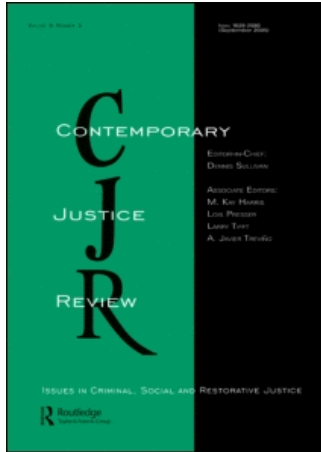


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# Crime and Insecurity in Liquid Modern Times: An Interview with Zygmunt Bauman

Tom Daems & Luc Robert

*In recent years Zygmunt Bauman, one of the world's leading sociologists, has increasingly devoted time and energy to topics that are directly relevant to readers with an interest in criminology and criminal justice. In a number of books and essays Bauman broaches themes such as unsafety and insecurity, punishment and prisons, social exclusion and poverty, and the like. Zygmunt Bauman speaks about crime and insecurity in terms of what he calls 'liquid modernity.' This interview was conducted electronically during August and September 2005.*

**Keywords:** Zygmunt Bauman; Sociology; Criminal Justice; Globalization; Unsafety; Insecurity

## Interviewers' Note

Zygmunt Bauman is one of the world's most influential sociologists. After his retirement in 1990 from Leeds University, where he had served as a professor of sociology since 1972, he did not put his pen to rest. On the contrary, over the past 15 years he has written a dazzling number of essays and published a large number of books which have attracted attention from all corners of the globe. In doing so, he has demonstrated the rare ability to combine creative thinking with skillful writing, inspired *inter alia* by fictional writers such as Italo Calvino and Borges.

In his work Bauman reflects upon a broad range of topics such as the Holocaust, ethics, post-modernity, human bonds, politics, culture, etc. In books such as *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998), *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (2001), *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (2004), and *Work, Consumerism and*

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*the New Poor* (2005) he shows how social problems have come to be individualized instead of being treated as public/collective issues.

His descriptions and analyses of contemporary society (which he nowadays characterizes as a liquid modern society) are often grim and dark. Yet Bauman refuses to fall prey to the Thatcherite catchphrase “There Is No Alternative” (TINA). Because he pays special attention to those people on the receiving end of social developments, the British newspaper *The Guardian* described him in April 2003 as “a champion of the underdog and a caustic critic of the status quo” (Bunting 2003).

## Interview

CJR: At a number of places in your work you seem to subscribe to a strain theory of crime (*à la* Robert Merton or, in its reformulated version of relative deprivation, *à la* Jock Young)—that is, there is a tension between goals and means, a tension caused by a social structure that holds out the same goals to all its members without giving them equal means to achieve them. To what extent are your views on the causes of crime inspired by this Mertonian core idea and where do you depart from it?

ZB: I’d be hard put if asked to allocate the credits. The idea behind your query is as old as I can remember. Perhaps I owe to Simmel the first glimpse. In his study of conflict—used by Lewis Coser in his much too coy and timorous (for my taste) but all the same welcome critique of Parsons when the latter was at the peak of his well-nigh dictatorial powers—Simmel pointed out that struggle between the established and the outsiders, as Norbert Elias would say later, is the principal instrument of ‘integration’—that is, of appropriation, adoption, and acceptance of dominant values—in fact the principal way of making them truly dominant.

Crime is just a sub-category of such conflict, set apart from the rest (for instance ‘assimilation’) by the illegality of the weapons used. In *Modernity and Ambivalence* I tried to unravel the attraction–repulsion dialectics inherent to all ‘integration calls,’ for those called to ‘integrate’ are always in a ‘heads I lose tails you win’ game. If they refuse the values on offer, they are doomed; they are doomed as well when in order to adopt them they press for their redistribution.

You could easily compose a long list of contemporary recordings of the many manifestations of that rule—from the youngsters in deprived city areas obediently adopting the value of self-assertion yet condemned for doing it through breaking glass and necks (described by Dick Hebdidge (1988) in *Hiding in the Light*), through the fast-growing literature on the ‘underclass’ charged with demanding their share of dominant values while doing nothing to earn them or doing wrong things to get them, up to Loïc Wacquant’s (2004) penetrating study of the no-win plight of the human rejects dumped in the American urban ghettos and their desperate though doomed efforts to get out alternated with the resigned returns in the search of shelter. And if that is not enough—browse through the pages dedicated to the ‘asylum seekers’ or ‘economic migrants’ in any copy of *The Mail* or *The Sun*.

From whatever I learned over many years of study, I conclude that this confusing ambivalence is unavoidable. In order to make their dominance secure, the dominant must make their values universally accepted. Yet they are rightly afraid that genuine universalization would sound a death knell to their domination. So, in a world they would like most, the universal acceptance of values would come in a package-deal with an almost universal reconciliation to missing them.

Privilege tolerates universality like the devil holy water. But one can't make the privileged immune without declaring the values universal (language records that paradox: 'nobility' is the category of superior people who are superior because they practice the universal value of nobility...). That aporia can't be resolved inside the realm of values—and so the problem is shifted to the battlefield of means. It is there that the real battle for privileged access to values is waged. It is not true that some people are devoid of means—it is only that the use of means available is prohibited and penalized.

We are all Levi-Strauss's *bricoleurs*—we are all skillful in making whatever comes handy into a tool with which we could reach whatever otherwise would be unreachable. If a privileged access is to be preserved (to put it bluntly, if values are to remain values!), the volume of available means is not to be increased but, on the contrary, cut down. Some 'really existing' tools must be disqualified—declared illegal—and using them must be made punishable. And it is common knowledge that the tools most likely to be declared illegal are those most easily available (often also the only available) to the people invited to celebrate the values one would rather not wish them to acquire.

As Bertold Brecht memorably mused: what is the crime of robbing a bank in comparison with the crime of establishing a bank? I suggest an answer: the difference between the two acts is between the code of criminal law speaking up or keeping silent. The stake of all power struggle is the pencil with which the line between legal and illegal means, or between legitimate coercion and violence, is drawn.

CJR: You say, 'From whatever I learned over many years of study, I conclude that this confusing ambivalence is unavoidable.' This is highly interesting because, at least at first sight, it seems to repeat a classical insight (vividly thematized by Emile Durkheim) that 'crime is normal,' i.e. it flows from an unavoidable confusing ambivalence. Yet, at the same time, your answer could not be further away from Durkheim's perspective: conflict enters the picture—'normality' derives from the unavoidability of an element of 'exclusivity' with respect to 'universally' proclaimed values. Could you elaborate a bit further on your views on the 'normality' of crime (if we are right in putting it this way) and where and when it gets 'abnormal' or 'problematic' in its proportions or forms?

ZB: You've got me here. Unerringly, you've put your finger on what I believe is the sorest of sore spots or rather the blankest of the blank ones. I have been asking myself the same question for a long time now—whether crime is not just 'normal' but also inescapable (the sole 'normality' theoretically conceivable and above all realistic in practice)—and each time, and through whatever reasoning I try to answer it, I end up with a 'yes' though instinctively I

wouldn't, couldn't, take 'yes' for an answer to that question. But here I am stuck midway. I haven't as yet found the way to refute the following reasoning: crime (for reasons spelled out before) is inevitable as long as access to hallowed/coveted values (i.e., the distribution of means to obtain them) remains unequal. But values would cease to be hallowed/coveted (i.e., cease to be values) if that access were equal to all. Let me hide behind Simmel's shoulders—much broader than mine—for Simmel pointed out repeatedly that 'value' and 'scarcity' are indissolubly linked.

CJR: How does the contemporary obsession with the body relate to the recent increase in, or better yet apparent increase in, and growing sensitivity to, different forms of bodily violence, especially different forms of sexual abuse? Do you think that liquid modern social life is more, equally, or less sensitive to crimes against the person than to crimes against property rights?

ZB: Yes, your suggestion is correct. The only trend we can be sure is indeed happening is the growing sensitivity to anything damaging, or potentially damaging, the body. The body—that last island of solidity and continuity (aren't solidity and continuity synonyms?) amid the torrent of fluids—is the front line on which the hottest wars (to update Clausewitz, the continuations of life-politics by other means) are fought, and all the apertures of the body are most closely guarded and equipped with most edge-cutting technologies.

Whether violence against the body grows or not, I have no way of deciding. After all, violence is a coercion which we consider illegitimate. The definition of violence follows, not precedes, sensitivity (I learned that years ago from Jock Young). And the task of assessing correctly the level of violence is nowadays particularly prohibiting because in our liquid modern times, in the absence of an authority able and willing to assert itself in a monopolistic position, the line separating legitimate from illegitimate coercion (i.e., violence) is an essentially contested issue—left, so to speak, to open competition or rather tug-of-war.

Many routine and familiar patterns of interpersonal relations (mostly such as involve physical contact) are re-classified in public view as acts of violence and demands are made that they be officially declared criminal such as sexual abuse of children, marital rape, and sexual harassment at work. More generally, with received borderlines between normal and abuse dissolved, or not staunchly enough guarded, attempts are made to draw new borderlines with the help of 'reconnaissance battles'—trying to find out how far the other side may be pushed and how much territory can be gained. That adds to the overall atmosphere of ubiquitous violence and its rising threat.

CJR: We detect a strong constructionist undercurrent in what you say. There is indeed a strong 'definitional,' 'drawing boundaries,' 'classification,' and 'reclassification' aspect to crime. At one extreme: crime is crime because the criminal code tells us so. In a certain way, that is the core insight of early sociologists of deviance such as Lemert, Kitsuse, and Becker. Yet isn't it the case that many of these acts of reclassification and criminalization relate to human

relations that hurt, harm, or cause suffering in one way or another? How do you see the relationship of these essential characteristics, if we can put it like that, of certain crimes to the constructionist ones?

ZB: To start with, please spare me the labels. Being eclectic by character and by choice, I resent the blinders which school loyalties demand that we wear. I am not constructivist, or for that matter any other 'ist,' and bear no responsibility for what the constructivist may aver. If you wish to find out how the words of classification turn into the flesh of social practices of which they pretend to be but a cognitive gloss, or if in doubt about just how elastic the ideas of suffering might be (and are!), you would start well by consulting Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*.

Now on a more serious note, allow me to send you to the unjustly (criminally!) neglected classic, Barrington Moore Jr.'s *Injustice*. Having explored the history of what we could call 'legal upheavals' or 'departures' Moore came to the conclusion that people as a rule manage to suffer a lot of pain without rebelling, providing they take the particular pain they suffer for an undetachable part of 'how things are.' Mediaeval peasants suffered incredible pain meekly, and rebelled only when the lord of the manor demanded an hour of extra unpaid field labour weekly on the top of the dozens already served. They rebelled in the name of their *Rechtgewohnheiten*, clearly considering the amount of pain suffered routinely thus far as the 'standard of justice' by which injustice is measured and defined.

Our present situation differs from that of the mediaeval peasants as liquid differs from solidity and movement from stagnation. There are few if any 'customary norms' left practiced systematically enough and with adequate force to be taken for standards of justice. The last time we heard such things being invoked was 30 years ago, in the pre-Thatcher-trades unions war in defence of the 'differentials.' And so every standard is debatable and hotly contested, and the lines dividing justice and injustice, and legitimate coercion and violence, are stakes in a continuous war—probably unwinnable, or at least not winnable definitely.

CJR: Throughout your *oeuvre* you emphasize how individual responsibility and the consequences of one's own acts and choices are important aspects of liquid modernity. How does this relate to the growing attention on the plight of victims of crime (i.e., those who suffer from 'bad' and 'harmful' choices) and their more explicit position within the criminal justice system and society at large?

ZB: Through most of the modern era, one underlying principle of legal and penal practice was the re-education and rehabilitation of the criminal, 'just deserts' having been assessed taking that ultimate purpose/prospect into account. Another underlying principle was the need to uphold the rule of law: 'Let justice be done, and seen to be done.' The criminality of crime was traced to the threat it presented to the 'order of things,' and individual security was thought to consist in the well-funded conviction that the order is well defended, solid, and stable.

But order is now fluid (a 'flow' rather than 'structure') and founding individual security on its continuing solidity and duration carries much less conviction now than in the 'solid modernity' era. And if you add to that the general degradation of the 'long term,' then an individual and immediate compensation for the wrongs individually suffered seems a much better bet. Restoration of order is recast from 'just deserts for the crime' into 'just deserts for the victim.' All that squares well with the culture of an individualized society of consumers. Compensation, indemnity, insurance—is that not what the seller–buyer relation is about? It also chimes well with the new centrality of waste-disposal concerns. It bodes ill for the criminal: once a threat to human bodies, forever a threat, and so the refuse tip is his only rightful place. Probation officers are no longer briefed to keep ex-prisoners out of prison but out of community.

We are veering back, and dangerously close, to the pre-law times of tribal and/or kin vengeance and 'eye for an eye' justice at the inter-individual as well as inter-communal levels. Aeschylus in his Oresteian trilogy hoped that 'fair trial, fair judgment, ended in an even vote, which brings to you neither dishonour nor defeat' would break the gory chain of personal vendettas. It did, for many centuries, though not for ever, as it seems now. What Aeschylus and generations of his disciples did not anticipate is that trial itself could be harnessed to the chariot of vengeance and viewed widely as a link in the 'schismogenetic chain' (Gregory Bateson) of vendetta. Sad irony: in the era of frail and still loosening family bonds, a prospect of compensation for the harm done to a family member rises to the rank of the most effective trigger of family sentiments.

CJR: To what extent are prisons the remaining solids in a fluid era? Are prisons dinosaurs of modern times (cf. the belief in rehabilitation and the shaping of minds and bodies; the panoptic structure with its moulding rationale) or solids, boundary-drawing institutions (providing stable orientation points: 'Here you cross the line!') in a liquid modern time? Is the prison a 'zombie institution,' in the words of Ulrich Beck, a remnant of the modern era, apt to fade away, or a necessary (solid) component of liquid life?

ZB: No, prisons, or any other sites of incarceration, with walls or without, like urban ghettos or refugee camps, are unlikely to become 'zombie categories.' If anything, their place in the order (or disorder) of things is likely to grow. On a full planet no longer offering global solutions to locally produced problems and forcing local state-political units to stew in their own juice, prisons in our 'developed' part of the world turn into human-refuse tips deputizing for the now absent destinations for emigration and deportation; on a full planet, they are the sole dumping sites available nowadays for the (economically) 'redundant' humans the consumerist economy cannot recycle into consumers and so society of consumers cannot absorb. As un-disposed-of human waste accumulates, the prison population is likely to increase.

Prisons are the last survivors of the by-and-large extinct species of old-style panopticons, institutions to keep people in. With society at large now kept on course by seduction and PR, rather than by normative regulation and policing, surveillance



plays a function opposite to that of the orthodox panopticons. Its aim is no longer to keep people in but out (impecunious immigrants out of the country, inauspicious clients out of the shopping malls, uninvited visitors out of the gated communities, loiterers or beggars out of public places, unreliable debtors out of banks).

CJR: Why, if prison is to keep people in, are there continued efforts to seek to integrate people in society?

ZB: I don't see much evidence of earnest policy for 'recycling' and 'rehabilitation'—and such policy would surely be met with enormous social resistance. Can you really imagine a politician aspiring to power in 2006 elections soliciting the support of voters by promising to return former criminals to the community? And there are no longer the pressing tasks of 'recommodification of capital and labour' which used to justify concerns about restoring the 'reservists' of the 'reserve army of labour' to 'active service.'

CJR: To what extent is the contemporary success of the prison (with rising numbers of prisoners in different Western societies), the support of the public for punitive developments, and the support for expanding budgets for criminal justice systems due to a 'longing for solidity?' Can we speak of a genuine demand, a bottom-up willingness to accept more legally-justified violent interventions and control (derived from a Durkheimian 'conscience collective'), or is this support motivated by other factors?

ZB: 'Public support for punitive developments' has deep roots. Strangers in the street (particularly if diffuse, unattached, misty, wandering anxieties are desperately searching for a tangible focus) are embodiments of the unknown, that bottomless container of undefined threats. 'Mob,' the generic name for urban fears, is an abbreviation of the Latin *mobile vulgus*, rabble on the move. We wish them swept off the streets and any government ordering the rounding up of 'obtrusive beggars' can count on quite a few extra votes. Hiring armed guards to keep the undesirables out of private space is a popular practice, an expression of sentiments on which governmental agencies in charge of public spaces gladly capitalize.

The second-stage re-focusing of the diffuse sentiments of social/existential insecurity on terrorists (the first stage was refocusing them on the threats to bodily safety) is likely to intensify further that support, and even stretch the approval to include the 'spilling over' on the social body as a whole of the effects of punitive measures ostensibly aimed at the cancerous cells only. The results of a recent ICM poll published on August 22, 2005, suggest that 73% of Britons believe that it is right to give up civil liberties to improve their security against terrorist attacks. There is little difference in this respect between people of different political sympathies and so presumably of different social classes: 79% of Tory voters are of this opinion, but also 72% of Labour and 70% of Liberal Democrat supporters. Of the people interviewed, 68% approved of the police demand to allow detention of suspects for three months without charge.



CJR: You highlight a very interesting point. Punitive measures which at first sight only seem to be directed at the few also have effects on the many—the social consequences of the way we respond to crime.

ZB: Alarm about rising crime (and, more generally, criminalization of social problems) is, I argue in *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, the last ‘useful’ function accorded to the poor who have been stripped of all past functions (like the occasion they offered to earn a place in the paradise through good deeds, or being a reserve army for labour and war). The poor now serve as the (partially effective) ‘safety valve’ for social anxiety which otherwise would be bound to accumulate to self-combustion point in the world of flexible labour, crumbling human bonds, and the spectre of social redundancy; they also serve as the means of making all alternatives to such a world utterly un-appetizing and more repulsive than the ‘really existing’ banes, by surreptitiously substituting the repulsive and horrifying vision of incarceration for the dissident desire to slow down and tame the whirlwind of the liquid modern life of consumers. Obliquely, they serve as well as the brake on attempts to check and curb the forces of negative globalization.

CJR: Is the projection of feelings of insecurity onto particular groups (criminals, asylum seekers, terrorists) an essential feature of a society? If so, how should we make sense of this phenomenon of scape-goating?

ZB: We can say that the modern variety of insecurity is marked by fear of human maleficence and human malefactors. It is shot through by suspicions about the intentions of other men and women or groups or categories of men and women, by a refusal to trust the constancy, dedication, and reliability of human companions, and by inability or unwillingness to make companionship solid, durable, and thus trustworthy.

Robert Castel (2003) charges modern individualization with responsibility for this state of affairs. He suggests that having dismantled closely-knit communities and corporations, which once defined the rules of protection and monitored their application with the individual duty of self-concern, self-interest, self-love, and self-care (with *l'amour propre* instead of *l'amour de soi*, to use Jean-Jacques Rousseau's memorable distinction), modern society had been built on the quicksands of contingency. Told, nudged, and pressed to pursue their own interests and satisfactions, and to concern themselves with the interests and satisfactions of others only as they affect their own, individuals believe others around them to be guided by similarly egotistic motives and so expect from them no more disinterested compassion and solidarity than they themselves are willing and advised to offer. In such a society, the perception of human company as a source of existential insecurity and a site full of traps and ambushes tends to become endemic.

Perhaps the crucial distinction of the present-day rendition of fear is the decoupling of fear-inspired actions from the existential tremors that generate the fear that inspired

them—the displacement of fear, from the cracks and fissures in the human condition where ‘fate’ is hatched and incubated to the areas of life largely irrelevant to the genuine source of anxiety. No amount of effort invested in those areas of fear-displacement is likely to neutralize or block the source, and so will inevitably prove impotent to placate the anxiety, however earnest and ingenious the efforts might be. It is for this reason that the vicious cycle of fear and fear-inspired actions (ostensibly preventive or defensive) rolls on, losing none of its vigour—yet coming no nearer to its declared objective.

The cycle in question has been displaced from the sphere of security (i.e., of self-confidence and self-assurance, or their absence) to that of safety (i.e., of sheltering from, or exposure to, threats to one’s own person and its extensions). The first sphere, progressively stripped of institutional state-supported and guaranteed protections, has been opened to the vagaries of the market and turned into a playground of the global forces beyond the reach of political control and so also beyond the ability of victims (already affected or fearing to be affected) to respond adequately, let alone to resist effectively.

Communally-endorsed insurance policies against individual misfortune, which in the course of the last century came to be known collectively as the social-welfare state, are now being phased out, reduced below the level needed to validate and sustain confidence in security, and it is no longer to be hoped, let alone trusted, that they will survive the next round of reductions. With state-maintained defenses against existential tremors progressively dismantled, and the arrangements for collective self-defense—like trades unions and other instruments for collective bargaining—following suit under the pressure of market competition that erodes the solidarity of the weak, it is left to the individual to seek, find, and practice individual solutions to socially produced troubles—and to do all that with individual, singly-undertaken, and solitary actions, equipped with tools and resources blatantly inadequate to the task.

Offering more flexibility as the sole cure for the already hardly bearable insecurity, messages coming from the sites of political power paint the prospect of yet more challenges, more privatization of troubles, and so ultimately more, not less, uncertainty. They leave little hope for collectively-assured existential security, and instead encourage the listeners to focus on their individual survival in an increasingly uncertain and unpredictable world.

Whereas personal safety has become perhaps the major selling point in the marketing strategies of consumer commodities, the guardianship of ‘law and order’—increasingly reduced to the promise of personal safety—has become perhaps the major selling point in political manifestos and electoral campaigns alike, while displays of threats to personal safety have been raised to the rank of perhaps the major asset in the mass media ratings war—adding yet more to the success of both the marketing and the political uses of fear capital. As Ray Surette (1992: 43) puts it: the world as seen on TV resembles “citizen-sheep” being protected from “wolves-criminals” by “sheep dogs-police”.

“And as Loïc Wacquant (2004: 11 a. f.) has recently suggested, ‘the securitarian merry-go-round is for criminality what pornography is to love relations’”—as it totally ignores the causes and meaning of its ostensible object and reduces its treatment to ‘taking positions’ selected solely by virtue of their spectacularity, and as it is put on

public display not for its own sake but for the sake of publicity. Public display condenses attention on 'recidivists, obtrusive beggars, refugees on the move, immigrants to be expelled, prostitutes on sidewalks, and other kinds of social rejects' who litter the streets of metropolises to the displeasure of the 'decent people.' For that purpose, the battle against crime is staged as a 'titillating bureaucratic-mediatic spectacle.'

It would be inane or insane to deny the reality of crime and crime-related dangers. The point is, though, that the weight of crime among other public concerns is measured, like the weight of all other objects of public attention, by the extensiveness and intensity of its public display, rather than by its inner qualities.

Joseph Epstein's (2005) recent vivid portrayal of the phenomenon of 'celebrity' captures well the most conspicuous aspects of the fascination with safety that form a so to speak generic 'negative celebrity' of the liquid modern time. 'Much modern celebrity,' Epstein suggests, 'seems the result of careful promotion.' Celebrity is based on 'broadcasting' an achievement, but also on 'inventing something that, if not scrutinized too closely, might pass for achievement.' And he concludes: 'Many of our current-day celebrities float upon "hype" which is really a publicist's gas used to pump up and set floating something that doesn't quite exist.'

One is reminded of Ulrich Beck's similar characteristics of contemporary risks: as most dangers are inaccessible to personal scrutiny and cannot be reliably confirmed or disproved with the means personally possessed, they can be relatively easily argued 'in' and 'out' of public beliefs. In the battle of opinions those with the strongest broadcasting support stand the best chance of winning.

CJR: After 9/11 (New York and Washington), 3/11 (Madrid), and 7/7 (London), measures have been taken and are being further polished to deal with 'terrorism.' American, Spanish, and British people were touched in a part of their existentiality of being. That is, in a sense all those aware of the terrorist attacks—in a mediated sense—felt victimized. Yet in your writings you support Robert Castel's claim that 'we live undoubtedly in some of the most secure societies that ever existed.' How do you reconcile these observations?

ZB: Indeed—one more paradox in the liquid modern collection of paradoxes. As the capacities of our tools and resources of action grow, allowing us to reach ever further in space and time, so our fear of their inadequacy to eradicate evil and make good secure tends to deepen. The most technologically equipped generation in human history is the generation most haunted by feelings of insecurity and helplessness. Or, as Robert Castel (2003) puts it in his incisive analysis of the current insecurity-fed anxieties, we—at least in the developed countries—'live undoubtedly in some of the most secure (*sûres*) societies that ever existed,' and yet, contrary to the 'objective evidence,' it is the most cosseted and pampered 'we' of all people who feel more threatened, insecure, and frightened, more inclined to panic, and more passionate about everything related to security and safety than people of most other societies on record.

Ours is thus far a wholly negative globalization: unchecked, un-supplemented, and uncompensated for by a positive counterpart which is still a distant prospect at best—though perhaps already a forlorn chance. Allowed a free run, negative globalization specializes in breaking boundaries too weak to withstand the pressure, and drilling numerous, huge, and unpluggable holes through boundaries that have successfully resisted so far the forces bent on their dismantling.

The openness of our open society has acquired these days a new gloss, undreamt of by Karl Popper who coined that concept. No longer a precious yet frail product of brave though stressful self-assertion, it has become instead an irresistible fate visited by formidable extraneous forces, a side-effect of negative globalization—that is, a selective globalization of trade and capital, surveillance and information, coercion and weapons, and crime and terrorism, which now disdain territorial sovereignty and respect no state boundary. If the idea of an open society stood originally for the self-determination of a free society proud of its openness, it now brings to most minds the terrifying experience of a heteronomous, vulnerable population overwhelmed by forces they neither control nor truly understand, horrified by own indefensibility and obsessed with the security of borders and of the individuals within them—since it is precisely that security inside the borders and of the borders that eludes their grasp, and seems bound to stay beyond their reach forever, or at least as long as the planet is subjected to the solely negative globalization. On a globalized planet, security cannot be gained, let alone assured, in one country or in a selected group of countries: not by their own means, and not independently of the state of affairs in the rest of the world.

Neither can justice, that preliminary condition of lasting peace and collective security. The perverted openness of societies enforced by negative globalization is itself the prime cause of injustice and so, obliquely, of conflict and violence. “As Arundhati Roy (2004) puts it: While the elite pursue their voyages to their imaginary destination, some place at the top of the world, the poor have been caught into a spiral of crime and chaos.” It was the action of the United States together with its various satellites, like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, that ‘prompted subsidiary developments, dangerous sub-products such as nationalism, religious fanaticism, fascism, and of course terrorism, advancing marching step in step with the neoliberal project of globalization.’ ‘Market without boundaries’ is a recipe for injustice, and ultimately for the new world disorder in which (contrary to Clausewitz) it is politics that becomes a continuation of war by other means. Global lawlessness and armed violence feed each other, mutually reinforce and reinvigorate each other; as an ancient wisdom warns, *inter arma silent leges*. Globalization of harms rebounds in globalization of resentment and vengeance.

The negative globalization has by now done its job, and all societies are now fully and truly open, materially and intellectually, so that any injury of deprivation and indolence, wherever it happens, comes complete with the insult of injustice—of the feeling of a wrong having been done: a wrong to be repaired, but first of all avenged. In the liquid modern world, dangers and fears are liquid-like—or are they rather gaseous? They flow, seep, leak, ooze. No walls have been invented yet to stop them.

The spectre of vulnerability hovers over the negatively globalized planet. We are all in danger and we are all dangers to each other. There are but three roles to play: perpetrators, victims, and bystanders doubling as prospective 'collateral casualties.' For the first role there is no shortage of bidders, while the ranks of those cast in the second and the third grow unstoppably. Those of us already on the receiving side of negative globalization are frantically seeking escape and breathe vengeance. Those as yet spared are frightened that their turn to do the same may—will—come.

In the classic and by now canonical Hans Jonas's formulation, introduced in *The Imperative of Responsibility*, the ethical imagination has failed, and is still failing, to catch up with the fast expanding realm of our ethical responsibilities. One could hear reverberating in that formulation the same concerns that haunted Jean-Paul Sartre's *oeuvre*: 'Whatever we do, we take responsibility, but we don't know for what.' Our tight interdependence makes us all objectively (whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, and—an ethically crucial point—whether we intend it or not) responsible for each other's miseries; our moral imagination, however, has been historically shaped to deal with the others residing in the spatial and temporal proximity within sight, and it has not as yet notably advanced beyond that traditional limitation.

We may add that the advent of 'information highways,' and so of electronically mediated tele-proximity, may be a stimulus towards such advancement; however, to catch up with the already attained scope of objective responsibility, an institutional road needs yet to be laid, paved, and policed. Such a road is still stuck at the drawing-board stage; worse still, for all we know its construction is unlikely to start as long as the conditions of negative globalization prevail.

If anything, the gap between the extent of our objective responsibilities and the responsibility accepted and practiced is thus far growing instead of being bridged. The prime reason for the impotence of the second to embrace the first is, as Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2002, p. 154) suggests, 'the traditionally self-restricting tendency of the orthodox normative responsibility to rely heavily on the concepts of "intent" and "motive,"' which are totally inadequate to cope with the present challenge of planet-wide objective responsibility. And we may comment that the absence of similarly planet-wide law and planet-wide jurisdiction, its executive arm, makes the prospect of such coping even more nebulous. 'The distinction,' Dupuy says, 'between a killing by intentional individual act and killing through the restriction of concerns of the egoistic citizens of a rich country to their own well-being while the others die of hunger' is becoming less and less tenable. Detectives' and policemen's desperate searches for motives in order to determine the suspects and locate the culprit of a crime would be of no avail when it comes to pinpointing the misdemeanours responsible for the present plight of the planet.

In such a world as ours, the effects of actions spread far beyond the reach of the routinizing impact of control and the scope of knowledge indispensable to design it. What makes our world vulnerable are principally the non-calculable risks—a thoroughly different phenomenon from those usually referred to by the concept of 'risk' as it is commonly used. Principally un-calculable risks arise in a principally irregular setting where broken sequences and non-repetition of sequences become a rule, and normlessness a norm. They are but uncertainty under a different name. The present

kind of planetary uncertainty is bound to stay incurable until such time as the negative globalization is supplemented and tamed by the positive one. The roots of our vulnerability are of a political and ethical nature.

So far, however, we and our governments respond mostly with (to use Mikhail Bakhtin's memorable expression) 'carnivals of compassion,' and a paramount function of carnivals is to reaffirm the exceptionality of a carnival-like interruption of the unprepossessing quotidian routine and so reconcile us to the normality of the latter.

Carnivals of compassion come nowhere near the roots of the trouble to which they ostensibly respond. Luc Boltanski's idea of 'distant suffering' received an unexpected twist: it is somehow easier to mitigate qualms of conscience triggered by the (mass-mediated) sight of 'distant suffering' than to face up to its causes. Carnivals of pity are very much resonant with the liquid modern spirit: 'Morality now!' But taming the negative globalization running amuck is not a task that can be fulfilled in a day. Gleneagles' 'war on poverty' was trumpeted in front-page headlines—for two days. A few weeks later, the information that the promised 'debt relief' is a fraud since it will come from the budgetary reserves already earmarked for 'foreign aid' was announced in small print somewhere on distant inside pages....

CJR: Solid modernity was a rule-providing and guiding modernity. At the moral level people were acting on 'automatic pilot.' With the move into liquid modernity aspects of responsibility and morality again come to the forefront. How do you see the link between this under-determination of human life courses, transgressions of norms and different kinds of deviance, responsibility for one's deviant or criminal choices, and culpability and punishment?

ZB: Let me state the trivial: everything said and done, crime is a crime, and criminals need to be punished and/or cured of criminal intents. Few if any people are forced to engage in criminal acts—there is always a choice, only the price to be paid does not depend on the actor, even though the decision that the price for refusing to partake in a criminal act is too high is a matter of choice.

Our idea of crime is founded on a mostly tacit assumption—an axiom, rather—that there is no crime without ill intent (all Hollywood smart detectives spending most of their time looking for a motive reassert that assumption daily on millions of screens scattered around the world). I suggest, though, that the challenge we face now is not trivial at all: the parameters of the 'crime phenomenon' need to be urgently re-thought, as the experiences of the 20th century all but reinforced by the current ones show that by far the greatest dangers threatening humanity are (excuse an oxymoron) un-motivated or un-intended crimes, and as the human-made catastrophes behave like natural disasters: they are unpredicted, strike at random, and for all we know they appear un-preventable—while their scale is out of proportion to any conceivable, genuine, or putative motive or purpose.

CJR: If the parameters of the crime phenomenon are re-thought and the contours redrawn, what place and significance do 'bread and butter'-type of crimes (petty crimes, street crimes) receive?



ZB: National Guard troopers sent to New Orleans after Katrina were clearly unconcerned with your undeniably subtle, and theoretically impeccable, distinctions. They were briefed to 'shoot to kill' the looters—and no-one instructed them to distinguish the thieves of expensive electronics from those stealing bread and bottled water. And let me add that 'looters' was the name reserved for the poor and the black. The others were described as 'food seekers.'

Petty crimes are indeed permanent companions of human togetherness, and the fast growing size, condensation, heterogeneity, and anonymity of contemporary megapolis will in all probability make their elimination yet more improbable than ever. The problem is not to eliminate them (personally, I am not sure they can be eliminated) but to not burden them with added frightening power by soaking up human anxiety from the areas of life where it is daily produced in rising quantities and then transplanting it into the areas of a much lesser uncertainty—which generating potency, which has the advantages of being 'close to home' and 'within sight and reach'. By thus diverting public attention, this 'transplant' avoids the much more risky and taxing confrontation with the true sources of insecurity. And yet we all too often follow the example of the famed drunk who sought a banknote lost on another, dark street under the nearest lamppost—because here, at least, he could see.

CJR: Thank you very much, Zygmunt, for sharing with us your thoughts on such difficult contemporary subjects. We are sure this is just the beginning of a continuing dialogue.

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