



## LIQUID METHODOLOGY – METAPHOR AS A METHOD

### Likvidna metodologija – metafora kao metoda

**ABSTRACT:** *The paper analyses metaphor as a sociological method. To demonstrate its methodological value, the paper centres on Zygmunt Bauman's metaphors who used them as a means of effectively conveying sociological interpretations to the public. Experts can use metaphors to generate research questions, and the public can use them to understand the world. While metaphors possess significant heuristic power, they cannot replace empirical evidence. The paper has implications for sociological methodology and to some extent, sociological theory.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Zygmunt Bauman, qualitative research, methods, metaphor*

**APSTRAKT:** *U radu se analizira metafora kao sociološka metoda. U cilju pokazivanja njezinog metodološkog potencijala, rad se usredotočuje na metafore Zygmunta Baumana koji ih je smatrao među boljim metodama za komuniciranje socioloških interpretacija široj javnosti. Metafora može pomoći stručnjacima pri generiranju istraživačkih pitanja, dok je javnost može koristiti za razumijevanje svijeta. Najveća prednost metaforâ je u njihovoj heurističkoj moći, ali one ne mogu zamijeniti empirijske dokaze. Doprinos rada je u području sociološke metodologije i dijelom sociološke teorije.*

**KLJUČNE REČI:** *Zygmunt Baumann, kvalitativno istraživanje, metoda, metafora*

### Introduction

Metaphor is the way of knowing that blends: knowing the social world and how to approach it, a way in which sociological knowledge may be constructed and communicated to the public, and a way to operationalise a humanistic vision of sociology. To illustrate the methodological potential of metaphor, the paper focuses on Bauman's metaphors. Metaphors may be used by experts (to generate research questions) and non-experts alike. Metaphors are omnipresent

in everyday speech, and they vividly convey complex ideas in simple terms. Perhaps these are the reasons why the public finds them helpful in navigating social changes and comprehending the world they live in. Yet, this does not imply that research findings from other methods cannot be used in the same vein, especially if the public is interested in some research topic.

Why opt for Bauman's metaphors to discuss and illustrate metaphor as a method? Bauman's sociology, of which metaphors are central, is characterized by four features: 1) sociological mission— Bauman dismisses abstract concepts such as “humanity” or “mankind” and focuses on ordinary people and how the world treats them. His mission is to demonstrate a fresh perspective on familiar aspects of life, revealing that things can be different; 2) analytical problem— He wants to examine how societal forces shape personal life stories and biographies, especially in terms of the contradictions individuals face that cannot be resolved on a personal level; 3) political action— Bauman strives to show that the world is irrational and that the human condition is marked by ambivalence, necessitating political action; 4) ethical commitment— the need to address the concern for those who suffer the most from the ambivalence of the human condition (Tester, 2004:5–6). It is against this backdrop that Bauman's metaphors should be understood<sup>2</sup>. Bauman employs metaphors to portray basic elements of the social world (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2006:308). He blends metaphors with other related scientific concepts and, in this sense, the metaphor functions as a dome around the concepts of the academic language (Cosmovici, 2016:25–26). However, Bauman himself had a liquid stance on methodology.<sup>3</sup> In his textbook *Thinking Sociologically 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, the word “metaphor” is mentioned twice in no particular or methodologically relevant context (see Bauman and May, 2001:9, 31). One reason is that Bauman had been silent on methodological issues (Blackshaw, 2005:53). This, however, does not suggest that Bauman rejects methodology altogether. One must carefully reconstruct it from his writings<sup>4</sup>. Bauman's (1966:43, 1967:406) primary objection was that there are no error-proof methods and that metaphors—like other qualitative methods—are better for capturing real-life experiences.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Bauman attempts to expand the

2 Bauman was a peculiar sociologist, a lyrical one. For an in-depth analysis of his place within social theory, see Tester (2004); and Sztompka, P. (1984). *Masters of Polish Sociology*. Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.

3 Contrary to sociologists whom Mills (1959:20, 103) described as “intellectual technicians”.

4 Bauman was a prolific writer. Walsh and Lehmann (2015) questioned the originality of Bauman's writings. They claim Bauman self-plagiarized a minimum of 90000 words. Tester (2018) offers arguments as to why “repetition” and “reappearance”—terms milder than self-plagiarism—occurred in Bauman's works.

5 Social sciences had difficulty embracing metaphors as a method. Hobbes (1998:21) counted metaphors among speech abuses and, for Locke (1998:597) metaphor cannot capture the true idea. Hence, it took time for social scientists to take metaphors seriously. Nonetheless, considerate approaches to metaphor are not free from the shadow of a doubt that comes in two variants: 1) the supradiscursive view and 2) the subdiscursive view. In the former metaphor is used to transmit ideologies that rule discourses from the above. Nazi Germany is an example of how metaphors misguided social and political views. The latter approach limits their function below the level of discourse using them as basic cognitive concepts

methodological toolkit and challenge what counts as “science” in sociology (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2006:308–310).

Using metaphors has proved to be Bauman’s method of choice in practising sociology (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2006:311). In recent years, metaphors in scientific language have become increasingly accepted. According to Tester (2004:12), Bauman had been at the forefront of this “blurring of genres”. By fusing science and literature, Bauman attempted to overcome some cons of conventional methods. He defines the researcher’s role in the research as a “detectivistic adventure”: “... it is bound to rely on conjecture as much as it does on the unassailable power of deduction, and much as it would wish to rely on the hard evidence of induction” (Bauman, 1992:8).

The primary reason for using metaphor as a qualitative method<sup>6</sup>– is the development of various scientific models for various cognitive purposes (Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester, 2014:96–97). Bauman alludes to Cartwright (1983:140) who posits that the models should allow deducing the right conclusions about the phenomena, without needing models to delineate everything. Upham (2005:130–131), another source Bauman refers to, suggests building different models for different objectives. In Bauman’s view, this is “exactly what metaphors do!” (Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester, 2014:97).

There is no bulletproof method. Metaphors are open to possibilities of understanding, and they may either contract or expand the horizon of imagination. Ricœur (2004:222–226) refers to this as the “iconic moment of metaphor”. The choice is subjective and arbitrary and involves hermeneutics. Ricœur (2004) explored the relationship between metaphors and hermeneutics, and although the publication of *The Rule of Metaphor* coincided with Bauman’s venturing into sociological hermeneutics, he has done so without reference to metaphors (Flanagan, 2013:53). In the guide for conducting meta-ethnography, Noblit and Hare (1988; see Višić, 2023) suggested that ethnographers should strive to generate arch metaphor when synthesising ethnographic studies. In Bauman’s works, there is no overreaching metaphor at the level of discourse that defines a model of social analysis. Although Cosmovici (2016) attempted to develop an interpretative model of the “embedding metaphor”. By analysing Bauman’s metaphors of globalisation, Cosmovici (2016:26–28) identified an underlying metaphor that integrates with the text and produces an original scientific discourse. This also revealed that Bauman uses metaphor to know the socio-political world and construct his sociological knowledge.

Bauman’s employment of metaphor as a method is not always successful. First, metaphors are sometimes used for dramatization and not for systematisation, meaning that there is no clear apparatus for studying society. Bauman is not a systematic sociologist, and he gradually abandoned the search

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(Maasen, 2000:202-203). Bauman’s metaphors fit within a subdiscursive framework. Perhaps this looming heritage of metaphors made Bauman a zealot-like proponent of the metaphor.

6 Nijhoff (1998:88) situates Bauman’s approach within a qualitative methodology that works within the tradition of reflexive practices.

for a coherent system in favour of metaphors, which in turn may have led to the “hypertrophy of metaphors” (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2006:309; Turner, 2010:137). Bauman (2008:235) himself admitted disdain and abandonment of the system. Examples of this are evident in the metaphors of “gardening state” and “liquid modernity”. Theoreticians of Nazi Germany used the analogy of gardening to describe the well-being of the state in terms of weeding out and replanting. Bauman (see 1987) seeks to develop this metaphor to describe the relationship between the Enlightenment and administrative techniques of modern states’ bureaucratic practices, which also use classification systems to differentiate the normal from the abnormal. Nevertheless, with numerous research focusing on the administrative features of modern states, it is farfetched to infer that the gardening metaphor can help comprehend modern politics (Turner, 2010:137–138). The same applies to “liquid modernity” which depicts the diminishing impact of social institutions on individual actions and the need for people to become more flexible and adaptable. The scope of this differs from one country to the next, and thus, this metaphor is not sufficient for accurate social analysis (Turner, 2010:138). Nonetheless, Bryant (2007; 2013:31) made a good argument that “liquid modernity” has no objectives or endpoint, but instead implies a broader notion that encompasses fluidity, flux, and turbulence.

Second, there is no extension of metaphor or deepening of the significance, meaning some metaphors cannot generate new theoretical descriptions.<sup>7</sup> Thus, metaphors such as “liquid fear”, “liquid modernity” or “gardening state” are hard to turn into concrete research programs (Turner, 2010:51, 136–141). Bauman’s argumentation does not stick to the linear path of related concepts. He is not acute to the different levels of analysis (social, political, psychological). Instead, he is “cherry-picking” from others without subscribing to their principles. By drawing upon expressions – concrete and abstract, conversational, and academic, narrative, and analytical – he dovetails from many distinct areas. Although Bauman’s writing is occasionally inconsistent, it is not incoherent (Nijhoff, 1998:95–97). He uses metaphors to communicate with the public, who in reading his works defamiliarize themselves from the habit of seeking consistency in everything.

### Metaphor in the Arsenal of Methods

Metaphors are just as pervasive in thought and action as are in everyday language (Goodman, 1976:80; Lakoff and Johnson, 2003:8; Swedberg, 2020:242). People use them every twenty words without realising it (ScienceDaily, 2019). This is also because metaphors are key tools for blending different ideas and perspectives without destroying their differences (Brown 1976:170). But in (social) sciences, there was a widespread aversion to using metaphor as a method.<sup>8</sup> Bauman (2013:21) succinctly explained the reason for this: “The

7 This especially applies to Bauman’s use of theological metaphors (Flanagan, 2013:54).

8 Brown (1976) proposed a cognitive aesthetic theory of metaphor as an alternative logic of discovery.

desperate efforts of many scientists to cut off all metaphorical roots and hide all traces of kinship with ‘ordinary’ (...) perception and thought are (...) part of a more general tendency of science (...) to put a distance between itself and the ‘common sense’ of hoi polloi...”. However, metaphors have recently become accepted in the language of sciences, especially in the development of hypotheses, interpretation of results, and communication of findings (Taylor and Dewsbury, 2018:1). In his essay on blurring the genres, Geertz (1980:171–172) foretold the future of metaphor: 1) they will be used systematically and extensively, and 2) more to construct and less to show. Metaphors are adequate if they meet five basic criteria: 1) economy, 2) cogency, 3) range, 4) apparency, and 5) credibility. The economy is analogous to Ockham’s razor. Metaphors are adequate when they are the simplest representation of phenomena (Brown, 1977:104–105). Thus, the use of metaphors comes from a need to grasp new sortings and orderings readily (Goodman, 1976:80). Cogency refers to an efficient integration. It is met when a metaphor explains something without being redundant, ambiguous, or contradictory (Brown, 1977:104–105). Range is the ability to incorporate other symbolic domains and metaphors can be judged based on the strength of this ability.<sup>9</sup> By transferring ideas and associations of one system to another, metaphors allow each system to be viewed anew from the viewpoint of the other. Although the metaphor is not a method peculiar to a specific discipline, it is mostly favoured by qualitative social scientists who are more reflexive and thus more aware of the role of metaphor (Brown, 1976:172; Brown, 1977:104–105; Bauman, 2013:19). Hence, a successful metaphor is one that, in time, is no longer seen as a metaphor<sup>10</sup> (Bauman, 2013:19). Some middle-range metaphors such as *social– role/structure/movement* have already become sociological concepts (Swedberg, 2002:245). Apparency is the capacity of language to “show” the experience instead of referring to it (Martin, 1975:168). Hence, an adequate metaphor makes connotations apparent (Martin, 1975:208). The final criterion is credibility. Metaphors should be credible and understood by the targeted audience (House, 1979). For Bauman (2013:22), this last criterion introduces an ethical and normative aspect that refers to the relation of sociology to society: “a decision to assume responsibility for the voluntary or involuntary, subjective or objective responsibility of sociologists, and an act of assuming a moral stance towards the vocation and its prospective beneficiaries”. Abbot (2007:73–74) refers to this as a *stance* by which he describes an author’s attitude toward their writings and the public. The author’s morally engaged stance involves their intense participation in the object of study, which they aim to recreate for the public.

9 Paradigmatic metaphors point to which problems to look at and how to look at them. Examples are the “social system” (see Parsons, 1951), “the organism metaphor” (see Levine, 1995), and the “human ecology metaphor” (see Gaziano, 1996). Middle-range metaphors are limited in scope such as Sutherland’s (1940) “white collar criminality”, Merton’s (1957:117–118) “role-set”, and Granovetter’s (1973) “weak ties”.

10 These are “frozen metaphors” which have lost their “as if” quality over time and become a name or description (Brown, 1976:174–175).

Some metaphors are part of ordinary language (e.g. role, stigma, climbing the social ladder, a cog in the machine) and their words are imbued with “spontaneous sociology” which can mislead the analysis (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1991:20–24; Swedberg, 2020:244). Nevertheless, sociologists should not reject metaphors from “folk sociology”. Instead, they should dispel the “semantic halo” and redefine common metaphors within a system of methodologically clarified concepts (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1991, 21–23). Hence, sociological metaphors should debunk popular beliefs. Bauman’s preferred strategy is defamiliarization. Defamiliarization through metaphor comprises estranging the well-known, of making the obvious non-obvious. Defamiliarization “may open up new and previously unsuspected possibilities of living one’s life with others with more self-awareness, more comprehension of our surroundings in terms of greater self and social knowledge and perhaps also with more freedom and control” (Bauman and May, 2001:10–11). Defamiliarization dissolves (artificial) oppositions and combines them into distinct and humanistically inspired sociological voices (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:20).

Sociological metaphors are a two-way street.<sup>11</sup> They move from the general culture to sociology and vice versa. Examples are concepts of *role-sick/model/gender/distance* and Weber’s technical term *charisma* which became a favourite expression in politics and journalism (Merton and Wolfe, 1995:16–23). But the same is true the other way around. As metaphors transition between different contexts, they often change their meaning (Richards, 1965:16; Swedberg, 2020:244). Some sociological metaphors may be suggestive, but underdeveloped (Swedberg, 2020:245). They may be epiphors, (use an existing meaning of the word to explain something new), diaphors (create a new meaning) (Wheelwright, 1962), or they may be static or mobile (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:815). Static metaphors can only be used in one context and are not very useful in others, whereas mobile metaphors can be shifted and used in different contexts (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:815). Bauman metaphors are mobile because they may apply to a variety of different contexts and their further development is only limited by the creativity and inventiveness of a researcher (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:815). Bauman’s metaphors also bridge epiphors and diaphors, allowing for a new interpretation by introducing unexpected terminology (e.g., vagabonds as the description of the new poor) (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2006:312).

Metaphors cannot substitute for empirical evidence or function as a “definitive concept” (Blumer, 1954:7). But they may help sharpen sociological imagination and indicate what kinds of facts to search for. In this way, metaphor functions as a sensitising concept, giving sociologists a general understanding and direction in approaching empirical cases (Blumer, 1954:7). Thus, metaphor is useful in developing hypotheses and research questions. However, metaphor’s

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11 As Geertz (1980:172) noted metaphors compare in both directions.

main advantage is its heuristic value, as it can spark sociological imagination and be understood in multiple ways<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, using metaphor should be done with an advisory note from Goffman (1959:254) who regarded them as “temporary scaffoldings”. Bauman (2013:17–18) understands and employs metaphors in that manner.<sup>13</sup> His metaphors function as heuristic devices, not as (f)actual descriptions of reality. Contrary to Goffman’s they are of moral character (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:815).

Sociology needs to employ metaphors to represent its world. The choice is not between scientific rigour and poetic insight but between fruitful metaphors and being their victims (Brown, 1976:178). Bauman (2013) admits that in using metaphors, sociologists set for themselves somewhat fewer perfectionist goals compared to the objectivist approach.<sup>14</sup> However, he unequivocally denies that employing metaphors is a sign of inferior knowledge. Instead, Bauman (2013:22) considers using metaphors as a part and parcel of a sociologist’s calling. There are three reasons why metaphor has its place among sociological methods. First, the term “society” as the core concept of sociology is itself a metaphor developing from its original meaning of close company or fellowship. Second, metaphors compare two systems by noting and exposing existing similarities between them without conjuring up a third concept. Metaphorical juxtaposition selects by drawing some features to the forefront and casting others aside. Finally, metaphors should be the preferred method for sociologists who aim to understand and interpret ordinary people’s choices and actions (Bauman, 2013:17–18).

## Bauman’s Metaphors

Nisbet (1977) outlined three major themes for sociological representation through metaphor: landscape, portraits, and progress. Likewise, in their study, Jacobsen and Marshman (2006; 2008) divided Bauman’s metaphors into three general categories: societal, human, and utopian. Bauman’s metaphors match descriptions of Nisbet’s themes and there is no significant difference between the two categorizations. Therefore, Bauman’s metaphors can be grouped using both Nisbet’s (1977) and Jacobsen’s and Marshman’s (2006; 2008) classification as shown in Table 1.

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12 As Merton (1975:51) showed with the metaphor “marketplace of ideas”, “forum of ideas”, “arena of ideas”, and “a population of ideas”.

13 For a discussion of different and complementary views between Bauman and Goffman see Jacobsen, M. H. (2008). Goffman Meets Bauman at the Shopping Mall - en diakron konfrontation om selv, samfund og sociologi. *Sociologi i Dag* 38(3):37-71.

14 Abbot sought to provide an outline of the narrative methodology. For a detailed discussion on narrative positivism see Abbot, A. (2001) *Chaos of Disciplines*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Table 1. *Thesaurus of Bauman's major metaphors*

Landscapes or societal metaphors <sup>a</sup>	Portraits or human metaphors <sup>b</sup>	Progress or utopian metaphors <sup>c</sup>
<p><b>Bauman (2000) <i>Liquid Modernity</i></b>  <b>heavy and light capitalism</b>/the passage from solid to fluid modernity  <b>liquids</b>/fluidity; mobility; lightness; weightlessness  <b>liquid modernity</b>/flow, everything becomes fragile and fluid; light capitalism  <b>liquidizing powers</b>/descended from system to society, from politics to life politics. The result is an individualized and privatized version of modernity  <b>melting</b>/melting the solids—the permanent feature of modernity  <b>melting pot</b>/solids thrown into the melting pot  <b>modernity-solid</b>/condensed/systemic  <b>fluid modernity</b>/ the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape, and hopeless chase. In 'liquid' modernity, it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule  <b>solid modernity</b>/ an era of mutual engagement; eternal duration as the main motive; heavy capitalism; territorial obsession [geographically]  <b>(the) rigidity of the order</b>/product of releasing the brakes  <b>solidity</b>/lasting solidity  <b>solidify the fluid</b>/attempt to find identity  <b>tradition</b>/protective armour of beliefs and loyalties which allowed the solids to resist the 'liquefaction'  <b>Bauman (2005) <i>Liquid Life</i></b>  <b>liquid life</b>/precarious life lived under constant uncertainty</p>	<p>Portraits or human metaphors <sup>b</sup></p> <p><b>Bauman (1987) <i>Legislators and Interpreters</i></b>  <b>interpreter</b> [as opposed to legislator]/ post-modern intellectual; translates and makes statements understandable statements from one into another; the good interpreter reads the meaning properly; gradually replaces legislator  <b>legislator</b> [as opposed to interpreter]/modern intellectual; makes authoritative statements which arbitrate in controversies of opinions, and which select those opinions which, having been selected, become correct and binding  <b>Bauman (1995) <i>Life in Fragments</i></b>  <b>pilgrims</b>/ able to select their destination early in life with confidence that the straight line will not bend; identity builders; their world must be orderly, predictable, determined and insured  <b>Bauman (1997) <i>Postmodernity and its Discontents</i></b>  <b>flawed consumers</b>/ [generic term for deviant behaviour]; outsiders who cannot partake in consumerism; problem, dirt to be disposed of; unfulfilled consumers who do not measure up to their desires; inner demons specific to the consumer life  <b>pilgrims</b>/as opposed to tourists; settled, [not fluid, not on the move] hardly ever look beyond the border of their hometown  <b>tourists</b>/masters of melting the solids; the epitome of fluid identity; constantly on the move [fluid; willingly]</p>	<p>Progress or utopian metaphors <sup>c</sup></p> <p><b>Bauman (1976) <i>Socialism the Active Utopia</i></b>  <b>socialism (modern)</b>/the utopia of the underdog and this consideration colours all its constituents, including those which can be rightly viewed as the legacy of older utopias  <b>Bauman (1987) <i>Legislators and Interpreters</i></b>  <b>active utopia</b>/ remembered or reconstructed mode of philosophies; living historical memory; the standard by which ambitions and performances are measured, criticized and corrected  * <b>gamekeepers [pre-modern societies; as opposed to gardeners]</b>/ are not intent on transforming the state of the territory to bring it closer to that of a contrived 'ideal state'; they do not contemplate an alternative state of affairs; they aim at securing a share in the wealth, to collect their share and to guard it against poachers  * <b>gardeners [modern societies; as opposed to gamekeepers]</b>/ The power presiding over modernity (the pastoral power of the state) is modelled on the role of the gardener; specialized personnel for a weed-free environment; administrators, teachers and "social" scientists specializing in converting and cultivating human souls and bodies  <b>gardening state</b>/modern state  <b>weeds</b>/unplanned, self-controlled plants that threaten to undermine the imposed order</p>



<p>Landscapes or societal metaphors <sup>a</sup></p>	<p>Portraits or human metaphors <sup>b</sup></p> <p><b>tourists vs. vagabonds/</b> metaphors of contemporary life; principal division of postmodern society</p> <p><b>underclass/warehouse</b> of all outcasts, seduced consumers, sentenced criminals; class beyond the classes</p> <p><b>vagabonds/dark moons</b> reflecting the shine of bright sun; the waste of the world in service to tourists; involuntary tourists on the move [fluid] unwillingly [unlike tourists]; caricature which reveals the ugliness underneath the beauty of makeup; rubbish bins for the tourist filth; victims of the world which made the tourists into heroes</p> <p><b>Bauman (2005) <i>Globalization The Human Consequence</i></b></p> <p><b>nomad/</b> displacement but different for vagabonds and tourists</p>	<p>Progress or utopian metaphors <sup>c</sup></p> <p><b>Bauman (1989) <i>Modernity and the Holocaust</i></b></p> <p><b>perfect world/</b> a gardener's [Nazi's] vision, projected upon a world-size screen</p> <p><b>Bauman (2004) <i>Wasted Lives</i></b></p> <p>* <b>human waste/wasted</b> humans; <i>homo sacer</i>; the surplus population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay; refugees and immigrants are imported waste; <u>An unavoidable outcome of modernization.</u></p> <p><b>Bauman (2005) <i>Liquid Life</i></b></p> <p><b>utopia/the</b> game and prey for hunters; grand social vision [in solid modernity], now split into a multitude of private but not complementary portmanteaus</p>
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Source: author

<sup>a</sup> Landscape or societal metaphors. Metaphors capturing transformation in the social and cultural landscape are extracted and sorted in this column.

<sup>b</sup> Portraits or human metaphors. The column showcases metaphors for various social types or classes and their traits.

<sup>c</sup> Progress or utopian metaphors. Metaphors resembling dioramas are used in this column to illustrate structure, order, and movement in time.

\* Although these metaphors may seem more fitting under the Portraits or human metaphors category, they are categorized under Progress or utopian metaphors because they are anthropomorphizations of social institutions and entities representing structure and order. However, with metaphors, it is hard to make a clear-cut distinction; hence, I recognise that all three categories are interlinked and mutually supportive.

Selecting works and identifying metaphors followed an iterative approach: The literature search included works translated into English and available as e-books; the selection criteria included having a metaphor in the title (e.g., *Liquid...*), or if the title matched the category (e.g., *Socialism the Active Utopia/Progress* or utopian metaphors); the identified metaphors from these works were then searched for in Bauman's other works to determine whether they have kept or changed the meaning; secondary sources were consulted to verify the accurate identification of Bauman's major metaphors; metaphors were compiled and sorted into categories based on their description; an inductive approach was used to identify emerging themes, which were then compared with existing classifications.

### 3.1. *Landscape or societal metaphors*

Sociologists are tasked with understanding the social and cultural landscape. Changes in the European social landscape of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were captured using metaphor, which lies behind concepts such as social status, authority, the sacred and the secular, alienation, and anomie (Nisbet, 1976:43). Bauman's societal metaphors describe how the landscape of modernity has changed from being solid to fluid (see Table 2, column 1): "unlike the preceding era of 'solid' modernity that lived towards 'eternity' (...) liquid modernity sets itself no objective (...) it assigns the quality of permanence solely to the state of transience (...) There is (...) always change (...) but no destination (...) no anticipation of a mission accomplished" (Bauman, 2005a:66). He acknowledges that he deliberately chose the "liquid" or "fluid" as the metaphor for contemporary society (Gane, 2004:19). For Bauman (2005a:1-3), a liquid modern society is such in which changes are fostered and routines discouraged. Life in a liquid landscape is fluid and cannot remain on the course for a long. As Bauman (2005a:2) asserts: "Liquid life is a precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty (...) Liquid life is a succession of new beginnings". Hence, society has moved from stability and life on track to unstable life of never-ending beginnings. Bauman's metaphor of liquidity captures the fast-paced environment of today, which is made possible by the 'lightness' that comes with avoiding responsibilities and commitments, both in the workplace and in personal lives (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:805). According to Bauman (2005a:3), at the heart of liquid modernity is the fear of enduring things and everlasting relationships, as the survival of society depends on the speed at which changes can be implemented: "The steadfastness, stickiness, viscosity of things inanimate and animate alike are the most sinister and terminal of dangers, sources of the most frightening of fears and the targets of the most violent of assaults".

Metaphor uses the technique of juxtaposition. Thus, the liquid landscape can only be understood in relation to the previous environment of solid modernity and as its critique. The metaphor of solid modernity describes the era of totalitarian regimes and their "gardeners" especially that of Nazi Germany. It was the era of solid concepts (blood, soil, nation, territory) and fixed ideologies which underwent the transition from "gamekeepers" to "gardeners". That made

the Holocaust an inevitable consequence of solid modernity: “And so the Jews were caught in the most ferocious of historical conflicts: that between the pre-modern world and advancing modernity” (Bauman, 1989:46).

The liquefaction or the changing of the social landscape is linked with the process of globalization, which melted the three solids: state, nation, and territory. In Bauman’s (2000:4) words: “The melting of solids led to the progressive untying of economy from its traditional political, ethical, and cultural entanglements. It sedimented a new order, defined primarily in economic terms”. The capitalism of factory lines and production was replaced with capitalism of information processing (Bauman, 2005b:54–72). These changes have also affected interpersonal relationships: “...relations should be diluted when consumed (...) like cars, should undergo regular [annual vehicle test] (...) long-term commitment, is the trap that the endeavour ‘to relate’ should avoid more than any other danger” (Bauman, 2003:x). Hence, the workplace and jobs are no longer for life and marriages are no longer “till death do us part”. However, some critics argue that Bauman’s account lacks empirical evidence. Smart (2007:20) suggests that Bauman’s vision of personal relations contradicts the empirical studies on kinship and family in Britain. According to Doogan (2009:6), “liquid modernity” overemphasizes the movement of nonfinancial capital and disregards the continued significance of the government in the activities of the market economy. These are the inevitable consequences of a conceptual worldview. Bauman’s metaphors, though not accurate depictions, serve as heuristic devices. Sociological landscapes are part of social scenery seen from some special from one’s perspective (Nisbet, 1976:42).

Bauman’s metaphor of liquid modernity illustrates how individuals have estranged themselves, and how the attempt to remain fixed or to “solidify the fluid” would oppose the current ethos of freedom of people, love, and capital (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:806–807). In short, these are the reasons “liquidity” or “fluidity” are metaphors befitting the novel phase in the history of modernity (Bauman, 2000:2). Owing to their mobility and dynamics, the metaphor of liquid modernity could be stretched to encompass metaphors of flow, flux, turbulence, and meltdown (see Bryant, 2007; 2013).

### *Portraits or human metaphors*

The portrait is another form of sociological expression. Artistic portraits typically focus on individual traits, whereas sociological portraits examine the shared characteristics of a group or class. Most sociological portraits are presented as role types. The sociological portrait follows the parsimony criterion, discarding all that is superficial and temporal and focusing on what is essential and unifying (Nisbet, 1977:68–71). Bauman (1997:93) identifies two postmodern role types, “vagabonds” and “tourists” and the gap between them represents the primary (class) division in contemporary society (see Table 2, column 2). Bauman juxtaposes them as “pilgrims” of solid modernity. But unlike pilgrims, vagabonds, and tourists are destinationless (Bauman, 1993:240; 1995:83–88). They are constantly on the move, willingly or otherwise.

The “tourists” are the elite, the “haves” who can participate in the consumer society. They are the masters of melting the solids and they move by choice. The “vagabonds” are the servants of the tourists. They are those who lack resources and are “flawed consumers” making up a broad spectrum of immigrants, refugees, and the underclass. Whereas tourists travel for pleasure, because they view the world as welcoming, vagabonds relocate out of need, since they find the world inhospitable (Bauman, 1997:89–93). Bauman has received both popular and academic recognition for using metaphors of “tourist” and “vagabond” to describe the extent to which everyone is “on the move” in liquid modernity (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:808). Bauman suggests that not everyone can imitate the movement of capital and the liquefaction of bonds through choice. Some people have their fate imposed on them (Tester, 2004:180). Hence, Bauman’s metaphors illustrate effectively that the social differences in liquid modernity are determined by the number or the absence of opportunities one has. Therefore, the “tourist and vagabond” metaphor refers to not just physical mobility but also to the increasing social mobility of tourists and declining social mobility of vagabonds (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:808–809).

The “underclass” metaphor generically portrays social misfits, the “weed” that pops up in every society: “‘Underclass’ evokes an image of a class of people who are beyond classes and outside hierarchy, with neither chance nor need of readmission; people without role, making no useful contribution to the lives of the rest, and in principle beyond redemption” (Bauman, 2005c:71). Bauman uses this metaphor adaptively, initially to depict Jews as a weed in solid modernity and then to describe various outsiders in liquid modernity.

Bauman’s metaphors of people are concerned with the moral aspects of living (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:809). This is clear when he describes how liquid modernity manages the movement or the fluidity of people. According to Bauman (1998:87), even though visas are no longer necessary in many countries, passport control is still needed to differentiate between the “tourists” for whose convenience the visas were cancelled and the “underclass” who should not be travelling. For Bauman (1998:87), this can be taken as a metaphor for the new stratification: “the ‘access to global mobility’ (...) has been raised to the topmost rank among the stratifying factors. It also reveals the global dimension of all privilege and deprivation (...) Some of us enjoy the new freedom of movement *sans papiers*. Some others are not allowed to stay put for the same reason”. This prompted Bauman to dispel the “semantic halo” and redefine the “nomad” metaphor. The fashionable label “nomads” can be misleading, since it overlooks the distinct experiences of vagabonds and tourists, with any similarity between them being only formal and shallow. If they were asked, many individuals would likely go elsewhere or reject the idea of a vagabond lifestyle (Bauman, 1997:87–92).

However, “vagabonds” and the underclass are not completely meaningless or purposeful. Although they are unwillingly continually uprooted, they have their firm place in the liquid modernity. Bauman (1997:93) explains the purpose of the vagabond as the “alter ego” of the tourists: “an alter ego means to serve as

a rubbish bin into which all ineffable premonitions, unspoken fears, secret self-deprecations and guilts too awesome to be thought of are dumped...” It is almost paradoxical that the tourist’s life is more bearable and even enjoyable because of the uniformly nightmarish alternative of a vagabond’s existence. Thus, the tourists have a personal stake in making the alternative as awful as they can. The worse the vagabonds’ conditions, the more satisfying the experience of being a tourist. If there were no vagabonds, the tourists would have to invent them (Bauman, 1998:98).

Bauman takes the meanings of tourist and vagabond metaphors from “spontaneous sociology” and successfully redefines them. His tourist/vagabond metaphors heuristically highlight new social stratification and the growing social gap. Mobility is the new status symbol. The elite travels by choice and has no spatial boundaries. Even the sky (or the ocean depths) is not the limit anymore. Let us recall the billionaire tech elite race for tourist travel to space<sup>15</sup> or the recently failed excursion to the RMS Titanic.<sup>16</sup> Due to their mobility, the tourist metaphor can be applied to the modern term “digital nomads”. Digital nomads are individuals who have a mobile work lifestyle. They can live and work wherever they choose if they have the internet. Taking advantage of their freedom, they become what they call location independent, meaning they can store or sell their possessions and rent out their properties to be free to travel and live as they please (Woldoff and Litchfield, 2020:15). Hence, they are modern-day tourists: “... digital nomads search for a new path to more freedom, more meaningful work, and a better quality of life (...) one that is paradoxically characterized by simultaneously high levels of fluidity and intimacy. Nomads move around frequently, so their community is fluid in the sense that individuals are constantly coming and going. This fluidity defines the community, continuously stoking it with the energy of newcomers and returnees, while simultaneously draining it as nomads drop out of community life at their whim or leave it altogether” (Woldoff and Litchfield, 2020:14).

The opposite is true for the ever-growing class of vagabonds. They are “involuntary tourists” constantly forced to move.<sup>17</sup> Hence, Bauman’s illuminative human metaphors force us to rethink our social arrangements and remind us of our ethical duty to others. In Bauman’s (2005c:1) words: “The poor will be always with us, but what it means to be poor depends on the kind of ‘us’ they are ‘with’. It is not the same to be poor in a society which needs every single adult member to engage in productive labour as it is to be poor in a society which (...) produce[s] everything needed”.

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15 Kariuki, P. (30.11.2021.). SpaceX vs. Virgin Galactic vs. Blue Origin: What Are the Differences? *MUO*. <https://www.makeuseof.com/spacex-virgin-galactic-blue-origin-differences/>

16 Steinbuch, J. (29.06.2023.). OceanGate still advertising Titanic trips after “catastrophic implosion” of Titan sub *New York Post*. <https://nypost.com/2023/06/29/oceangate-still-advertising-trips-to-titanic-wreckage/>

17 In 2022 108.4 million people were displaced by war, persecution, violence, and human rights abuses. UNHCR (June 2023). Report on forced displacement. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/unhcr-calls-concerted-action-forced-displacement-hits-new-record-2022>

Personification is undesirable albeit unavoidable in metaphorical expression. In sociology, personification is often used to represent a social phenomenon as if it were a person with similar qualities (Sweedberg, 2020:249). While personifying variables is generally discouraged, it is accepted for collectivises: [t]reating collectivises as persons is a commonplace of social analysis, as it is of common language of both Roman and common law” (Abbot, 2007:80). Bauman’s portraits testify to his distinguished technique of anthropomorphising social constructs into personages of flesh and blood. This implies that synthetic entities can be effective social constructs, which can be linked to positions of power and strategies with scenes of dramatic action (Nijhoff, 1998:97). Hence, vagabond/tourist metaphors methodologically succeed in humanising abstract and often intangible notions and experiences (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:810).

### *Progress or utopian metaphors*

Sociologists face a twofold challenge of trying to explain structure and order, as well as change and development. The notion of sociology used to illustrate the movement in time is the “grand evolution”. This is an intellectual device through which the pattern of change is made central to entities called “mankind”, “society” or “culture” (Nisbet, 1977:94–96). Metaphors are often used as a heuristic tool, presenting one perspective among many without claiming to accurately depict reality. Metaphors of progress provide a panorama or an “illusion of movement” rather than a scientific explanation of evolution. They strive to portray progress in rhythmical and linear sequences (Nisbet, 1976:96–98).

From a methodological standpoint, more precise usage of metaphors of progress should be as dioramas. Bauman’s metaphors provide a dioramic overview of progress (see Table 1, column 3) by sequentially chronicling development from premodernity (wild cultures; gamekeepers) through solid modernity (gardeners), and to liquid modernity (consumer society; hunters; tourists).

Bauman (1987:52) deploys the metaphor of “gamekeeper” to portray the “wild”, premodern culture, whose idea of utopia was to self-reproduce undisturbedly. The “gamekeepers” did not feed or eradicate the vegetation, nor did they aim to alter the territory under a preconceived “ideal state”. Their conception of progress was the preservation and gradual extension of the present into the future. As Bauman (1987:52) asserts: “gamekeepers [want] to secure a share in the wealth of goods these timeless habits produce, to make sure that the share is collected, and to bar impostor gamekeepers (...) from taking their cut”. The “gardening state” had no intention of preserving “wild cultures” in their garden or leaving the world as it is. The emergence of solid modernity rests on the process of transforming wild cultures into garden ones. Thus, “solid modernity” was more for social planning, cultivation, and design. The “gardening state” needed gardeners—specialized personnel for the weed-free environment. If the desired social design is to be achieved, there is a constant demand for supervision and surveillance. The pastoral power of the state is modelled upon the gardener (Bauman, 1987:51–52). Bauman shows how modernity saw

the world as the stage for human creation, where effort and regulation could transform it into a “better place”. The people also could also be measured against this standard: “The good citizen could be grown, like a grafted tomato, or the blue rose” (Beilharz, 2000:78). The “gamekeepers” were fatalistic, they were “religious people” (Bauman, 1987:52) who viewed nature as the God’s work, whereas “gardeners” saw it as the work of man. Progress was tied to knowledge and moulded by modern “gardeners” such as administrators, teachers, and “social” scientists, who gave people what they needed. The metaphor of the gardener finds its best application in Bauman’s depiction of totalitarian regimes. Genocide is a gardener’s job and just one chore that those who see society as a garden need to undertake. Weeding out is seen as constructive work in achieving the perfect garden. Hence, visions of society as a garden define parts of their population as human weeds, which must be removed and prevented from spreading. Gardenlike conception of society made Hitler and Stalin view mass murders as creation and not destruction (Bauman, 1989:93).

The melting of solid modernity, which describes progress from collectivism to individualism, brought new ideas of progress and visions of a perfect society (utopia). Grand-scale visions of solid modernity were fragmented into numerous private utopias. Each one is tailor-made for the lonely enjoyment of the individual (Bauman, 2005a:152). The gamekeepers sought to preserve the *status quo*; the gardeners took an active part in social engineering and hunters acted as individuals without a sense of social responsibility. Progress in liquid modernity lacks one vision. Thus, the hunter metaphor effectively mirrors the transformation from collective to atomised forms of living (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:813). The perfect society for hunters and tourists works towards a “safe environment”, without beggars, pesters and thieves (Bauman, 1998:120).

Bauman’s gardener metaphor is mobile and can help gain insights into some present-day phenomena. Kamete (2017) deploys the metaphor of the “gardening” state to illuminate key things about urban and social planning in Zimbabwe. The metaphor illustrates how state-directed spatial technology planning is bound to the gardener state’s rational social engineering objectives, primarily concerning preserving order in an artificially created world. It is a practical method to understand the pursuit of order and the classification of weeds in the modern city. It reveals how planning science is crucial in identifying and categorising weeds, leading to their public declaration and treatment (Kamete, 2017:16–17). However, metaphors of progress cannot substitute empirical evidence or serve as the basis for serious scientific analysis. The metaphor of progress stems from the biological world, describing life cycles of plants and organisms, making it ill-suited for social change (Nisbet, 1969:3–4). Despite this, they are the oldest and most powerful metaphors in Western thought. They serve to synthesize the past, present, and future (Nisbet, 1969:7–251). However, their “accuracy” depends on the object’s distance. As Nisbet (1969:240) explained: “The usefulness of the metaphor of [progress] is determined by the cognitive distance of the object (...) The larger, the more general, abstract, and distant in experience the object (...) the greater the utility of the metaphor. Conversely, the smaller, more concrete, finite, and empirical our object, the less the metaphor’s utility”.

## Conclusion

Bauman admitted that in using metaphor as a method one sets for themselves methodologically lower aims. However, using metaphor as a method brings sociology closer to its subject—the people in society. Metaphor has a strong heuristic power. They help to name, describe, and explain in the simplest terms often complex social phenomena and situations to the public. Metaphors do not recount reality and cannot provide the basis for creating policies, evidence-based decision making or research programs as some of the more robust research methods can. Metaphors have different audiences than those of policymakers. For the non-experts, metaphors may assist them in orienting and navigating fast-shifting and complex currents of social changes. For social scientists, metaphor may stir sociological imagination in the way of seeing things from different angles and formulating research ideas. Thus, a good metaphor is mobile, inter-contextual and one that, in time, becomes a concept.

Bauman practised sociology for the people. In doing so, he found metaphor the most fitting method and employed it and developed it over the years. His metaphors of landscapes, portraits, and progress are dioramas. While not giving the most accurate depiction of reality, they meet the criteria of parsimony by effectively lying out in the simplest terms contemporary social conditions, new social stratification, and social development. His metaphors have survived the test of time. They are very mobile and easily applied to different social contexts and phenomena. Furthermore, they have a strong moral calling that compels us to rethink the direction or the understanding of progress. Metaphors, like all methods, aim to test and interpret reality. Thus, they ought to be viewed as “temporary scaffoldings”, serving as working hypotheses and research questions that should be dismantled once they establish a constructive research framework or deepen comprehension.

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