

Titolo: LIQUID FEARS: contemporary society and its liquid fears

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Fears and phobias would be deemed as human reactions that protect us by signaling danger. However, after the attacks on September 11th in the United States, they have been transformed in panic and multiplied in the heart of industrialized societies. This review focuses on the influence of such fear over the modern liquid societies. In an introductory chapter, Zygmunt Bauman argues that, in contrast to animals (which feel basic fears like a kind of impulse to escape in specific situations), men have the ability to elaborate a secondary fear characterized by being “socially and culturally” recycled.

Oddly, *“the fear is more terrible when it is diffuse, dispersed, not very clear; when it floats freely elsewhere, without bonds, anchors, home or a clear cause”* (Bauman, 2008:10). Simply, human fears transcend the boundaries of time and space while they remain in our fantasy. This lies in the ground of conscience which regulates the behavior among human beings even when no direct threat exists (derivative fear).

The dangers and “derivative fears” can be classified in three types: a) those that threaten the person physically, b) those that threaten the durability of the social order where a person lives in, and c) those that threaten the phenomenological person’s place in the world. Although a derivative fear does not imply an imminent danger, feeling of insecurity can be channeled by means of other mechanisms applying the principle of cooperation. In fact, modern State is in charge of their citizen’s security; however, when its own possibilities are exceeded, responsibility is assigned to other spheres such as capital market.

Following this explanation, human beings usually try to reduce the undesirable consequences of sudden events, transforming fears in risks. Philosophically, risks are characterized by being calculable while certainness focuses on the “visible and possible dan-

gers.” Likewise, Bauman outlines that no catastrophe is harder than impossible. In the collapse of “civilization”, the state of nature (according to hobessian’s thesis) prevented people from fighting by means of common material resources. That way, civilized life is presented as a form of sheet, beyond the limits of disorder and barbarism. In the so-called “Titanic syndrome”, Bauman explains the paradox of panic in modern liquid modernity. Titanic disaster, like the luxurious transatlantic, represents the social order while iceberg symbolizes the vulnerability of humanity.

Basically, modern societies are being devastated by the same fears which wreak gradually havoc in the daily life. Thanks to the selfishness and progressive social fragmentation each citizen faces these types of fears individually. This is the case of modern “terror to death” in which Bauman emphasizes that the message of modern television (like Big Brother) programs show human weaknesses in public; survival is only possible for one person while condemnation is part of the majority’s fate. In accordance to Bauman, Big Brother works as a “moral story” in which punishment and recompense become more important than solidarity.

Again and again throughout the book, Bauman assesses that, from all animals in the planet, only human beings fear to the presence of death. This feeling not only is innate but also suggests a conscience intended to anxiously find the sense of being in this world. From all deeds that humans are afraid of, death has always been the less known for them. In this regard, culture works as a mechanism that helps humanity to bear her inevitable presence every day.

That way, “the original sin”, “the redemption” and consequent salvation are essential issues in human being’s world. Beyond the recompense, each person chooses how to live its own life. In turn, like salvation, fame is our destiny and demands an appropriate sacrifice. Unlike a hero who individually looks for his own fame and salvation, religion provides the opportunity of transcendence whenever people might not access to the benefits of personal immortality.

In the threshold of French Revolution, Bauman sustains France adopted the ancient roman *pro patria* formula. As a result of this, modern State and its citi-

zens created a bridge towards solidarity and reciprocity so that their own survival was granted. The society’s welfare was more than important for those who died in the field of battle anonymity. This example helps understanding the reasons why citizens are devoted to redemption as a vehicle to reduce anxiety. If hobessian and durkheimian thesis are correct, humankind founded the society (Leviathan) as a sacral entity in opposition to the action of mystery.

Nonetheless, in our liquid modern society of consumers, strategies are deployed in marginalizing or disregarding all that is long-lived; from this perspective, people look forward to devaluing all own experiences shaped in the immortality. Unlike a couple of centuries ago, our modern views are not aimed at accessing eternity but a transitory style of life (profane).

In the *deconstructionism* of death, negative and disastrous consequences are left behind; in consequence, humankind is experiencing an increase in the level of panic because of its possible destructive aftermaths. In other words, the fear of dying is not other feeling than horror to being excluded, abandoned, and forgotten by the neighbor. Under these circumstances, humanity is continuously being fragmented due to individualism and egoism; that way, our obsession of living forever is converted in a vehicle towards disaggregation. If, in fact, a community was united and rooted in the belief that death was an external and extraordinary issue, nowadays individualism calms down such a concern trivializing the importance of emotional bondages. In short, whenever social linkages weaken, a likelihood of considering mortality as a remote event emerges.

In the course of reading, Bauman deals with the relationship between evil and fear. Human Beings are aimed at scaring the negative consequences of their motivations and thoughts. Meaning of evil would work as a kind of rational explanation in which people would understand and justify “god’s wills”; unpredictable catastrophes or events do not happen at random; otherwise, they are part of a divine plan in response to human’s sins.

Everything that happens in this world would be (implicit or not) caused by human’s behaviors. Underpinned by the Second World War’s crimes and

Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem where extermination was supposedly justified by his smart lawyers arguing that it was a decision made by the top of Nazi's hierarchal Bureaucracy, the main thesis in Bauman outlines that rational allegation continuously reminds the presence of evil in our life (not only a Tsunami but also the ethnic genocides). Basically, anxiety arises whenever human relations collapse because the sense of world turns unpredictable. Culturally, natural disasters like Katrina showed that the poor had been more prejudiced than others in American society.

Following the example of Katrina hurricane, Bauman assures that most inhabitants in New Orleans were "black or Latin American". Furthermore, more than a fourth part of the population lived under the limit of poverty. Quite aside from Katrina, the victims had been excluded from economic progress long time ago. Modernism as well as American capitalism had already promised humankind the immunity before the authoritarian desires of nature but this was evidently selective and exclusive just for a few people. In other words, catastrophes or climate disasters cut the world in two, emphasizing the previous cultural frontiers where there are persons who deserve to be saved and others who do not.

The main thesis in Bauman is that modern bureaucracy not only ethically affects the responsibility for actions in the different gears in organization but also takes moral reciprocity subduing emotions onto a secondary role. In the course of the twentieth century, humankind replaced the moral opinion by instrumental methodologies that have been put in hands in order to make the decision-mak-

ing's process more efficient. Once the appropriate abilities to consider how to use it rationality are deteriorated, technology's advances had the intention of reducing the costs of freedom. The suspension of ethic order in conjunction with a moral responsibility's declination appears to be predominant in liquid times. From this change of mind, technological fetishism performs the role of a political mechanism in substituting the modern guilty (because of a lack of observance of moral issues) by the need of being constantly informed. In other words, information and tecnos equilibrate and purify our bad actions and decisions. The paradox of technology reminds us that even though there is an immensurable speed in our technical advances, our moral did not evolve from Eva and Adam's times.

Taking its cue from R. Castels, Bauman outlines that the increase of risks and insecurity's feeling in people is not the result from the protection's shortage but a lack of clarity as regards fate. A sinister motivation became a mirror of our own impossibility to make firm and durable linkages and substitute them by a more impersonal modern trademark. Historically, fears have in fact accompanied humankind but in liquid modernity they are traded beyond the jurisdiction of Nation-States. Once again, an excessive competition jeopardizes reciprocity and solidarity.

On the other hand, ignorance and egoism ensure that disaster's impacts are more extreme and chaotic according to social perception. In ancient times, Prophets were concerned over predicting that the end of world was coming. That way, in the line of history men have put their efforts to prevent doomsday from com-

ing true.

Nevertheless, in modern times there are no boundaries between fantasy and reality. The negative modern globalization would imminently turn into a real catastrophe because of a lack of prophesies. Most likely, after a long period of stability, any minimal change or disruption would be taken as a sign of disaster accelerating the social fragmentation.

The following review has been intended to clarify and explain some points of Bauman's book even though some other methodological issues would be re-considered. At a first instance, it is not clear how capitalist trademark reduces solidarity and secondly, how these restrictions cause a society defense declination against fears. In general, Bauman's text is well-written but with grammar riddles (like parenthesis) that hinder the reading in several parts.

Finally, even if Bauman did not define what the fear is in any part of his interesting meditation, he forgets the influence of milenarism in the propagation of modern panics. Possibly, September 11th attacks in the United States had more impact (or not) than Hiroshima and Nagasaki's bombings. The point is that the end of millennium woke up diverse feelings associated with anxiety, fears, panics, and the like which deserve being investigated in future approaches. In spite of the aforementioned issues, we consider Liquid Fears as more than important for all scholars who are concerned with topics of this nature.

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