BAUMAN, LIQUID MODERNITY AND DILEMMAS OF DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT   The concept of liquid modernity proposed by Zygmunt Bauman suggests a rapidly changing order that undermines all notions of durability. It implies a sense of rootlessness to all forms of social construction. In the field of development, such a concept challenges the meaning of modernization as an effort to establish long lasting structures. By applying this concept to development, it is possible to address the nuances of social change in terms of the interplay between the solid and liquid aspects of modernization.

KEYWORDS   Bauman • consumption • development • modernity

INTRODUCTION

Zygmunt Bauman is no theorist of development, although his work on postmodernity can be treated as indirectly relevant to the critique of development. His recent work, which takes him from postmodernity to liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), brings him closer to questions in the field of development. These questions concern the expansion of markets, effects of itinerant labour, new levels of poverty, redrawing of class lines, and contradictions of consumption. In a recent interview with Keith Tester (Bauman and Tester, 2001: 96–8), he expressed a growing uneasiness with postmodernity as an umbrella term applied to a wide range of social transformations. He proposed liquid modernity as a more apt term for making sense of changes as well as continuities in modernity. Several books have already appeared discussing Bauman's confrontation with modernity (Beilharz, 2000, 2001; Smith, 2000; Tester, 2004). My concern is not with Bauman's intellectual journey but with his new choice of term for a condition that was once

considered postmodern. If liquid modernity is considered a better term than postmodernity, what would its usage imply for the meaning of the present context of modernity? Would this term make a difference to the development agenda of modernizing societies?

In a way, Bauman's preference for liquid modernity can be seen as part of a general response to the recent decline of postmodernism. This decline can be attributed to the failure of postmodernism to go beyond the critique of foundationalism. By reducing the social to a mere system of differences and the subject to an illusion of individuality or self-presence, postmodernism exorcised actors and agents from society and therefore could not adequately explain the meaning of social action and change. It represented a spirited attack on the power structures of modernity but it did not, and probably could not, lay down principles for an alternative structure because it was adamantly anti-foundational. By parodying modernity, postmodernism took on a comic frame (Alexander, 1995: 84) that could not plausibly be translated into statements on temporal changes in society. Yet, the social world had moved on and changed dramatically and social theorists had to invent new terms like neo-modernism to describe and explain these transformations. In using this term, Alexander (1995: 85) sought to present a view of contemporary society that included the victory of the neo-liberal right, the high-level transformations of the newly industrializing countries, and the reinvigoration of the capitalist market. His observation of these changes led him to conclude that the new social conditions prompted a return to many modernist themes. These themes are undoubtedly relevant to the question of development.

Bauman's recent works can be located within this return to modernist themes. These are themes centering on the revival of the market, the global spread of democracy, and the vital role of agency. Actually, Bauman had not abandoned these themes even when he was writing about postmodernity in the early 1990s. In outlining a theory of postmodernity, he stressed the impossibility of neglecting agency in dealing with any instance of social change. For him what was distinctly postmodern about contemporary society could be found in the meaning of choice for individual agents under conditions of plurality (Bauman, 1992a: 191–203). Yet a decade later, his concern with choice no longer addressed the postmodern but the uncertain future characterized by a 'fluid world of globalization, deregulation and individualization' (Bauman, 2002: 19). His metaphor of liquid modernity is directed towards a critique of the aqueous foundation of modernity. At the same time, the link with postmodernity is not completely severed because the sense of flexibility and uncertainty implicit in the postmodern is continuous with the notion of liquidity. This new discourse on an aqueous foundation can be interpreted as Bauman's probable dissatisfaction with the inability of postmodernism to confront the emerging conditions of inequality in the West and around the world. These conditions converge with

problems generally dealt with by theorists of development. Bauman's earlier works on inequality were largely concerned with the problem in Western societies, but in the light of the globalizing effects of modernity he has extended his concern worldwide (Bauman, 1998a). For that reason, the notion of liquidity is appropriate for conceptualizing the flow of modernity and its consequences around the world. But to understand this shift to liquidity, it is necessary to examine the theoretical context in which Bauman addressed the inadequacies of a solid modernity.

FROM SOLIDITY TO LIQUIDITY

Modernity appears solid because of the rapid centralization of institutional power. This was precisely Weber's *problematique* when he distinguished between traditional, legal-bureaucratic and charismatic authority (Weber, 1946). In essence, the solidification of modernity is analogous to the transition from traditional to legal-bureaucratic authority. Bureaucratic structures may seem to be more solid than traditional ones but are vulnerable to the 'softening' effects of charisma. Similarly, we see in Giddens's (1990) treatment of modernity the attribution of institutional power to the nexus between capitalism, industrialism, surveillance and the military. Modernity is solid in the sense that the combined power of these interlocking institutions overwhelms any individual effort to keep tradition in place, and makes 'Western expansion seemingly irresistible' (Giddens, 1990: 63). However, he construed the reflexive process inherent in modernity to have 'softening' effects on institutional structures. Thus, new knowledge generated by modernity can be applied reflexively to undermine its apparent solidity.

By comparing Weber and Giddens, modernity is made out to be solid insofar as institutional power is consolidated through a process of seemingly uncompromising changes in social structures. Yet, this power is not regarded as absolute since charisma and reflexivity constitute the solvents that can possibly dissolve the existing institutional arrangements. The notion of liquefaction is built into this power-driven model of modernity that cannot ignore the fluid nature of social practice whether it is derived from charisma or reflexivity. It is this question of social practice that underlies some poststructuralist attempts at dissolving the solidity implied in the formation of modern institutions. Foremost in this effort was Michel Foucault who saw power 'as something that is *exercised* rather than possessed; it is not attached to agents and interests but is incorporated in numerous practices' (Barrett, 1991: 135). These practices concern the exercise or operation of power at a micro level in which networks and strategies interface to produce a highly complex picture of how modern institutions work. Hence, it is not the solid formation of institutions that seems real but the practices within that soften the texture of reality. The heterogeneity of power relations challenges the impression of solidity in these institutions.

In other words, solid modernity is by and large a myth. Its solidity cannot be taken for granted but is qualified by resistance, contradictions and other softening effects perceived at the ground level. In that sense, Bauman's allusion to the ambivalence of modernity can be taken to suggest that its solidity has been an illusion all along. Like Weber, Giddens and Foucault, Bauman perceived modern contradictions to be the source of social practices that challenged the appearance of institutional solidity. Yet, this reference to the illusion of solidity was not apparent in some of his earlier works. For example, in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Bauman, 1989: 13) he seemed to give modernity a solid touch in order to demonstrate that sanctions for evil did not arise out of thin air but were a corollary of the very structures of modernity itself:

> Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's sufficient condition; it was, however, most certainly its *necessary* condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable. The Nazi mass murder of the European Jewry was not only the technological achievement of an industrial society, but also the organizational achievement of a bureaucratic society.

The implication is that the mass destruction of an ethnic group could not have been possible if modernity merely comprised free-floating structures. Only in a solid context can modern structures intermesh to produce the kind of killing machine meant for a genocidal programme. Thus, in referring to a human tragedy of vast proportion, Bauman implicitly attributed to modernity a solid character.

This theme was continued in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Bauman, 1991: 29) where the metaphor of gardening was used to depict the solid collusion between the modern state and science to weed out elements detrimental to 'the vision of good society, a healthy society, an orderly society'. Yet, he envisioned the triumph of solid modernity to be Pyrrhic since this modernity was also a source of Jewish intellectual marginality which challenged the imagined lattice of progress. By drawing on the work of Freud, Kafka and Simmel, he argued that each author represented an effort to disclose the ambivalence of modernity as reflected in their marginal experiences in European society. Thus, psychoanalysis 'transformed the human world . . . into a text to be interpreted. . . . By asking questions, it sapped the *structure* whose substance was the prohibition of asking'. In the case of Kafka, his 'namelessness precedes, and ushers into, the *modern* world; one in which names are not received but made, and, while being made, fail to offer a fixed date and a settled place and abrogate the very hope of such an offer'. As for Simmel, 'sociology had no room for "society"; Simmel was after the mystery of *sociality*. Simmel's sociology is about the art of building – rather than grand, harmony-conscious, architectural designs' (Bauman, 1991: 175, 184, 187).

Jewish marginality, therefore, exposed modernity's feet of clay. In *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Bauman, 1992b: 134), his discourse on the presence of death turned modernity's feet of clay into dregs of uncertainty:

> Death was an emphatic denial of everything that the brave new world of modernity stood for, and above all of its arrogant promise of the indivisible sovereignty of reason. The moment it ceased to be 'tame', death has become a guilty secret; literally, a skeleton in the cupboard left in the neat, orderly, functional and pleasing home modernity promised to build.

Death surpassed marginality to deliver a *coup de grâce* to solid modernity. By the time Bauman got to the subject of *Postmodern Ethics* (1993: 211),

> modernity appears to be a continuous yet ultimately inconclusive drive towards rational order free from contingency, accidents, things that can get 'out of hand'. It is to maintain such an artificial order, forever precarious and always stopping short of its ideal, that modernity needed enormous quantities of energy the animate sources could not possibly supply.

As Bauman went beyond the tragedy of the Holocaust, his portrayal of solid modernity became more circumspect, taking into consideration the mushiness and messiness which came with the inexactitude of progress. Because he perceived the inability of the modern order to be orderly, the spread of such an order throughout the world could only mean the exploitation of resources at an alarming rate that created more inequality. Thus, in *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Bauman, 1998a), he attributed this increased inequality to the rise of liquid capital, which meant the free movement of capital and money. As liquid capital flowed in all directions, the question of labour became more significant in relation to the quest for production and profits. Labour was seen to take on more flexibility in relation to unpredictable market forces.

In a world of shape-shifting capital and labour, modernity is best defined as amorphous – in short, liquid. Hence, *Liquid Modernity* (Bauman, 2000) can be interpreted as Bauman's cumulative effort to document and understand the alienation of progress, or as Abrahamson (2004: 177) puts it, 'the road liquid modernity is going down currently leads to unbearable human suffering and injustice'. For Bauman, the process of liquefaction began with a solid modernity dedicated to the brutal elimination of any element that allegedly threatened the manicured garden of progress. Alienation came to define the very nature of modern existence, first giving the impression of overcoming but eventually manifesting as ambivalence that would not go away. In Bauman's (1991: 230) words, 'The trained urge to escape from the "messiness" of the life-world has exacerbated the very condition from which escape was sought'. The realization that escape is futile suggests the need for a more flexible strategy to confront the existential condition of alienation. Therefore, Bauman redefined postmodernity as

'modernity in its liquid phase' and 'the era of disembedding without re-embedding' (Bauman and Tester, 2001: 89). It is the era of rolling imperma-nence where bonds are frayed and intimacy falls prey to the transitory nature of all social relationships (Bauman, 2003a). Alienation has not disappeared but taken on a new demeanor as we witness the dissolution of 'bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions' (Bauman, 2000: 6). It is reintroducing conditions of risk and uncertainty that accentuate the vulnerability of the individual rather than uniting individuals to defend their rights (Bauman, 2001).

The question of impermanence was already central to his discourse on mortality when he asked how we can make sense of anything if 'only the transience itself is durable' (Bauman, 1992b: 174). However, to understand transience as a constant in the present context requires a new concept, one that is able to capture change as the inability to stay put or the inclination to venerate mutability. Social change is not just an intrinsic part of any society; it also produces a tendency towards the acceptance of new values underlying our conception of existence. For Bauman, 'Transience has replaced durability at the top of the value table. What is valued today (by choice as much as by unchosen necessity) is the ability to be on the move, to travel light and at short notice. Power is measured by the speed with which responsibilities can be escaped. Who accelerates, wins; who stays put, loses' (Bauman and Tester, 2001: 95). As a result, transience has a built-in value towards the obsession with novelty. A transient environment is one that continually generates new objects to be admired, possessed and consumed momentarily. It produces an attachment to the quick turnover of anything. An ethic of desultory consumerism ensues from such an attach-ment. As Bauman (1998a: 81) put it, 'Ideally, nothing should be embraced by a consumer firmly, nothing should command a commitment till death do us part, no needs should be seen as fully satisfied, no desires considered ultimate'. The sense of freedom experienced in the perpetual state of tran-sience can be translated as 'the plenitude of consumer choice' (Bauman, 2000: 89).

Liquid modernity is, therefore, Bauman's conception of how the world today denies the so-called solidity that it once struggled assiduously to create and maintain. He addressed the liquefying power of modernity as being called upon to 'replace the inherited set of deficient and defective solids with another set . . . which would make the world predictable and manageable'. Yet, this power seemed to have generated 'patterns and figurations which . . . were as stiff and indomitable as ever' and 'whose turn to be liquefied has now come'. This infinite progression of liquefaction provides the sense of impermanence that he described as 'the new lightness and fluidity of the increasingly mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power' (Bauman, 2000: 3, 5, 6, 14). It is not necessarily an optimistic view of modernity because the restlessness and openness inherent to liquidity cannot but create

greater inequality and more social and economic polarization. Thus, his analysis of liquidity rebukes the freewheeling sense of openness as an obstruction to the ethic of responsibility. Such an ethic is deemed vital to the security of knowing that we can depend on each other. Thus, the liquidity of contemporary society is not necessarily a new source of progress but likely constitutes a programme of disenfranchisement of the poor and other marginal people (Bauman, 1998b, 2001).

For Bauman, liquidity is not simply a condition for contemplation but an existential dilemma that needs to be addressed practically. When he asserted that 'It is difficult to conceive of culture indifferent to eternity and shunning durability' (Bauman, 2000: 128), he implied the ability to maintain security and morality should not be lost or forgotten in the face of on-rushing liquidity. Yet, his reference to makeshift connections in the form of cloak-room communities, carnival communities and explosive communities (Bauman, 2000: 199–201) does not augur well for efforts in restoring or rein-venting the type of social bonds necessary for actualizing security and morality. Liquidity reduces our sense of durability to suggest new levels of freedom and at the same time dissolves the bonds that reify our sense of security.

Bauman's concern with the problems of modernity is not specifically related to the question of development in modernizing societies. There is hardly any reference in his works to modernizing societies, yet it can be argued that liquid modernity poses an important problem to these societies because development connotes a process of accumulation, construction and rationalization that is not immune to liquefaction. If liquid modernity is considered inherent to the modernizing process itself, then it is a kiss of death from within, so to speak, in the zigzag race to attain the goals of development.

DILEMMAS OF DEVELOPMENT

In the second half of the 20th century, development became a code word for not wanting to be left behind in a world of rapid discoveries and changes. Practically every country in the world is compelled to seek development in order to become and stay modern. For modernity connotes the charmed circle of progress, sophistication, growth and completeness. But development is not simply a process of improving the lot of a nation. First, it is yoked to a linear time frame and second, it cannot be disengaged from the capitalist complex of production and consumption. The linear timeframe has been a universal measure of progress and world mastery. It has an evolutionary perspective that makes *becoming* a periodic inevitability, apparently moving from a lower stage to a higher one. Linear movement of time is like a blind man's buff, time unfolding blindly as history grapples with events that allegedly take us to a more perfect state. The passage out of human

misery is considered a function of time's blindness and knowledge accumulated over time. There are undoubtedly 'discontinuities of historical development' as Giddens (1990: 4) puts it, but ostensibly history's forward movement is destined to find new levels of experience conducive to human well being. Thus, linearity is by definition a force of *overcoming*, a push factor that generates an image of creativity and progress.

If development is embedded within linearity, then *becoming* as a periodic inevitability is no different from *overcoming* as a source of personal and collective renewal. What is renewed is a sense of being that no longer holds on to a previous ideal state of existence. That state is jettisoned as time opens up new possibilities to overcome the past in order to reconfigure the present as a more desirable state of affairs. In other words, development overcomes in order to become something that is solidly anchored. Developing to become modern constitutes a quest to establish new structures that are, nevertheless, characteristically solid like those in the previous eras. The threat to these new structures comes from within the process of overcoming, which generates over time disillusionment with the foundation as we have seen in the rise of postmodernism.

Development is, therefore, a solidifying project. Countries pulled in by the linear timeframe seem to have no recourse but to push towards a solid modernity. In linear terms, the solid phase represents a stage of development that attempts to reorder or do away with traditional structures in order to construct institutions, which provide measurable standards of improved well being. In discussing the conceptual meaning of the three worlds of development, Pletsch (1981: 576) articulated its teleological assumption to suggest a definite end-point in the degree of solidity achieved by any country embarked on development. The First World is considered purely modern because of the solid consequences of its scientific, technological and democratic achievements, unlike the less solidly organized societies of the Second and Third World (p. 574). These two worlds trail behind the First World by lacking solid modernity. Yet as the First World sheds its solid image, does it mean that the other two worlds will eventually pass through the solid phase to reach a level of liquidity?

Bauman (2000: 29) seems to think that solid modernity identified with the First World has reached a turning point with the dissolution of hubris and the deregulation of modernizing tasks. It means that there is no teleology of development. The First World is swimming in an ocean of uncertainty and ambivalence. The Second World has disintegrated with the dismantling of the Soviet Union and communist states. The Third World has fragmented into the newly industrializing countries (NICs) and the less wealthy and less developed nations. Solid and liquid modernities are interspersed with varying perceptions of development's end-point, or we can say both types of modernity are no longer subjected to a teleological viewpoint. It is no longer possible to define development precisely as the emergence of solid

modernity since the advent of liquid modernity disprivileges the assumption of pure modernity or modernity based on unqualified world mastery.

Bauman (1993: 215) had already questioned this assumption in his earlier work on postmodern ethics: 'contrary to the widely shared view of modernity as the first universal civilization, this is a civilization singularly unfit for civilization. It is by nature an insular form of life, one that reproduces itself solely through *deepening* the difference between itself and the rest of the world.' This critique of modernity as the first universal civilization represents, in effect, a scepticism of modernity as a direct means to development. For Bauman (1993: 213–14) identified growth, imperialism and inflation as suicidal in their long-term consequences, and that economic growth represented 'the process of *expropriation* of order, not of its global increase'. What have increased globally are new opportunities for further expropriation of order in a borderless world where solid economies have been replaced by liquid markets. Thus, it was only logical for Bauman (1998a: 65–6) to conclude that because of 'the new "porousness" of all allegedly "national" economies . . . global financial markets impose their laws and precepts on the planet. The "globalization" is nothing more than a totalitarian extension of their logic on all aspects of life.'

Under the impact of liquid modernity, the three worlds of development are transformed into a water-world of 'inter-state, supra-local institutions' that 'act with the consent of global capital . . . to destroy systematically everything which could stem or slow down the free movement of capital and limit market liberty' (Bauman, 1998a: 68). As a process of 'world-wide *restratification*' (p. 70), globalization appears to have turned development into an otiose concept. The idea of a solid end-point has fizzled out as the liquefying power of global capital is dissolving all the boundaries that once distinguished between different countries on the road to a solid modernity. It is as though globalization created a borderless mass society, levelling social institutions and cultural perceptions under variable signs of consumption (Lee, 2002). Yet, islands of solidity still exist in this water-world of global capital because consumption cannot proceed without production, and production remains the basis of all solid formations that thrive on the meaning of development.

In short, the quest for development has not completely faded away but has taken on a new face. Development can no longer be premised strictly on a Western model when various parts of the West itself have experienced de-industrialization. The trend towards flexible specialization, downsizing and subcontracting in various Western countries accounts for the impression of an emerging liquid modernity. From this impression, work receives 'a mainly aesthetic significance' (Bauman, 2000: 139). In this environment of free-floating labour, production is no longer considered an important source of developmental values. Instead, production is reconfigured as a servant of consumption.

But in East and Southeast Asia, development came to embody the creation and maintenance of expanding and technically efficient economies. Production became a central feature of these economies, especially in the area of manufactured goods. Government participation in these economies gave rise to the concept of the developmental state (White, 1988). In trying to catch up with the achievements of the West, the state in many Asian countries 'assumed responsibility for setting national growth priorities designed progressively to upgrade industrial capacity' (Cohen and Kennedy, 2000: 179). These national priorities concerned policies to accelerate socioeconomic growth by acquiring technological knowledge, raising infrastructural standards, attracting foreign and local investment, setting up local and offshore industries, and cultivating a corps of local entrepreneurs. There is no doubt these policies were intended to create an environment conducive to the attainment of solid modernity. Nothing is more solid than being able to demonstrate to foreign visitors and local residents alike workable infrastructures, efficient bureaucracies, impressive communication systems, and generally acceptable standards of living. Even the sudden financial downturn in 1997 did not dampen the drive of these emergent economies. Gradual economic recovery in the subsequent years put these countries back on the road to reaching the citadels of solid modernity. This was made possible by the unshakable belief in the play of market forces that determined the road to modern success. As Evers and Gerke (1997: 3) put it, 'The strength of the belief in market forces could justifiably be called "market fundamentalism", as it is enshrined in unchangeable orthodoxy and relentlessly defended'. It is this fundamentalism that continues to inform and drive the development ethos of Asian economies, affecting also the consumption patterns of these economies.

THE APORIAS OF CONSUMPTION

In liquid modernity, consumption is conjugated to desire and, later, to the wish. Bauman (2000: 75–6) described this evolution from desire to the wish as the freeing of consumption from solid obstacles to new heights of pleasure:

> The 'need', deemed by nineteenth-century economists to be the very epitome of 'solidity' – inflexible, permanently circumscribed and finite – was discarded and replaced for a time by desire, which was much more 'fluid' and expanded than need because of its half-illicit liaisons with fickle and plastic dreams of the authenticity of an 'inner self' waiting to be expressed. Now it is desire's turn to be discarded. It has outlived its usefulness: having brought consumer addiction to its present state, it can no more set the pace. A more powerful, and above all more versatile stimulant is needed to keep consumer demand on a level with the consumer offer. The 'wish' is that much needed replacement: it completes the liberation of the pleasure principle, purging and disposing of the last residues of the 'reality principle' impediments.

The wish represents the transformation from the vagueness of wants to a more definite pattern of consumption that converges with the 'aestheticization of everyday life'. The latter term refers to 'the rapid flow of signs and images which saturate the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society' (Featherstone, 1991: 67). It is the liquidity of signs and images that generates seemingly limitless new objects to which consumers respond as their prerogative to choose and to fulfil their wishes. Bauman (1998a: 84) considers consumers as people who 'live from attraction to attraction, from temptation to temptation, from sniffing out one tidbit to searching for another, from swallowing one bait to fishing around for another'. As needs turn into desires and then into wishes, so the compulsion to consume runs into the dead-end of 'never wilting excitation' (p. 83). Consumers cannot seem to go beyond excitation. In the end, the 'rise of the consumer is the fall of the citizen' (Bauman and Tester, 2001: 114). In other words, consumption abetted by liquid modernity introduces a new type of irrationality. Consumers are so fixated on the objects of their consumption that they become unaware of their own predicament. A good illustration of this aporia of consumption is provided by a Reuters (2004: 8) report on a popular computer game in Egypt:

> Glued to computer screens in a Cairo cybercafe, Egyptian teenagers lead US forces against China and a shadowy Middle Eastern group, while most of the country seethes in anger over US policy in the region. The US-produced computer game . . . portrays a scenario in which the United States and China battle the Global Liberation Army (GLA), a Middle Eastern underground movement with a fondness for chemical weapons. The teenagers say the game reinforces the western image of Arabs as 'terrorists' with introductory scenes showing them gunning down civilians and stealing US aid, but the graphics and high-octane action keep them hooked. . . . The teenagers, all students at an American high school in Cairo, say they are annoyed that games, movies, comics and books from the United States portray Arabs as cruel fanatics but despair that there are no Arab companies that can make products to redress the balance. . . . Although the game does not directly identify the GLA as Arab, the names of the rebels sound vaguely Arabic without being real Arabic names. The characters speak in what would be described as Arabic accents. In spite of their strong feelings about the portrayal of Arabs, the teenagers say most Egyptians have found a way to enjoy the game with a clear conscience.

The consumption of this computer game puts Egyptian teenagers in a quandary. It compromises their Arab identity as consumers of a computer game that projects negative stereotypes of Arabs, but at the same time vertiginous effects of the game override their claims to that identity. It is this aporetic condition of being caught between tradition and consumption that defines choice in liquid modernity.

For Bauman, consumption is a way of life that flows with the tides of liquid modernity. Freedom to choose from myriad objects of consumption

implies that consumers are constantly being uprooted in their search for consumables without feeling any compunction to be committed to a fixed set of values. Yet the ability to consume, flitting from one product to another without pause, is only possible in a social environment that has in place the necessary credit facilities and structural supports vital to the movement of capital. A high degree of solidity is evident in the institutional set-up that occasions consumption. Banks and credit companies in collusion with government institutions and shopping centres provide the larger framework solidly perceived by consumers as the avenue to the expression and fulfilment of their wishes. The liquidity of spending and shopping cannot be realized without the solid reality of modern structures first being available for any business transaction to occur. Development opens the door to the creation and maintenance of such structures. Construction of modern structures for improving quality of life and efficiency in public services underlies the developmental goals of many governments around the world. No government that is modernizing wants to deny or retard construction of these structures that also introduces new perceptions leading to fresh needs and wishes. When new highways are constructed, cars and vehicles of all makes are naturally expected to traverse them. Hence, automobiles are imported through local agencies or an automobile industry is developed locally to accommodate the needs of motorists. Soon these needs mutate into wishes as different car models locally assembled and imported become widely available for motorists to choose and buy, each make or model taking on symbols of desirability and prestige. The fluidity of these symbols and the wishes associated with them cannot be actualized if highways, car makers and sellers are not first put in place as a result of the policy to develop transportation and communication in the country. In short, development interlocks solid and liquid modernity.

Availability of credit facilities, an important aspect of solid modernity, advances consumption needs and wishes. In contemporary society, credit as exemplified by the ubiquity of credit cards represents the ability to acquire goods and services on the basis of one's standing in relation to bank accounts, property ownership and business reputation. The wish to consume must be solidly backed by hard currency and property. In societies embarked on development, the creation of credit facilities sometimes circumvents such requirement in order to enlarge markets in line with government policy of economic growth. For example, in Malaysia economic growth since independence in 1957 has encouraged the expansion of credit facilities to affect the lifestyle of both upper and lower income groups. In an insightful study of credit and consumer culture in Malaysia, Talib (1995) observed that the urge to spend reflected the overall pro-consumption environment in the country, undoubtedly a consequence of development policies across the board. More specifically, she noted that: 'With the proliferation of credit facilities offered by several financial institutions, the credit cards, easy payments, cooperatives
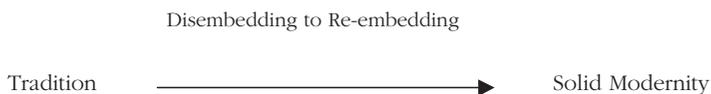
Disembedding to Re-embedding

Tradition ⟶ Solid Modernity

Figure 1   Path of Development

Disembedding without Re-embedding
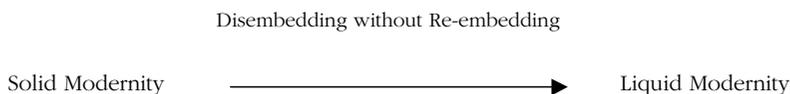
Solid Modernity ⟶ Liquid Modernity

Figure 2   Path of Consumption

and various credit marketing schemes, the pace of material accumulation is accelerated, penetrating every level of society, both rural and urban' (pp. 211–12). What she described was in fact the emplacement of various capitalist structures to solidify networks of monetary transaction as part of the wider scheme of development, which became a generator of credit for consumption across ethnic and class lines. The Malaysian case illustrates that the creeping influences of liquid modernity as reflected in local consumption patterns could not have materialized without the solid financial institutions and practices that came with development. These patterns are reinforced by the desires and wishes of the new middle class who 'constitute new markets for all kinds of Western products from television soap operas, Western food and fashion to computer software and multimedia technology' (Evers and Gerke, 1997: 8).

Since development brings with it the conditions for unrestrained consumption, its contradictions stemming from the impingement of rapid growth on identity needs become superimposed on the outcome of consumption itself. There is indeed a gnawing threat to the consumer's sense of identity from objects of consumption which are sources of excitation as well as ambivalence. Development disembeds in the sense that it sets up new structures of freedom that offer alternative identities to traditional ones. The alternative identities are vehicles for re-embedding individuals in communities striving to attain solid modernity (see Figure 1). Consumption occurring within the parameters of development is, however, an aporetic experience because it provides an overwhelming sense of participatory delight in cosmopolitan objects without re-embedding individuals in the emergent communities that made such consumption possible in the first place (see Figure 2).

To say that 'consumption is a lonely activity, endemically and irredeemably lonely, even at such moments as it is conducted in company with others' (Bauman, 2000: 165) is to discover the heart of neo-modern darkness.

In its modern form, it was not consumption but capitalist production which was responsible for the emergence of alienated labour. This was the way Marx conceptualized modern alienation, as 'a new focal point from which to view human beings and hence to speak of them, one which stresses the fact of segmentation or practical breakdown of the interconnected elements in their definition' (Ollman, 1975: 133). By participating in capitalist production, human beings as wage earners became estranged from each other as self-serving elements in a money economy. Marx interpreted this separation and distortion of the original communal life as the alienated feature of modernity.

In the same vein, Bauman's analysis of consumption takes the liquefying experiences of wish fulfilment to be the epitome of discrete actions accomplished without intimate involvement of others. As he puts it, in consumption 'cooperation is not only unnecessary, but downright superfluous' (Bauman, 2000: 165). The fact of consumption is also the fact of alienation since wishes in liquid modernity free-float over myriad objects of display. Commitment is almost impossible in a world where pleasure is derived from anonymous social relations. The wish is alienated not simply by the conditions of anonymity but by the emptiness of consumption disguised as revolutionary high-tech communication. The mode of consumption in liquid modernity markets alienation as unfettered selection of goods and services under the sign of evolving technology. In liquid modernity, alienation is aestheticized as 'the cool thing to do'.

Since development cannot exclude consumption, does it mean that alienation is inexorably built into development? On the one hand, development is supposed to constitute a new identity or a new community premised on the belief in the reconstruction of society. On the other hand, development also introduces an insatiable urge to spend, to become fashionable, and to reshape personal identity. It sets in motion the transformation of needs into desires and wishes. Once basic needs and necessities are met, desires and wishes take over to rivet attention on the signs of new lifestyles and leisure activities. Consumption of these signs is rapidly turning both rural and urban dwellers in developing societies into highly individualized participants in the pursuit of commodities. As development re-embeds social relationships in new contexts of institutional growth, it also frees individuals to become consumers par excellence.

The process of re-embedding is itself a source of alienation since being re-embedded in new structures weakens pre-existing relationships. Under conditions of developmental change, re-embedding breaks down traditional ties but frees individuals to seek new references for constructing fresh identities. But as consumers exposed to the liquefying experiences of global culture, these identities do not necessarily constitute a fixture from which a stable sense of belonging can be created. Instead, alienation remains a

chronic condition that is masked by the exhilaration of consumption, the feeling of cosmopolitan engagement even for a fleeting moment.

CONCLUSION

By substituting the idea of liquid modernity for postmodernity, Bauman (2003b: 19) is able to address the transition of modernity as a 'forcefully built order' to a world which rejects any 'future burdened with obligations that constrain freedom of movement'. But this world is not the same as the world of development where solid modernity is the professed goal of planners embarked on restructuring society. These planners adhere to an agenda determined by the obligation to construct durable structures. Yet, development opens the door to increased consumption that is accompanied by the liquefying features of modernity. The developing world cannot but become trapped between the dream of solid modernization and the reality of liquid transactions. As a consequence, development comes to represent the construction of infrastructures and institutions conducive to the flows of liquid modernity that must eventually dissolve the ramparts of an imagined durable order. In that sense, the liquidity overflows to dampen the agenda of solidification.

The postmodern critique of the three worlds of development can be turned into a question of how development is affected by the transition from solid to liquid modernity. The basis of this question hangs on Bauman's observation that liquefaction is disembedding without re-embedding. Since development is a process of disembedding to re-embed in new structures, liquefaction would likely distort the act of re-embedding by providing alternatives that can create or increase the ambivalence of identity. In other words, development can no longer be considered a type of unilinear change. Liquefying experiences intensified by consumption may constrain the act of re-embedding and result in different forms of alienation. Because of such experiences, the *three* worlds of development can be collapsed into *two* interacting modes of modernity, solid and liquid. The level of interaction is determined by the rate of disembedding without re-embedding. If there is a high rate of disembedding to re-embed in new structures, then interaction occurs more in favour of the solidifying agenda. If disembedding takes place with little or no re-embedding, then the process of liquefaction dominates. It would be more fruitful to gauge the level of interaction between solid and liquid modernity in any society than to simply imagine a direct transition from solid to liquid modernity.

Bauman's concept of liquid modernity offers an innovative approach to analysing the complexities of social change in the contemporary world. Does it imply that it is a more effective concept than postmodernity? Both liquid modernity and postmodernity are concepts concerned with the

problem of depthless social change, i.e. the loosening of social bonds that disguises alienation as a celebration of diversity and flexibility. However, the deconstructive roots of postmodernity pose anti-hegemonic questions that are not clearly demarcated by references to liquid modernity. Postmodernity, as Bauman (1992a: ix) observed, 'does not seek to substitute one truth for another. . . . Instead, it splits the truth. . . . It denies in advance the right of all and any revelation to slip into the place vacated by the deconstructed/discredited rules.' None of this spirit seems to be evident in liquid modernity. Yet, the critical element is not completely missing in liquid modernity because the description of the 'new lightness and fluidity' of the world is also an undeniable probe into '[g]lobal powers . . . bent on dismantling [dense and tight] networks for the sake of their continuous and growing fluidity' (Bauman, 2000: 14).

Thus, development can be treated as a concept that brings together the deconstructive agenda of postmodernity and the peripatetic purpose of liquid modernity. By analysing development as being rooted in ideologies of solidity, it is possible to address simultaneously the meaning of teleological growth and the global reach of the new liquefying powers. The perspective of postmodernity cuts into the meaning of progress to show the reversibility of growth, which itself can be regarded as a consequence of the irresistible powers of the liquefying process. Development does not traverse a straight path but meanders through a postmodern landscape that is awash in the foam and waste of liquid modernity.

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