

Exploring Modernity's Hidden Agenda in Europe: The complementary contributions of Zygmunt Bauman and Ernest Gellner

DENNIS SMITH

Contribution to Michael Hviid Jacobsen (ed) *Beyond Bauman: Critical engagements and creative excursions*, London: Routledge (forthcoming November 2016)

Introduction

Zygmunt Bauman and Ernest Gellner were both born in 1925, one in Poland, the other in Czechoslovakia. They grew up in a world heavily influenced by the twentieth-century agenda of modernity, which emphasized liberation and rights, especially for nations and individuals. Later, from the 1970s onward, Bauman and Gellner witnessed the emergence of a new agenda for modernity, one that shifted the focus towards the challenges of global rebalancing, regulation and restraint.

The old agenda was about dismantling colonial empires, undermining arrogant aristocracies, and challenging all kinds of enslavement. The new agenda is about conservation, control and managing a more crowded planet. It has met resistance: the richest are in no hurry to conform; the old colonial powers are slow to shed feelings of superiority and special entitlement; and the poor's accumulated resentments feed insurgencies. As a result the new twenty-first century agenda has met delay and denial. It has been monumentalized in lofty speech but not yet made the basis for determined and sustained action on a sufficiently large scale. It has been hidden in plain sight.

This chapter asks what is at stake for Europe. The inquiry is given sharpness through a critical comparison between some aspects of the lives and ideas of Bauman and Gellner. In different ways they each confronted the dilemmas that have shaped both the old and new agendas. One key item on the new agenda is how to cope with fundamental shifts in global power balances without triggering destructive cycles of humiliation and violence. Europe and its near neighbours in the Maghreb and the Levant are at the centre of these power shifts with their attendant dangers. Can Bauman and Gellner help us understand the threats and opportunities these processes bring? We may consider, for example, Bauman's analysis of liquid modernity and Gellner's approach to nation-formation processes and the dynamics of Islamic societies. Do they help us make sense of the uprisings and civil wars in the Middle East and North Africa since 2001 and the Eurozone crisis since 2007?

In this chapter these issues will be contextualised through a brief discussion of the biographies of Bauman and Gellner, some of their key ideas, the challenge to those ideas posed by the new agenda of modernity, and the place on that agenda filled by recent transformations and crises in the Middle East, North Africa and the European Union. It will then be argued that Bauman's contribution can best be adapted to a world 'beyond Bauman' by identifying three distinct versions of his approach to modernity. These three Baumans are mutually contradictory in some respects but each yields rich resources. They are the products of a particular biography that produced certain strengths as well as some inevitable gaps. Gellner's different biographical path has produced work with some complementary strengths that help fill those gaps.

Taken together, the two writers provide us with a useful platform for further inquiry. But let us begin by identifying the two agendas of modernity in a little more detail.

Two agendas of modernity

Several drivers shape modernity. These include: clusters of transforming new technologies; decisive alterations in global climate; tides of demographic growth, decline and migration; devastating regional or world wars; great economic recessions; and generational waves of religious fervour expressing the population's deep anxiety. From 1914 onwards a combination of such forces overwhelmed the great European land and sea-borne empires, a process accelerated by the rapid spread of an optimistic global agenda for twentieth-century modernity focused on national aspirations, human rights and individual freedom.

By the 1960s demands for both individual and collective rights and freedom had become common ideological coinage. Indeed, the original agenda of modernity remains highly relevant in the early twenty-first century. Many dedicated campaigners fighting for the rights of women, employees, the victims of racial abuse and so on still have their hands very full with necessary work. However, during the 1970s the global landscape shifted significantly, signaling new global threats and priorities.

In 1978 the great reformer Deng Xiaoping became paramount leader of the Chinese People's Republic. The first climate change conference was held at Geneva in 1979. The Iranian Revolution took place in the same year. A hurricane of change arrived during the 1980s, with the rise of neo-liberalism and the dramatic collapse of the Soviet Bloc. The three-way struggle between communism, fascism and capitalist democracy was won, temporarily at least, by the last-named, mainly due to the military strength and economic vigour of the United States. By the 1990s the defeated political ideologies were making comebacks in hybrid form. Chinese communism amalgamated with a non-democratic form of capitalism. Meanwhile, fascism's militarism, glorification of violence, and dreams of domination had strong echoes in movements such as extreme jihadism.

The new and still hidden agenda (see Smith 2006) has four main items. One is the task of making climate change manageable. That means finding peaceful and fair ways to conduct the current struggle for access to key resources, including energy supplies. This is the most prominent new agenda item, fighting its way through a vigorous and determined campaign of denial. A major climate change control agreement was signed in December 2015.

A second item on the new agenda is how to make urban living as civilized as possible for all inhabitants of the megacities coming into existence across the planet. Unhappy urban citizens eventually turn into rioters. Combating this threat to socio-political order requires resources such as health services, education, and housing, delivered through integrative democratic politics. Acknowledging this issue has so far been little more than an act of piety by world leaders.

The third item is how to manage the rise of China and India as they come into balance with the West and then overtake it. Humiliation is a risk both for challenger nations that seem threatening and hegemonic powers forced into partial retreat. The dynamics of humiliation are potentially explosive but too little progress is being made towards

understanding and controlling them (see, for example, Smith 2006, Smith 2010, Smith 2012, Smith 2014).

The final item is the need to prevent widespread war during the power struggle under way for influence within the large 'world island' of Eurasia (Brzezinski 1997, Kaplan 2012, Petersen 2011). That means avoiding incautious entanglement between this intercontinental 'great game' and the bitter regional fights currently going on within Islam. In practice, the United States, Russia and Europe are all finding it difficult to reconcile their 'world island' strategies with their approaches to the ramifying conflicts within and between Islamic states in the Middle East and North Africa.

Two Central European intellectuals

Now we have mapped out the shifting landscape of modernity, let us also trace the contrasting journeys Zygmunt Bauman and Ernest Gellner have made through that landscape. Gellner was brought up in Prague, some three hundred kilometers away from Bauman's home town of Poznań (see Hall 2010). Both are Jewish and when Nazi influence increased, both escaped but in different directions: Gellner to Britain, Bauman to the USSR. Both served in the military during World War II, Gellner with the Czech armoured brigade that joined the siege of Dunkirk and later entered Belgrade in triumph, Bauman with the Polish division of the Soviet Red Army, which eventually helped to take Berlin.

Both experienced extreme vulnerability and intense danger during early life. Bauman suffered anti-Semitic prejudice in his youth at Poznań, and when Hitler's troops arrived his family, like many others was faced with the choice of either leaving or being rounded up. Gellner's family was still in Prague when the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia and had a hair-raising escape. A family friend was shot dead crossing the Polish border (see Smith 2001: 38-41; Hall 2010: 17-25).

Bauman and Gellner are similar not just in their preoccupations but also in their productivity. They have both been recognized as brilliant scholars and formidable advocates for their positions: the first a remarkable seducer with his words, the second a notorious verbal gun-fighter; Gellner once noted, self-mockingly, that he had acquired 'a certain name for writing abusive prose.' (Gellner 1987:152). There is, in both writers, a kind of obsessiveness, albeit carried off with great charm, in their repeated return to a fairly small range of themes and examples. It is almost as if each has been regularly checking that a sticking plaster stays in place over a wound.

In the work of both writers there occasionally surfaces a fond remembrance of historic times and places when Jews and other minorities felt safer. Bauman recently spoke in a public lecture about the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which fell in 1795, and which has been widely admired in retrospect for its tradition of cooperation and dialogue between diverse cultures, and respect for local identities. Gellner had similar feelings about the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, and found the idea of rule by the Hapsburgs infinitely preferable to being subjected to Soviet domination. As he put it, Franz-Joseph [Hapsburg] was preferable to Joseph [Stalin] (Smith 2012: 556; Hall 2010: 329-30). Both Bauman and Gellner have constructed their analyses of the present and future under the shadow of the sad fact that those comfortable old habitations, the commonwealth and the empire, with their capital cities in Warsaw and Vienna respectively, are gone forever.

Bauman and Gellner both see modern life as a struggle but they see different struggles. Bauman has been closely involved in the three-way battle between fascism, communism and capitalism that dominated much of the twentieth century. He has lived through two moments of absolute victory and utter defeat. The first was in 1945 when he witnessed the crushing of the Nazi machine and entered Berlin, possibly, so it is rumoured, either inside or on top of a Russian tank. The sequel occurred forty-four years later, when, like many of his contemporaries, Bauman watched the dismantling of the USSR, the same vehicle for socialist transformation that he had leapt aboard in 1939 when his family fled from Poland to Russia.

By 1989 Bauman was in the West. He concluded that after a fifty-year battle, capitalism had resoundingly won the three-way confrontation. The only question remaining was how individuals would be able to hold body and soul together as they wander, so to speak, like Hansel and Gretel through the leafy forest full of gingerbread houses that is the world's market place. In Bauman's view, the struggles of life are now above all focused on the individual level. Modern-liquid men and women are on their own as they worry about their health, their prospects for food, shelter, income and employment, about how to conquer the fear of other wandering strangers, and about whether they can find viable pathways through the capitalist forest that might lead towards a personally meaningful destination.

Gellner, who died in 1995, was also deeply involved in the twentieth-century battle to define the political, economic and cultural parameters of modernity. However, unlike Bauman, Gellner saw 1989 as the start of another key phase in the struggle between visions, models or systems of modernity. He thought that major victories had been won but there was still much to play for. Like Bauman in the mid-1940s, Gellner was 'on the front line' in 1989 and the years that immediately followed.

Gellner happened to be in Moscow on academic business during 1988-9, and he saw the political and social turmoil at reasonably close quarters. During the early 1990s he was actively involved, along with fellow Czech Jiri Musil, in setting up the Central European University in Prague and he took the lead in founding its Centre for the Study of Nationalism. Unlike Bauman in 1945, Gellner in the early 1990s was not wearing a soldier's uniform. However, he was part of an advance guard trying to secure a bridgehead in Prague from which to mount a defense of newly-liberated Central Europe against fanaticism and cynicism from many directions (Hall 2010: 353-6, 365-70).

Gellner was engaged with others in a politico-cultural struggle against the remnants of the *nomenclatura* with their hankering for the old authoritarian days, against black marketeers made newly respectable by the rediscovery of Adam Smith, against carpet-bagging business consultants from the West, and against extreme forms of radical Islam. Like Bauman, especially the young Bauman of the 1960s, Gellner saw the key battlefield as the education of the young. For Gellner education was the key to defending and advancing a form of modernity that was rational, scientific, democratic and humane, all being Enlightenment values that are, of course, shared by Bauman.

Although Bauman and Gellner shared the same cultural nest, they looked out from it in different directions. According to Zygmunt Bauman, an ever-increasing number of

us are enduring, and occasionally enjoying, a liquid-modern existence that is unjust, unequal, uncertain, and ultimately unsatisfying. We have no choice but to make the best of it. Some may pass their time analyzing the moral and political dilemmas it presents. Others will restlessly pursue liquid modernity's temporary satisfactions when and if they can. Many will be marginalized or excluded. The overall drift of things, to which capitalism is well adapted, is towards social fragmentation so that the core unit of the social world becomes, to an increasing extent, the isolated individual living in a world of indifferent, exploitative or hostile strangers.

By contrast, Gellner focused his attention on the way disparate and highly localized groups could be combined into larger, more complex bodies whose elements cohere reliably, producing robust and coherent nation-states with a relatively solid existence. His message is as follows: our best hope for living decent and humane lives together is to understand, defend, strengthen and, where possible, extend the influence of liberal democracy and Enlightenment values, making sure these precious assets are protected within relatively solid institutional structures.

So Bauman points to a drift towards increased fragmentation, urged on by the way capitalism operates. Gellner sees a movement towards increased integration, fostered by nation-building bureaucrats, intellectuals and politicians. Both these approaches are potentially relevant to Europe in the early twenty-first century because the development of the European Union has been, on the one hand, an exercise in trying to create a relatively solid institutional structure capable of integrating a number of European nation-states, and, on the other hand, a series of attempts to clear away structures that interrupt the tidal flows of market forces and the forward push of corporate interests.

Furthermore, in the wake of the Eurozone crisis the European Union is currently poised between two possible futures: either developing into something much closer to a European state, with its own system of top-down fiscal discipline; or disintegrating into a more fragmented arena offering rich pickings for market operators and business opportunists. But, however tempting, we cannot reduce the whole world to a simple formula that equates the market with fragmentation and the state with solidification. To demonstrate this, consider the following.

Liquid crowds and solid selves

The American-led invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) were soon followed by widespread disruption of governance throughout the region. Two other results were widespread civil war and the release of fundamentalist energies, channeling multiple frustrations into violent transgressions. Knock-on consequences included the toppling of the Gaddafi regime in Libya, helped along by NATO and the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, including the Syrian uprising, which led to yet another civil war.

These facts pose difficulties for Bauman's central argument, which is that liquid modernity is shaped by global capitalism through skilful manipulation and seductive charm. Not so in Syria, Iraq or Libya. International corporations have helplessly witnessed the disruption of the region's rich large potential market for consumer goods during the past decade and a half. For well over a decade the main business of politicians, generals and insurgents operating over much of the Middle East and North

Africa has been to break down and destroy the organizational capacities and morale of their opponents. The outcome has been human misery and the fragmentation of states within the region.

Yet many migrants fleeing into Europe from this shattered region illustrate the human condition that Bauman associates with liquid modernity. Across the Mediterranean and through the Balkans has come an atomized crowd of wanderers. They have been forced into alien territory where they continually encounter uncaring strangers. Many are clearly highly educated and from the professional middle class. These refugees are fully switched on to the digital world. Here are Bauman's 'liquid' people.

However, many of these migrants live in a world of strong belief and regular worship, conditions that counteract the impact of Bauman's 'liquid modernity', as Ernest Gellner's work on Moslem societies implies (Gellner 1969; Gellner 1981). They are in liquid crowds but have fairly solid selves. The refugees' estranged condition is not due to constant bombardment by commercial advertisers or a zombified existence as spectators in a media wonderland. Nor is the liquidization of their relatively peaceful urban life to be explained by the market's relentless permeation. The teeth in the crushing machine belong to proto-states and the remnants of half-ruined states. The problem is that too many would-be states or radically diminished states, be they Kurdish, jihadist, Ba'athist or whatever, are trying to occupy the same territory. War and migration are turning the wheels of destruction. They in turn drive the black market exploiting the refugees.

Loss of a world

The destruction and disorder in parts of the Middle East and North Africa in 2015 are not dissimilar to the situation in central Europe during Bauman's youth. But Bauman's approach to liquid modernity comes from a later stage in his biography, specifically from his experiences during the 1970s and 1980s. Bauman's work on liquidity, like his earlier writing on post-modernity, was in large part a response to the fact that his plans for a neo-Marxist sociology to reshape modernity (see Bauman 1969) were thoroughly trashed during and after the Thatcher-Reagan era. Bauman's plans depended on the existence of a vibrant public sphere, a place where citizens could debate and intellectuals such as Bauman have their influential say. By this means enlightened sociological and philosophical perspectives would help to shape public policy. But the neo-liberal project attacked Bauman's preferred home territory, shrinking the state and diminishing the public sphere. It surely hurt Bauman to lose his field of dreams in this way.

Bauman cauterised that wound and distanced himself from the disaster scene by making the rather over-the-top assertion that all bureaucracies killed off moral sensitivity in their officials (see Bauman 1989). In fact, Bauman had spent his formative years in just such a bureaucratic role, as a high-ranking officer within the Polish military during the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, for the new post-state Bauman, the primary agent in shaping the world was global capitalism. Bauman built a model of how such a postmodern (or 'liquid') capitalist world might work. He presented that model (call it Y) to his readers as 'the real situation' that existed behind or within the confusing cultural and political signals they received in their daily lives (call that X). In this respect, the basic structure of his subsequent message has been: 'You have experienced X (confusion); the explanation is Y (liquid modernity).'

In other words, Zygmunt Bauman has invited us to see contemporary history through his particular lens. However, it is possible to reverse that relationship and explore Bauman's life, career, and opinions through the lens provided by the wider context of contemporary history. The present author first did this in a book subtitled 'prophet of postmodernity' (Smith 2001). But by 2000 Bauman has already switched track, moved on from 'postmodernity', and was reworking his case notes under the heading of 'liquid modernity' (e.g. Bauman 2000; Bauman 2003; Bauman 2006; Bauman 2007).⁷ It is time to ask how his writings both before and after 2000 might help us face the current challenges of twenty-first century modernity, especially those currently faced by Europe and its Islamic neighbours.

There is no space here for detailed analysis of all the political, sociological and indeed moral issues indicated at the start of this chapter but two things are done. First, some conflicts between three versions of Bauman's approach to modernity are discussed, readily accepting that their co-existence increases the richness and variety of the intellectual resource he provides. Second, the potential value of Bauman's contribution is extended by merging it with some aspects of the work of Ernest Gellner.

Three Baumans

Bauman's readers have encountered at least three Baumans over the decades. They certainly overlap but they do not fit together easily. First, early on in his career Bauman identified some basic orienting theoretical principles that have remained relatively unchanged in his work over the past half-century. Second, Bauman has spent the past decade and a half offering guided tours around liquid modernity, a socio-political environment that is in many respects a relabeled version of post-modernity, an idea Bauman seized upon and elaborated during the eight years before he 'went liquid' (see Smith 200:136-66). Liquid modernity, like post-modernity, was presented as a new world intimately associated with late twentieth-century globalization in the wake of the collapse of socialism. Finally, in 2004 Bauman produced an articulate analysis supporting the European Union as a political project. Unusually for a book by Bauman in this period, the term liquid modernity is absent from the index.

It should be evident that in a long writing career there is likely to be experimentation with different approaches. This is not a criticism. Above all, Bauman is an activist. He always wants to shape his readers' intentions as well as their understanding. Every text he produces is a potentially valuable resource. With that in mind, let us examine in turn these three different positions: *Bauman I*, *Bauman II* and *Bauman III*.

Bauman I

Since the mid-1960s, early on in his academic career, Bauman has placed at the centre of his thinking the challenge of endemic uncertainty. He continues to believe this condition confronts all human beings in all complex societies. As a dissident Marxist in Poland working in higher education, Bauman witnessed his own students' confusion when faced by many conflicting values and ways of living such as, for example, wide-eyed dogmatic Communist orthodoxy, envious admiration of the West, inward-looking self-cultivation, cynical opportunism and dilettante hedonism (see Bauman 1966; Smith 2001: 62-4). Early on, Bauman identified his preferred

solution to this challenge: a decent humane society managed through rational dialogue amongst the major interests. His interest in these themes has never wavered. However, his assessment of the relevant institutional means and constraints has changed in response to the different ways that history has, so to speak, reshuffled the pack. Bauman's commitment to Enlightenment values is another constant although his pessimism has tended to increase.

Another aspect of Bauman's approach is his belief that when people moved out of their medieval villages and off the feudal landed estates in large numbers, 'solidity', stability and intelligibility fled from the social, moral and ontological orders. Gone were the days when God was in the world and people could see the divine cosmos reflected in earthly hierarchies and communities. The cosmic order and social world became disjointed and confusing but human brains and muscle power reestablished a degree of coherence. Rulers and their advisers were faced with three almost impossible tasks: categorizing hordes of restless individuals into defined groups; explaining those categories to members of the groups; and maintaining order within and between them (see Bauman 1973; Bauman 1976; Bauman 1978).

Bauman argues that uncertainty was endemic. The efforts of bureaucrats created chronic ambivalence because their categories always created leftovers that did not fit in to the social order. Intellectuals made matters worse by joining in the subsequent quarrels. Attempts at sustained rational dialogue failed. Human efforts to construct their own socio-political world created a modernity that was ambiguous, uncertain, or, to use his most recent terminology, 'liquid.' This leads us to *Bauman II*, which requires a more extended discussion since it is the Bauman most people know best.

Bauman II

Zygmunt Bauman introduced the term liquid modernity in 2000 (Bauman 2000). It refers to a highly fluid world of uncertainty, anxiety and continual change in institutions, relationships, attitudes, and self-identities. By comparison, solid modernity consists of socio-political arrangements that keep groups and individuals securely in their place as subjects or citizens, with a clear sense of where and how they 'fit in.'

Bauman has said relatively little about solid modernity apart from his characterizations of Soviet repression, which he has typically contrasted with the seductive techniques of commercial advertising in the West (see Bauman 1988). Other advanced forms of solid modernity include Nazi Germany in the mid-1930s or North Korea as it likes to represent itself: a whole people moving as one. For advanced liquid modernity, think of, say, Chicago when it was a wide open city in the late nineteenth century, or the City of London after deregulation.

Liquid modernity is a logically coherent model that focuses on a number of specific, apparently interconnected features within a social situation, insisting upon their preponderance and systematic nature. The world of liquid modernity is occupied by the following: consumers, strangers, exploiters and victims; the rich and the poor; and towering forces such as the market (insidiously everywhere), technology (dangerously out of control) and bureaucracy (domineering and amoral but recently diminished in influence). This is a world where the middling rich and those who are not quite poor

gaze at celebrities while shutting their eyes and ears to the sufferings of the marginal and excluded.

In the liquid modern world there is inequality and injustice on a large scale. However, it is very difficult for liquid-modern citizens to open a constructive dialogue with the powerful corporate interests that keep in place these unfair structures that help maintain their profit levels. Those interests have penetrated the political structures that inhabit the public sphere at a national and local level while, at the same time, exploiting their own capacity to move around the world with relative ease, inhabiting a poorly policed extra-territorial sphere.

The book *Liquid Modernity* (Bauman 2000) is buttressed by two others: *Globalization. The Human Consequences* (Bauman 1998), which reminds us about the impact of increasingly powerful market forces stretching across oceans and continents and reaching deep inside national economies; and *In Search of Politics* (Bauman 1999) which records the shrinking of the public sphere. Bauman's macroeconomics and macro-politics are depicted in a very dramatic spirit sometimes reminiscent of Goya's war paintings or Turner's stormier seascapes. This grabs our attention. What is more, he puts us right in the middle of the picture. He models our minds for us, telling us 'what it is like' for us to be liquid-modern people.

As Bauman sees it, liquid-modern men and women engage with the world through a multitude of loosely connected projects. Some they begin themselves: such as a job, a relationship, a hobby, a gang membership. Others are, so to speak, sold to them: for example, a style, a package holiday, a political allegiance, a new government. These projects generally carry a promise. They will reassure the fearful, blow away ambivalence, produce feelings of satisfaction or generate some private profit or other advantage. Almost invariably, these promises are broken producing even more anxiety and uncertainty. As a result, we experience liquid modernity as a disturbing mishmash of deregulation, uncertainty, fragmented individuality, fractured time, estranged space, fragile work bonds, artificial community and pervasive loneliness.

How did all this come about? According to Bauman, in this guise at least, our modern world apparently became predominantly liquid sometime between the early 1980s and 2000. Liquid tendencies existed before then in the form of modernity's dark matter, so to speak, which Bauman termed 'postmodernity' during the 1990s. However, by 2000 this dark matter had transformed itself from the world's shadow into the world itself. Since that date, Bauman has conducted an intensive survey of this pan-oceanic territory he has named and claimed.

How are liquid and solid modernity related? Bauman seems to imply that the heavy regime of solid modernity was brought into being by industrialization, urbanization, and the need to mobilize and control a mass urban-industrial workforce. In other words, it was initially a European nineteenth-century phenomenon that continued far into the twentieth century. After the 1980s the lighter regime of liquid modernity associated with global capitalism came into existence and this regime will apparently stretch forward deep into the twenty-first century. Bauman obviously realizes that if taken literally this is a rather misleading characterization of the past two centuries. It may, perhaps, be regarded as a useful imaginative sketch designed to dramatize his model, a sort of 'just so' story.

In fact, Bauman is perfectly well aware that the experience of living in ‘liquid’ conditions of profound ambivalence can already be found at the very beginning of the twentieth century (see Bauman 1991). In 1900 we find Georg Simmel, a man familiar with urban society in both Central and Western Europe, writing about the disturbing fluidity of modern life. He describes ‘The lack of something definite at the centre of the soul [which] impels us to search for momentary satisfaction in ever-new stimulations, sensations and eternal activities. Thus it is [he adds] that we become entangled in the instability and helplessness that manifests itself in the tumult of the metropolis, as the mania for travelling, as the wild pursuit of competition and as the typically modern disloyalty with regard to taste, style, opinions and personal relationships (Simmel 1990: 484).’ Simmel relates these phenomena to money itself, since they share money’s intrinsic ‘emptiness and merely transitional character’ (484). In the same vein, he finds it significant that ‘we term money in circulation “liquid” money’: like a liquid it lacks internal limits and accepts without resistance external limits that are offered by any solid surroundings’ (495).

Go back to the mid- and early-nineteenth centuries, and here we find other historical parallels with Bauman’s vision. Consider, for example, *The Art of Life* (Bauman 2008), Bauman’s elegantly written guide designed to help perplexed people who fear to drown in liquid modernity. This book was published in 2008. However, its central message can be found a full century and a half earlier, albeit in a less polished and scholarly guise. It exists between the covers of a work called *Self-Help* (Smiles 2008; originally 1859) by the popular author and lecturer Samuel Smiles. This earlier book was based on lectures Smiles gave in the 1850s to young apprentices trying to make their way in the dangerously exciting industrial city of Leeds, later Bauman’s own dwelling place. By the time of Smiles’s death in 1904 nearly a quarter of a million copies of *Self-Help* had been sold (see Briggs 1965).

In offering guidance, Smiles and Bauman have a similar checklist of points for their readers to bear in mind: the need for them to cope with the unsettling uncertainties of existence, the danger of being seduced by superficial glitz, the warning that constant pressure would be put upon their mental, physical and emotional resources, the reminder of the need to keep one’s moral antennae fully activated, the comforting fact that deep satisfaction could be found in sheer hard work, and, not least, the thought that fashioning a worthy and satisfying life is like painting an aesthetically satisfying picture. Smiles in 1859 and Bauman in 2008 are of almost one mind.

The market for advice on dealing with fluid and unpredictable life circumstances was booming throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Further back also, in the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville discovered in North America a polity that already had, in Bauman’s terms, strong liquid-modern tendencies. There was a strong individualistic spirit, no limits on personal desires, and each person was caught up in a ‘futile pursuit of that complete felicity which always escapes him’ (Tocqueville 1968, 639). Individuals were self-centred, frustrated, and lonely. In fact, looking even further back, the repeated impacts of war, migration and market fluctuations have meant that liquid modernity with its uncertainty, anxiety, ambivalence, fear of strangers, restless flight from betrayal and ardent pursuit of temporary delights has been the prevalent or default condition for large swathes of the human population

throughout at least the past half millennium in Europe, stretching back to early modernity.

A swift historical journey, travelling backwards from the late twentieth century, takes us through Yugoslavia's bloody breakup, the harsh turbulence of the immediate post-Soviet years in Russia and Central Europe, past the horrendous refugee crisis of the late 1940s, and through two world wars punctuated by a global depression. Travelling further back still, the eighteenth and nineteenth century brought the massive upheavals of urbanization and industrialization, transformations interwoven with revolutions and wars directed against the old aristocratic regime. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the reformation and counter-reformations, which concerned not just territorial power but every individual's soul, rolled across almost the whole of Europe, bringing the French religious wars (1562-98) and the Thirty Years War (1618-48) (see Bayly 2004, Eksteins 1990, Findlay and O'Rourke 2007, Mazower 1998, Wasserstein 2007, Wolf 1982). *Bauman I* knows this already, just as he knows that the peace, prosperity and welfare states of Western Europe during the 1950s and 1960s were very untypical. At which point we may turn to *Bauman III*.

Bauman III

As already mentioned, in 2004 Bauman published a book on the European Union which eschews analysis of liquid modernity although there is a substantial attack on what the author sees as a rapacious American 'empire' (see Bauman 2004, 45-90). In effect, the United States figures in the text as a major promoter of globalization with all its alienating consequences. By contrast, the EU is presented as the main potential antidote to this unwholesome tendency in the world.

Bauman's book is entitled *Europe. An Unfinished Adventure* (Bauman 2004). This work may have come as something of a surprise to readers of Bauman's immediately previous and subsequent work. He asserts that Europe possesses a distinctive and well-developed intellectual and political culture. He also acknowledges that there is a substantial capacity for political and governmental agency vested in Europe's state-like bureaucracies based in Brussels.

The red meat is found in the final chapter. Bauman's question is: what should Europe try and do in the world? He sees two possibilities. One is that Europe might undertake 'local retrenchment', which involved 'reconstructing at the [European] Union level the legal-institutional web which in the past held together the "national economy" within the boundaries of a nation-state's territorial sovereignty' (136). He thinks that such a strategy would lack ambition when 'Viewed from a planetary perspective' (136) since it would only be seeking 'local solutions for globally generated problems' (137).

Bauman recommends instead giving priority to another approach, which he calls 'global responsibility and global aspiration' (135). He gives no practical details but the general idea is that Europe should be a 'global pattern-setter', deploying 'its values and the political/ethical experience of democratic self-government it has acquired, in order to assist in the substitution of a fully inclusive, universal-human community for a collection of territorially entrenched entities engaged in a zero-sum game of survival' (141-2).

This is, of course, a very tall order. With some justification, Bauman compares such an enterprise to being ‘on a rising slope of a mountain pass we have never climbed before’ (140). In any case, whatever happens or is attempted, Bauman is surely right to emphasize the European Union’s latent capacity to engage in political action, drawing not only upon the pooled sovereignty of member states but also the prestige and authority Brussels has accumulated over half a century of successful expansion.

If we are interested in how Europe’s ‘unfinished adventure’ may be further pursued in the light of the current EU crisis, one thing is worth noting. What Bauman calls ‘local retrenchment’, in other words, strengthening the EU’s legal-institutional basis, its economy and its territorial sovereignty, is not some kind of evasion from more ambitious action. On the contrary, it is a necessary precondition for achieving international goals. It would, for example, strengthen the EU’s capacity to reach an even-handed deal with the United States over free trade, and reinforce its resilience in working towards diplomatic and institutional solutions that might help bring an end to the long war under way close to the continent’s southern and eastern borders.

Gellner and solid modernity

Ernest Gellner can help map the territory here. He brings a different perspective on the viability and effectiveness of political action within the framework of the state. It is relevant that, unlike Bauman, who served as a high-ranking military officer in post-war Poland, Gellner spent the decade after 1945 making his way into and up the academic hierarchies of Oxford, Edinburgh and the London School of Economics. In other words, Gellner cut his teeth within the self-confident and relatively tolerant ambience of British elite education. By contrast, Bauman’s formative encounters with officialdom were as a manager within a supposedly omniscient communist regime trying to force through immense transformations at an impossible speed. Gellner learned the potential of soft power, especially if its objectives are relatively conservative or gently reformist. For his part, Bauman learned the limits of hard power, especially if its objectives are rapid and radical social reconstruction.

Bauman never penetrated the English establishment as successfully as Gellner who learned on the way that a strong, shared culture can integrate institutions in spite of some underlying incoherence. Generalizing from this, Gellner emphasized the value of mechanisms such as a universal education system, which could provide whole populations with shared understandings and experiences that would deepen their sense of common membership. Bauman despaired of state bureaucracies and feared a drift towards increased fragmentation, urged on by the way capitalism operates. Not so Gellner who foresaw continued movement towards increased political integration, promoted by nation-building bureaucrats, intellectuals and politicians.

In practice, Ernest Gellner and Zygmunt Bauman agree that ideally a modern society should be rational, just and democratic (see Bauman 2004: 124-6; Hall 2010: 159-65). Also, they both assume that such a society should, if possible, be neither so ‘liquid’ as to condemn its members to a highly fragmented, anomic and isolated existence, nor so ‘solid’ as to impose bureaucratic regulations or communal constraints depriving people of all individuality and freedom.

But they had very different missions. During the 1960s and 1970s, Bauman was fashioning a modern Marxist sociology as a vehicle for driving towards a socialist

utopia where he hoped to set up house. During those same years Gellner felt he was, so to speak, already happily accommodated in the right dwelling but duty bound to check the roof for leaks, just in case. In other words, Gellner was preoccupied with intellectually justifying the liberal-democratic-scientific-industrial way of life that he felt privileged to enjoy in Western Europe.

Bauman has still not found what he was looking for. He remains far distant from the good society for which he has worked and hoped. Gellner, on the other hand, believed that, as the inhabitant of a West European democracy, he was fortunate enough to be already living in such a society. For him the question was: how can we preserve and protect our own good societies and, when possible, raise other societies up to the same standard? (See, for example, Bauman 1967, Bauman 1969, Bauman 1971, Gellner 1964; Gellner 1973; Gellner 1974a; Gellner 1974b, and much later, Gellner 1992a and Gellner 1992b. Also relevant are Gellner 1987, Gellner 1988).

One strategy was to maintain democratic standards within Europe. Gellner's vision of the EU in the 1990s was that it should be a mutually supportive combination of nation-states that were not subject to oppressive political centralization (see Gellner 1997). Like Bauman he saw dangers on the horizon. However, his concern was not that liquid modernity would become completely predominant; in fact, quite the reverse. Gellner's anxieties about the future were stimulated by his research into Islamic cultures, which he assumed would become increasingly influential as economic development occurred beyond Europe and America. They would also, he thought, become more politically assertive. In an interview published in 1991 Gellner recalled that after World War II he had concluded that 'the solution of the Jewish national predicament by the establishment of the state of Israel would lead to a dramatic, tragic, perhaps insoluble confrontation with the Muslim world. The least one could do was try to understand that world' (Davis 1991: 66).

Gellner's exploration of Muslim societies ran parallel with his work on nation-building and nationalism. He concluded that democracy could thrive, potentially at least, when common membership and cultural identity were focused on belonging to a nation (Gellner 1983). However, he became more pessimistic when he turned to another potential source of cultural solidarity and identity. This was the arena of shared spiritual faith, specifically Islamic faith, an arena that many believers consider to be universal, more important than individual secular ambitions, and uncontainable by national boundaries. In North Africa and the Middle East Gellner found a world where religion was certainly supportive but could also be oppressive. He suggested that the most active and radical forces in this arena were pushing hard towards a type of modernity that inhibited freedom and individuality and was much too solid, although he did not use Bauman's terminology.

To summarise, Bauman has gazed disconsolately westwards towards America, the seat of neoliberal capitalism. He has seen, coming from that direction, the advance of liquid modernity, a regime that gives prominence to dedicated consumers while despising the poor. By contrast, Gellner, equally disconsolate, has looked eastwards towards the lands of Islam. He has seen, coming from this other direction, the advance of solid modernity, a regime that breeds obedient adherents of the Moslem faith, whose believers are, in general, very ready to enjoy whatever material benefits Western capitalism can offer them.

Democratic citizens do not have a prominent place in either of these scenarios for the future development of capitalist modernity. According to our two key witnesses, capitalism prospers but democracy and human rights decline whether we look East or West. What has to change to avoid this projected future? Some suggestions follow.

Summary and concluding remarks

My object in this chapter has not been to set up a contest between Zygmunt Bauman and Ernest Gellner. Instead, I have treated their work and biographies as a resource pool which might yield insights into some pressing socio-political and cultural questions affecting Europe and that continent's near neighbours. The spirit of this analysis has been pragmatic. The discovery of three approaches from the same Bauman has made his work more, not less, useful since this has increased the range and diversity of the insights available.

This comparison between Bauman and Gellner has found a high degree of convergence between them in two key respects. First, they share the same fundamental Enlightenment values, those expressed in the widespread demands made during the twentieth century for individual freedom, national liberation, secure and comfortable living conditions, educated and engaged citizens, and democratic socio-political arrangements. Second, they both regard certain European societies as providing the nearest approach to this ideal.

They also diverge in two key respects. First, Bauman believes that global capitalism is sweeping away the conditions that make civilized social democracy possible. By contrast, Gellner reckons that the cultural strength of many Western national societies is probably sufficient to preserve their democracies. Second, they both see threats to the stability and security of democratic arrangements but they see these threats coming from different directions. Bauman derides footloose capital's lack of commitment to specific localities and the ruthless extraction of profit by large corporations, especially those based in or backed by America. By contrast, Gellner has identified a deep distrust for secular individualism in some aspects of Islamic teaching and thinks this suspicion would perhaps undermine attempts to spread Western-style democracy beyond its current base into Islamic communities and nations.

Both writers emphasize the limitations of the old agenda for modernity, especially the failure of the democratic nation-state to contain either corporate power or Islam. The point is that those two forces have been able to insist on the priority of a broader frame of reference that is either the global market or the supranational *ummah*, demanding that governments yield before their demands. Those tensions threaten to undermine the citizenship rights that were one of the main achievements registered under the twentieth-century agenda for modernity. Overcoming those tensions is an essential precondition for effectively tackling the new agenda of modernity. That means going beyond both Gellner and Bauman.

We need to deploy a sense of historical perspective. This reminds us that international capitalism of some kind has been around for well over half a millennium and Islam much longer, as have other universal religions such as Christianity. It is noticeable that in the past traders and priests of all stripes have been forced to moderate their

demands and mind their manners within national or dynastic territories when the bond between ruler and subject or, more recently, between government and citizen has been a strong one. That is where attention should now be paid.

The upsurge of populist movements across Europe and in its near-neighbourhood has expressed a strong desire to reestablish that bond on terms that respond to the deep dissatisfactions of the citizenry. Eventually that is likely to happen. However, will the main cement of such a bond be hostility to outsiders, be they 'intrusive' corporations, 'alien' religions, or whatever? Or will a spirit of tolerance and humanity be embedded in our future politics and constitutional arrangements? Will the needs of the poor and weak from all backgrounds be respected on the grounds that they are citizens with social, legal and political rights?

Fortunately, the European Union provides a framework within which socially-responsible democratic energies may be mobilized (see Smith 2014a, Smith 2014b, Smith 2014c, Smith 2015). Resilience and flexibility are needed. In this respect Bauman has recently provided welcome encouragement. In *Moral Blindness* (Bauman and Donskis 2013) he argues that Europe has an unrivalled 'adaptability and a capacity to set things in motion' (183). It has been able 'to learn the art of living with others.' Europeans are ready to 'negotiate the terms of neighbourhood' in a spirit of 'robust (or in today's parlance *proactive*) solidarity' so as to 'lend a stable structure to human habitation' (190-1). This is, he believes, a great asset in the age of multiple diasporas, throwing people from many cultures and ethnic backgrounds together.

However, a major challenge is that those living either in a fortress-like environment or among the ruins of war are liable to feel intense fear and hatred. This condition is likely to retard or disrupt attempts to create stronger bonds of communication among different communities with diverse religions and cultures. How might that be overcome? It is vital that Europe's approaches to its near neighbours take full account of the barriers built by generations of humiliation. We need to create a politico-cultural climate that permits democratic dialogue between moderate and open minds on all sides. In recent months relevant evidence has been arriving daily on our media screens. We see that the families from Syria and adjacent countries who find themselves in Europe after their dangerous flight from destruction are, in general, very like ourselves. When they speak we see they share with us many of the discourses that frame our own lives. Seeing how similar we are is the best possible basis for creatively exploring our differences. That would indeed be a helpful contribution to the task of tackling modernity's new agenda for the twenty-first century.

Bibliography

- Bauman, Zygmunt (1966): 'Three remarks on contemporary educational problems', *Polish Sociological Bulletin*, 6, 1 (13), 77-89
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1967): 'Marx and the contemporary theory of culture,' *Social Science Information*, 7,3,19-34
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1969): 'Modern times, modern Marxism,' in Berger 1969, 1-17 and *Social Research*, 34, 3, 399-415
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1971): 'Twenty years after: the crisis of Soviet-type systems,' *Problems of Communism*, 20, 6, 25-51
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1973): *Culture as Praxis*, London: Routledge

- Bauman, Zygmunt (1976b): *Towards a Critical Sociology*, London: Routledge
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1978): *Hermeneutics and Social Science*, London: Hutchinson
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1982): *Memories of Class*, London: Routledge
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1987): *Legislators and Interpreters*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1988): *Freedom*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1989): *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1991): *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1998): *Globalization. The Human Consequences*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1999): *In Search of Politics*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2000): *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2003): *Liquid Love*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2004): *Europe. An Unfinished Adventure*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2006): *Liquid Fear*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2007): *Liquid Times. Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2008): *The Art of Life*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bauman, Zygmunt and Leonidas Donskis (2013): *Moral Blindness*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bayly, Christopher (2004): *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Briggs, Asa (1965): 'Samuel Smiles and the Gospel of Work' in *Victorian People*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp 124-47
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew (1997): *The Grand Chessboard*, New York: Basic Books
- Davis, John (1991): 'An interview with Ernest Gellner', *Current Anthropology*, 32, 1, 63-72.
- Eksteins, Modris (1990): *Rites of Spring. The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, London: Black Swan
- Findlay, Ronald and Kevin O'Rourke (2007): *Power and Plenty. Trade, War and the World Economy in the Second Millennium*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Gellner, Ernest (1964): *Thought and Change*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson
- Gellner, Ernest (1969): *Saints of the Atlas*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson
- Gellner, Ernest (1973): *Cause and Meaning in the Social Sciences*, London: Routledge
- Gellner, Ernest (1974a): *Legitimation of Belief*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Gellner, Ernest (1974b): *Contemporary Thought and Politics*, London: Routledge
- Gellner, Ernest (1981): *Muslim Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Gellner, Ernest (1983): *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Gellner, Ernest (1987): *Culture, Identity and Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Gellner, Ernest (1988): *Plough, Sword and Book. The Structure of Human History*, London: Collins Harvill
- Gellner, Ernest (1992a): *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, London: Routledge
- Gellner, Ernest (1992b): *Reason and Culture. The Historic Role of Rationality and Rationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Gellner, Ernest (1997): *Nationalism*, London: Phoenix

- Hall, John (2010): *Ernest Gellner. An Intellectual Biography*, London: Verso
- Kaplan, Robert (2012): *The Revenge of Geography*, New York: Random House
- Mazower, Mark (1998): *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century*, Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Mitchell, Timothy (2011): *Carbon Democracy. Political Power in the Age of Oil*, London: Random House.
- Simmel, G (1978): *The Philosophy of Money*, edited by David Frisby, translated by Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, London: Routledge
- Smiles, Samuel (2008): *Self-Help*, Oxford: Oxford World Classics; originally published in 1859.
- Smith, Dennis (2001): *Zygmunt Bauman: Prophet of Postmodernity*, Cambridge: Polity
- Smith, Dennis (2006): *Globalization. The Hidden Agenda*, Cambridge: Polity
- Smith, Dennis (2010): 'Social Fluidity and Social Displacement', *Sociological Review*, vol 58, no 4, November 2010, 680-8
- Smith, D (2012): 'Dimensions of World Making: Thoughts from the Caspian Sea' in Ann Dennis and Deborah Kalekin-Fishman (eds) *The Shape of Sociology*, Sage, 113-33.
- Smith, Dennis (2014a): 'Coping with the threat of humiliation: Contrasting responses to the crisis of the Eurozone in Greece and Ireland', in Nikos Petropoulos and George Tsobanoglou (eds), *The Debt Crisis in the Eurozone: Social Impacts*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 84-108.
- Smith, Dennis (2014b): 'When the peloton hit the mud. Displacement struggles and the EU crisis,' in John Erik Fossum and Augustín José Menéndez (eds) *The European Union in crises or the European Union as crises?*, ARENA Report Series, Oslo, Norway, 157-83.
- Smith, Dennis (2014c): 'Making sense of the EU crisis' in Dennis Smith et al *Dennis Smith in Ljubljana*, University of Ljubljana, 2014, 89-109.
- Smith, D (2015): 'Not just singing the blues. Dynamics of the EU crisis' in Hans-Jorg Trenz et al (eds) *Europe's prolonged crisis: The making or the unmaking of a political union* Palgrave, 23-43.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de (1968): *Democracy in America*, edited by Jacob Peter Mayer and Max Lerner, New York: Collins
- Wasserstein, Bernard (2007): *Barbarism and Civilization. A History of Europe in Our Time*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Wolf, Eric Robert (1982): *Europe and the People Without History*, Berkeley: University of California Press