfect, harmonious world for humans' (Bauman 1995:173). Morality within solid modernity was based upon the imposition of a moral code that does more than describe what people do



but prescribes moral behaviour. The code was designed to prevent evil and abolish ambivalence. However such moral codes lift personal responsibility for wrongs committed by the individual. The solid modern person does not need to trust their own moral judgement as they become increasingly dependent on the expertise of experts. Moral codes are designed to allow the solid modern person to escape from fear, but have the unforeseen consequence of enhancing the fear and feeling of powerlessness in the face of threats identified by experts. As Bauman often repeats, in solid modernity moral responsibilities are taken away from the individual and placed in the hands of agencies and become subject to what Hannah Arendt described as the 'rule of nobody', generating a tendency towards 'adiaphorization'.

However, the crisis of ethics in the postmodern condition does not necessarily mean the end of morality: 'it is possible now, nay inevitable, to face the moral issues point blank, in all their naked truth, as they emerge from the life experience of men and women, and as they confront moral selves in all their irreparable and irredeemable ambivalence' (Bauman 1995:43). We only share that small part of ourselves that is relevant for the encounters we engage in and nothing more, as such in the postmodern condition encounters between people are fragmentary and episodic; we only ever interact with a fraction of the self with much of the Other classed as private and as such it remains unknown to us. Most encounters have no lasting legacy the events pass with little or no significance for the individuals concerned.

In the postmodern/liquid modern era of 'unadulterated individualism', ethics has become derided as typically modern and there has been a significant degree of emancipation from such constraints by an aestheticisation of ethics. Postmoderns do not trust any moral authority. For Bauman people are morally ambivalent, filled with uncertainty and neither by nature good or bad. Moreover, moral behaviour is 'non-rational' and based in the realm of personal autonomy and as such cannot be guaranteed by the state or other authorities designing the context in which behaviours take place, rather people have to learn to live morally without such guarantees. Moral behaviour is described by Bauman as 'aporetic' meaning that no action is unambiguously good or bad and all actions: 'if acted upon in full, leads to immoral consequences' (Bauman 1993:11). In an argument that follows John Macmurrary's communitarianism, Bauman argues that the moral self has to act in a manner that is unselfish, in that the moral self must give up some aspect of themselves.

Bauman acknowledges that being with the Other and for the Other can lead to the destruction of the individual autonomy of the Other, to the domination and oppression of the Other. Although this issue and how liquid modern people can avoid destroying the individual autonomy of the Other is not explained. Bauman's opinion is that morality is 'not universalizable', but because his starting point is Kant, Bauman does make universal statements to support his position and at the same time from a Kantian perspective rejects the nihilist idea that morality as something that is local and

temporary. Such universal statements include that we should not do harm to others as this agrees with their self-interest and in addition, that 'every reasonable person must accept that doing good to others is better than doing evil' (Bauman 1993:27). For Bauman it is the moral capacity of people that allows them to form communities; to recognise and have concern for the emotions of others (Bauman 1993:33), we have the capacity to do this because we have a cognitive frame of reference that gives us the skills to read the emotion of the Other and because we share such emotions and their meaning is clear to us. Morality becomes personalised when it is released from the artificial and rigid ethical codes found within solid modernity. It is the appeal to abstract principles that saps the moral prerogatives of communities. When such abstract ethical codes make their appearance then our moral impulse is suppressed. Institutions that attempt to morally protect the community releases the individual from any personal moral responsibility for the Other. In solid modernity there is a public space but it contains no moral proximity, such public space is characterised by estrangement from intimacy with the Other.

Again taking his starting point from Lévinas, Bauman argues that the 'primal scene' of morality is sphere of the 'face to face'; we encounter the Other as a naked and defenceless face, not an abstract face but the face of another person, which dissolves alterity and individuality. Proximity becomes important for the link between self and Other. We become isolated individuals reaching to a state of being for the Other, a 'we'- relationship in which we are better with each other than without. We are better when we are side by side and physically close. The 'we' is 'the plural form of "I"' (Bauman 1993:47). As a moral person the 'I' has to take responsibility for the Other and it is this taking of responsibility, triggered by the gaze of the Other, that creates the 'I' as a moral self.

As in Lévinas's contribution to ethics, Bauman's postmodern ethics are the ethics of love and caress. Bauman looks at caress as a metaphor for a moral relationship, reflecting a gesture like lovingly stroking the contours of the other's body:

the sight of *l'Autre* that triggers the moral impulse and recasts me as a moral subject through exposing me and surrendering/subordinating to the object of my responsibility (this happens already before *l'Autre* has a chance to open her/his mouth, and so before any demands or requests could be heard by me ...) – even if the tactile, the caress, is a better metaphor for Lévinas's model of what follows the awakening of the moral self (Bauman 2011a).

The passage from being-with the Other to being-for the Other involves 'love' which Bauman describes as resistance to objectification, an 'awakening to the face'; the removal of masks that hides empathy and emotion that allows us to see the nakedness of the face and hear the 'inaudible call



for assistance' that allows us to comprehend the 'vulnerability and weakness' of the Other. The Other becomes my responsibility, a target for emotion, with responsibility-for-the-Other, power-over-the-Other and freedom vis-à-vis the Other identified by Bauman as the component parts of our 'primal moral scene' (Bauman 1995:64). Bauman explains that to act morally the self has to come to terms with what was thought to be incurable ambivalence, he makes clear what this relationship and commitment to the Other's welfare involves in 'practical terms' (Bauman 1995:69):

My responsibility for the other .... includes also my responsibility for determining what needs to be done to exercise that responsibility. Which means in turn that I am responsible for defining the needs of the Other; what is good, and what is evil for the Other. If I love her and thus desire her happiness, it is my responsibility to decide what would make her truly happy (Bauman 1995:64-65).

The post/liquid modern experience of intimacy is a 'de-ethicized' intimacy rooted in 'flotation' a condition which neutralizes moral impulses and moral considerations. The 'primal scene' of morality is the face to face of the intimate; the moral part of two, which changes with the appearance of the third. It is with the presence of the third that our moral impulse pauses and awaits instruction. The presence of the third transforms the postmodern/liquid modern self into a sensation-gatherer; and for sensation-gatherer the Other 'is made of rarefied and ethereal substance of impressions' and to caress the Other is to explore the Other as a surface to be 'stroked or licked – an object of tasting' that 'enters the world of the ego as an anticipated source of pleasure' (Bauman 1995:122-123).

Adiaphoria is a 'floating of responsibility' for the Other, with the separation of 'pleasure/use value' from the commitment to 'love'. Adiaphoria leads to 'the stripping of human relationships of their moral significance, exempting them from moral evaluation, rendering them 'morally irrelevant' (Bauman 1995:133). Adiaphorization is set in motion when our relationship with another person is less than total; the person becomes 'useful' to us. It is only if a relationship is full in that it is with the whole self that it becomes 'moral' argues Bauman. In the postmodern condition, and one might assume in liquid modernity as well, there are four distinct life strategies or life-models identified by Bauman; each one self-contained and self-enclosed, restricting the creation of moral duties and responsibilities and potentially making our relationship with the Other fragmentary even in the most intimate of interactions; there is an ambivalence towards the Other, with the Other evaluated on aesthetic grounds in terms of their ability to promise joy and provide sensations rather than in terms of morality and responsibility for the Other's welfare. At the same time the Other retains an element that is regarded as 'sinister, menacing and intimidating ... Mixophilia and mixophobia vie with each other' (Bauman 1995:138).

Adiaphoria excludes some categories of people from claiming to be moral subjects and as such they are treated with moral insensitivity and are more likely to be exposed to suffering. There is then a causal connection for Bauman between moral insensitivity and the ability to commit acts of cruelty: 'Modernity did not make people more cruel; it only invented a way in which cruel things could be done by non-cruel people' (Bauman 1995:197-198). Not only does the Other have no voice when we take responsibility for them but their 'consent was not called for' (Bauman 1995:201).

The moral self is its own interpreter of the needs of the Other; the command of the Other is 'unspoken': 'It is the Other who commands me, but it is I who must give voice to that command, make it audible to myself' (Bauman 1993:90). Bauman continues: 'The Other is recast as my creation ... I have become the Other's plenipotentiary, though I myself signed the power of attorney in the Other's name. "The Other for whom I am" is my own interpretation of that silent, provocative presence' (Bauman 1993:91). When Bauman's moral self takes on the plenipotentiary role, the moral self becomes the all-powerful, perhaps even absolute representative of what she or he considers to be the interests and wishes of the Other. For Bauman the 'I' appears to become both legislator and interpreter of the Other, with the right to decide what is true in relation to the Other and also maintains the right to decide what is just for the Other.

When the Third appears on the scene this changes the situation of 'the moral party of two' to a 'moral society' in which our innate moral impulse becomes 'baffled', pauses and requires instructions. The arrival of the Third constitutes a group, and our moral proximity with the Other is replaced by 'aesthetic proximity'; a condition in which 'the Other' becomes one of 'the many', the faceless crowd. Social space becomes a complex interaction of three interconnected processes for Bauman – cognitive spacing; aesthetic spacing and moral spacing. Cognitive spacing informs us of who we live with. This information becomes part of our taken for granted background knowledge or our 'natural attitude'. The Other is not unknown to us but we may not know one specific human Other, we come to understand individuals as types of people not individual persons. Bauman identifies the origin of hostility towards the Other as a product of the 'inner demons' of frightened people who draw upon the culture to see anything that is not indigenous or alien as a source of pollution.

Social organisation neutralizes our moral impulse by firstly creating distance in place of proximity; exempting some Others from our moral responsibility; assembling humans into aggregates; the effect of these changes is that social action becomes adiaphoric and as human agents we find ourselves in an 'agentic state' (Bauman 1993:123). Our moral capacity and responsibility for the Other becomes 'floated' and we engage in civil indifference 'effacing the face' of the Other who comes to be recognised as a set of traits rather than a person. In place of been with and for the Other

and we direct our concern away from the Other and towards 'intermediaries' within the immediate proximity of our community, people with whom we have physical co-presence such as 'comrades in arms' or 'loyalty to mates' (Bauman 1993:126). Culture is the assertion of our collective identity and its role with sociality is to be a mechanism of self-perpetuation or self-reproduction. Cognitive spacing helps to reduce such anxiety by informing people within the culture on how to view and respond to the Other and reminding the individual who they share a 'we-relationship' with.

The Other argues Bauman 'is a by-product of social spacing' and 'the otherness of the Other and the security of the social space (also, therefore, of the security of its own identity) are intimately related and support each other' (Bauman 1993:237). Social spacing takes the form of a 'cultural homogeneity' and is maintained by the intensity of the 'member's dedication' and 'popular emotion' and, as such, has a central role to play in identity building. When Bauman chooses to use the term 'member' to describe individuals within a community this explains why individuals who are seen not to be members are classed as 'strangers'. The culture that members share is not based upon an innate impulse but based upon an 'exclusivist ideology' that stresses human differentiation and the categorical. This 'exclusivist ideology' has intensified with the dismantling of the Welfare State because without the state having as significant a role in providing a safety net, moral responsibility for providing help for the poor and people in need, becomes a private matter. As such, claims Bauman, 'those who can buy themselves out from collective provisions – an act which turns out to mean, sooner or later, buying themselves out of collective responsibility' (Bauman 1993:244).

Culture, in its postmodern and liquid modern form, still maintains its ability to separate and banish on the basis of a 'collective fear-fed zeal' for self-defence (Bauman 1995:177-178). This ability which Bauman calls the 'anthropoemic strategy' is endemic to every society, through concepts such as tradition, community and 'forms of life' or 'rhetoric of blood and soil', culture provides the underpinning communal cohesion, consensus and shared understanding for social spacing and is both inclusive and exclusive in that the Other comes to have their conditions and choices defined by it. Asserting 'simultaneously its own identity and the strangeness of the strangers' (Bauman 1995:190). Bauman (2011b) maintains that culture provides a communal belonging and 'identity stories' that make meaningful interaction within communities possible. Such human bonds are not given by nature but based upon 'fervour and commitment' that they should continue (2011b:80-81). Bauman reflects upon this anthropological conception of culture with an examination of human rights. Human rights were established for the benefit of individuals and were secured by joint effort. However with rights come boundaries and borders between the members of the community and the Other (2011b:90).

There is an imaginary, hypothetical and elusive character to Bauman's ethical perspective. Bauman adopts a culture driven, abstract, disembodied approach to issues of ethics and morality;

which contains an abstract conception of a generalised Other, applicable to all peoples classed as Other in all places and at all times. According to Seyla Benhabib, the generalised other is problematic because it abstracts real human individuals from their particular circumstances:

The standpoint of the generalized other requires us to view each and every individual as a rational being entitled to the same rights and duties we would want to ascribe to ourselves. In assuming the standpoint, we abstract from the individuality and concrete identity of the other. We assume that the other, like ourselves, is a being who has concrete needs, desires and affects, but that what constitutes his or her moral dignity is not what differentiates us from each other, but rather what we, as speaking and acting rational agents, have in common ... The standpoint of the concrete other, by contrast, requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity and affective-emotional constitution. In assuming this standpoint, we abstract from what constitutes our commonality, and focus on individuality. We seek to comprehend the needs of the other, his or her motivations, what she searches for, and what s/he desires (Benhabib 1992:158-159).

Bauman's ethical stance is universalistic in that it is restricted to the standpoint of the 'generalized other', his ethical stance is not preoccupied with the details of specific relationships or with a 'particular other'. Bauman falls in the trap identified by Hannah Arendt of transforming a *who* into a *what*. The Other for Arendt is often viewed as a lonely, politically marginal figure who: 'usually enter the historical scene in times of corruption, disintegration, and political bankruptcy' (Arendt 1958:180). Otherness is an important aspect of plurality but human distinctiveness, the distinct quality of alteritas possessed by all things is not the same as Otherness. Through speech and action people distinguish themselves rather than being merely distinct. It is through speech that people present themselves to others not as physical objects, or sets of characteristics but as unique individuals: As Arendt explains: 'With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world' (Arendt 1958:176). Moreover, the unique personal identity of the Other can only be hidden in silence. It is silence that transforms a who into a what:

The moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a 'character' ... With the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us (Arendt 1958:181).

In developing his care-and-responsibility orientation Bauman has no inclination to take the standpoint of a 'particular other' as such Bauman has no respect for a 'particular other's' needs. The

Other for Bauman is a disembedded and disembodied being. Bauman defines the Other, decides the needs of the Other and what should be done in the interests of the Other. The acquisition of moral competencies in relation to the definition of and needs of the generalised Other are derived from the culture 'we' not the Other share.

Ethical impartiality and the application of responsibility are based upon learning to recognize the claims of the Other as defined by the culture we are socialised into. The Other has a culturally defined identity that makes the Other different but should be treated as a person just like oneself and as such needs no voice because as long as we accept the moral imperative that the Other should be treated as we would treat ourselves, as such as this stance constitutes fairness and justice in the public sphere. Rights and duties are culturally defined not negotiated with the Other as is the most appropriate way arbitrate conflict and distribute rewards. Such a stance confirms the common humanity that the Other shares with us and our understanding of their human individuality. Moreover, the process of abstracting from his or her identity and ignoring the distinct content standpoint of the concrete other leads to epistemic incoherence in universalistic ethical theories. Bauman rejects reciprocity in our ethical dealings with the Other yet it is reciprocity that provides the capability and skill to adopt the standpoint of the Other, to imaginatively put ourselves in the position of the other and see the other as different with distinct needs and desires. In Bauman's position there is no attempt at a mutual understanding of Otherness.

Taking our starting point from Benhabib (1992), we can also identify that Bauman makes a distinction between 'an ethics of justice and rights' that is communitarian in nature and rooted in culture and an 'ethics of care and responsibility' that involves the imposition of what we feel to be right and wrong for the concrete real Other person. We see here the assumption Bauman (1993, 1995) makes that what is good for us is good for the Other. We understand the care that we need and so understand the care that the Other needs. Care and responsibility also become abstract, universal and imposed upon the Other. What is good for us in our society and culture is assumed to be good for all, everywhere including the Other. Bauman's responsibility for the Other with no voice is little more than blind domination. Culture compels us to think and act towards the Other in specifically determined ways. The distinctive and unique elements of the individual's humanity are emptied from the Other and they appear before us as an object for our responsibility. The Other is unable to articulate how they should be judged or treated, unless such a request is in accord with the view established within the we relationship.

### **New Public Sphere: The Way Out of the Contemporary Interregnum**

In his post 2000 'liquid turn' writings, Zygmunt Bauman has come to identify the public space in terms of 'collectivities of belonging' in which new forms of communitarian politics can emerge

that give the community some influence or direction over the consequences of liquefaction. However, the task of establishing this new public sphere is all the more difficult because 'culture' has been distorted by market forces from its original Enlightenment-inspired form in which there were 'people' to 'cultivate', into a form within liquid-modernity in which consists of 'offerings', a 'warehouse of meant-for-consumption products' not 'norms' and is described as something which is 'willingly pursued'; and within which choice is unavoidable; regarded as both a 'life necessity', and a 'duty' for the individual consumers. Choice is characterised by "seduction, not normative regulation; PR, not policing; creating new needs/desires/wants, not coercion" (Bauman 2009:157, 2010:399). This liquid modern culture allows the individual clients to be seduced without 'stiff standards', a culture that serves all tastes while privileging none, a culture that encourages fitfulness and 'flexibility'. Unlike solid-modernity there is an abandonment of the attempts at assimilation of the stranger into the dominant culture in an effort to take away the strangeness of the stranger. We can no longer assume 'collectivities of belonging' or 'integrating of communities'. Culture within liquid modernity is characterised by difference but not necessarily a celebration of difference.

Bauman argues in favour of an expanded role for a new public sphere that emerges out of life politics. Bauman takes his starting point an understanding of the public sphere from Hannah Arendt who suggests that the public sphere gathers us together: 'the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised' (Arendt 1958:57). The term 'public' for Arendt signifies two closely related phenomena: First; 'everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity' in which no activity can become excellent if it is outside of the public sphere. Second; the public life is distinct from the intimate life. The public sphere is a space in which reasoned arguments about the contested aspects of social and political life can be addressed. However, one might ask how engagement within a public sphere is possible given Bauman's assumptions about the nature of solidarity in post and liquid modernity. Also because inequalities of power continue to pervade the public sphere, issues are raised about how the public sphere is to be constituted and how the legitimacy of the sphere is to be maintained. Why would a politics of such a public sphere not be manipulated by the powerful?

There is then a contradiction in Bauman at this point; as life politics is the politics of the new public sphere and yet life politics is a politics of rebellious subjectivity. In addition, there are practical problems in terms of how such a public sphere could emerge, given that both post and liquid moderns define themselves first and foremost as consumers and orientate themselves and their life strategies, towards the enjoyment of acquired use values within their personal/private sphere.



There is the additional question of what is the public sphere expected to do? Is this sphere a recreation of the political community in which the existing legislators are replaced by new people? Or is the role of the public sphere to get the existing legislators to make better decisions, by giving voice to the community so that the legislator's decisions are more responsive? Is the role of the public sphere to stop the process of liquefaction, strengthen social solidarity and allow the emergence of socialism as an active utopia?

The conceptual problems and difficulties that affect Bauman's social analysis surface with renewed force when he reflects upon life on the far side of the contemporary interregnum. One of the reasons why his conception of the public sphere is not convincing is because Bauman does not present a convincing account of how post and liquid modern identities emerged. How and why did it come about that rampant consumerism emerged and made people adopt life strategies in which they came to view themselves and others in terms of use values? In Bauman's work there is no account of how the changes in global capitalism that brought about the shift from the society of producers to the society of consumers came about.

Bauman does explain that in the liquid modern world political boundaries have become porous and the state has limited abilities to counteract the consequences of the flows of capital: "the fast accelerating vehicle of progress" (Bauman 2010:40). Given that problems affect us on a global scale such problems can only be solved if we 'raise human integration to the level of humanity, inclusive of the whole population of the planet' (Bauman 2010:69). The 'democratic paradigm' remains important in the creation of a 'good society' 'invested in the democratic form of human cohabitation and self-government' (Bauman 2010:56) supported by a culture of values and practices to 'nurture equality, cooperation and freedom' by self-critique and reform. To this end the state is 'indispensable ... for the sake of making the equality of humans feasible (I would say "dreamable") if not real' (Bauman 2010:60). And what is this global public sphere aiming to achieve? What will the new global public sphere achieve at an alternative to the contemporary interregnum? Bauman makes his position clear we need 'intervention in the markets': 'to impose limits on consumption and raise local taxation to the levels required by the continuation, let alone further expansion, of social services' (Bauman 2010:69). Such an approach does not address the very real quality of life issues, for example in relation to the sexuality of the Other that underpin life politics, ethical issues where solutions are not to be found in the distribution of tax income or welfare state expansion.

Within the individual there are two contradictory forces at work; on the one hand Bauman identifies an innate moral impulse that identifies the moral way forward as being with and for the Other and to demand nothing back in return: 'moral impulse, moral responsibility, moral intimacy that supplies the stuff from which the morality of human cohabitation is made' (Bauman 1993:35).

Alternatively people are socialised into a common culture that provides individuals with cognitive frames of reference, this culture has an adiphoric effect on the individuals – in both solid and liquid modernity, but for different reasons. The adiphoric state is a common explanatory mechanism in Bauman's analysis of solid modernity, including both Nazism and Stalinism, postmodernity and liquid modernity; it is the concept that Bauman draws upon to explain what it is that makes 'ethical considerations irrelevant to action' (Bauman 1999:46). The agentic state is then the opposite of a state of individual autonomy and responsibility. In terms of the Holocaust, the sociality of the face-to-face relationship was dispersed into a field of technological representation. Actions are said to become 'morally adiphoric' (Bauman 1993:125) when authority for an action is removed from the agent's behaviour, individuals do not have to face the moral content of their actions, what Bauman describes as a situation of 'floated responsibility' (Bauman 1993:126) or what Arendt described as the 'rule of nobody' (Bauman 1993:126). The adiphoric state is rooted in a hatred of impurity. Bauman accepts Arendt's position that the reality of human existence is a 'conditioned existence' and the 'world's reality' is experienced as a 'conditioning force'. The processes of rationalisation or liquefaction impact directly upon the central nervous system of the individual as a determining or conditioning force external to the individual, suspending the individual's moral agency to the degree that the moral content of an action is placed outside of the consciousness of the agent. In the same way that switching off the lights in a room makes us blind to the objects about us. Rationalisation or liquefaction simply enters the mind as the uninvited guest, brings about a set of behaviours and leaves without agency being affected by the contact or the experience.

In his work with Leonidas Donskis, Bauman and return to the adiphorizing effects of social processes that encourage moral irrelevance and dehumanization of the Other: 'the liquid modern variety of adiphorization is cut after the pattern of the consumer-commodity relation, and its effectiveness relies on the transplantation of that pattern to inter-human relations' (Bauman and Donskis 2013:15). Mass consumption has come to have an overwhelming grasp on the happiness of post and liquid moderns. Bauman appears to agree with Herbert Marcuse in *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) that consumerism has created a second nature that ties people libidinally to the commodity. Although Bauman does not address the questions of how was it that the moral impulse did not become commodified? And why did our soul and humanity not also become commodified? Bauman ends up presenting a contradictory image of the individual who is on the one hand endowed with a moral impulse and on the other prevented from acting upon this impulse because of the adiphorizing effects of external social processes which prevent the individual viewing their own actions as cruel or immoral and such adiphorizing effects are assumed to exist in all forms of solid and liquid modernity. In solid modernity adiphoria is generated by the processes of rationalization and the "reality principle", whilst in post modernity and liquid modernity adiphoria is generated

by consumption and the "pleasure principle". However, the creation of a new public sphere is problematic for Bauman because in his work the relationship between self and other is a relationship of being-to-being mediated by culture, making the relationship both being-to-being and knowledge-to-knowledge. We perceive the Other through culture, and it is culture that underpins the very thing that others the Other. Making Bauman's Other both particular and abstract; an individual human being perceived as a generalised other.

As we would expect, by taking his starting point from Kant's categorical imperative and understanding a moral act as 'duty'. Being with the Other and for the Other can only be conceived on the basis of the knowledge we possess, within the context provided by culture. However, there is a problem with this position, as Keith Tester (1997) explains: 'Bauman is too aware of history not to know that hatred cannot be ignored. But his commitment to a narrative of Culture which stresses universal and almost spiritual human qualities and capacities means that he gives the chance of hatred rather less weight than it merits' (Tester 1997:140). To fully accept the Other we would have to develop the capacity to think beyond our culture, to stretch the limits of our knowledge, cognition and language. This process would in the first instance involve a form of intra-subjective separation from our ontological framework as the first step in allowing us to think of the world that is different from what we previously imagined so that a possibility for non-antagonistic inter-human relationships with the Other could be possible. However, this raises the cultural issue of trust. How can we trust a person who is not one of us? The Other appears to have knowledge that we do not possess and that is the source of the perceived threat they pose; and the culture of all forms of modernity makes people weary of difference and it is this culturally bound concern about difference that is contained within our cognitive frame of reference that underpins the process of Othering with modernity.

## **Conclusion**

There is an impartial and universal nature to the argument in Zygmunt Bauman's deontological ethical analysis. Individuals do not make moral choices alone in an isolated context but rather individual's modes of moral subjectivity and moral choices are made within a cultural context. To quote Keith Tester again: 'Bauman's work is fully within the compass of Culture' (Tester 1997:135). Making the moral world regular, orderly and linked to solidarity. The generalised Other becomes a 'concocted homunculi' an 'aggregate of spare parts and aspects'. If the Other has a voice in Bauman's ethical writings, that voice is provided by Bauman himself. Members of the culture are presented by Bauman as the legislators and interpreters of the needs, wishes and desires of the Other. In addition, there is a Manicheanism underpinning Bauman's approach to ethics most clearly seen in his comments on sexuality; a belief that there is a fundamental division between forces of

good and forces of evil in the world. Taking his starting point from the division of orientation between an 'ethic of ultimate ends' versus an 'ethic of responsibility', first outlined by Max Weber in his 1918 lecture on "Politics as a Vocation", Bauman suggests that an 'ethic of ultimate ends' is based upon the idea that the end justifies the means, it may be necessary to engage in actions which are morally questionable such as bombing civilian targets in order to achieve an important political goal. The alternative is to be with and for the Other and to take responsibility for the Other. Both positions involve taking what is assumed to be the morally superior standpoint, in that the intention in both positions to bring about a better situation. However, both positions in the last analysis lead to human beings coming to be viewed as objects in the world.

Zygmunt Bauman's ethical stance places an emphasis on social justice, social and political rights that are by their nature simply right not wrong and that the moral content of an action is not dependent on its consequences. The only 'good' thing in itself is a good intention, however acting on the basis of a 'good' motive or good intention can also cause harm, such as the unwanted imposition of 'love' or 'caress', if the Other is allowed no voice. If individuals do not examine what may be achieved from an ethical action, including what good can come from their acting ethically and speculating on possible unforeseen consequences of their action then harm to the Other may result. This is more so if the needs of the Other are assessed solely from our own point of view. As Bauman rightly points out a self-founding morality is 'blatantly and deplorably, ethically unfounded' (Bauman 1995:18) but this does not prevent him from developing such a self-founding morality in his own work. It is the voice of the Other, which Bauman chooses to silence in his ethical writings, the very thing that makes that person unique and allows the Other to express their autonomy and choice of outcome. For Bauman, it is unreasonable to ignore dispossessed Others but this is not in itself an ethical stance if there is no possibility of entering into a dialogue with the Other, allowing them to come into the new public sphere and allow the Other to participate in the formation of a shared understanding of what is needed to be done. Bauman needs to deconstruct the paternalistic, benevolent emotions and feeling states that underpin the ethical perspective of doing things on behalf of the Other because we feel it is in their own best interest. Bauman's ethical stance raises the question of who will guard the ethical consequences of Bauman's individual having unlimited power over the Other. Who is going to identify if the loving, caressing and being with and for the Other is in the interests of the Other or meets the needs of the Other.

Zygmunt Bauman's ethics does not have the commitment to the Other's alterity as the starting point of ethical responsibility as in the work of Emmanuel Lévinas. For Lévinas every individual is unique and maintains a quality of otherness that he terms alterity, by which he means that the Otherness transcends all other categories and concepts. For Lévinas there is much to be discovered within the individual inter-personal encounters with the Other. For Lévinas the relationship with

the Other is one that that involves learning from the Other, without the purpose of placing one's own interpretation of need onto the Other. It is this unknown content that the self uncovers in the encounter with the Other that initiates the ethical quality or the association between self and Other. There is an a posteriori element in Lévinas's approach to ethics that is missing from Bauman's approach. Bauman's ethical account insufficient because, despite being focussed on been with and for the Other, it rejected the idea of the Other as a unique individual thus failing to provide a suitable basis for ethics in Lévinas's terms. There is a duty of the self to the Other in Bauman's approach but at a cost in terms of undermining the Other's reciprocal role in providing content to the ethical relationship. As such Bauman's voiceless and passive Other is denied full ethical status within the ethical relationship. Bauman's underpinning Socialism means that the emphasis between self and Other is on material considerations. In Lévinas's terms the Other cannot be comprehended by knowledge derived from the self's own perception of need in the way that Bauman attempts to do so. We may also want to question Bauman's assumption that we can only flourish in a socialist utopia, an egalitarian society where there are strict controls over the level of consumption one person can engage in and the state intervenes to distribute income spent on unnecessary consumption to people less fortunate via a welfare state. As suggested above the Other may not want to live in a socialist utopia and many of the problems that people, including the Other face in relation to self-realisation in relation to identity, such as their preferred gendered or sexual identity are not going to be resolved by a forced redistribution of other people's income.

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