



GOVERNO DO ESTADO DO  
**AMAZONAS**

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## **Zygmunt Bauman: “Social media are a trap”**

(Interview by Ricardo de Querol)

Zygmunt Bauman has just celebrated his 90th birthday [...]. Since developing his theory of liquid modernity in the late 1990s – which describes our age as one in which “all agreements are temporary, fleeting, and valid only until further notice” – he has become a leading figure in the field of sociology. [...]

Born in Poland in 1925, Bauman’s parents fled to the Soviet Union following the German invasion in 1939. In 1968, after he was stripped of his post as a teacher and expelled from the Communist Party along with thousands of other Jews in the wake of the Six-Day War, he left for the United Kingdom, taking up a post at Leeds University where he is now Emeritus Professor of Sociology. His work has been awarded numerous international prizes, among them Spain’s Prince of Asturias Award, in 2010. He has outlined his pessimistic world view in books such as 2014’s *Does the Richness of the Few Benefit Us All?*, which argues that the world is paying a high price for the neoliberal revolution that began in the 1980s and that wealth has not trickled down to the rest of society. In *Moral Blindness*, published last year, he and co-author Leonidas Donskis warn about the loss of community in our increasingly individualistic world.

**QUESTION.** You have described inequality as a “metastasis.” Is democracy under threat?

**ANSWER.** We could describe what is going on at the moment as a crisis of democracy, the collapse of trust: the belief that our leaders are not just corrupt or stupid, but inept. Action requires power, to be able to do things, and we need politics, which is the ability to decide what needs to be done. But that marriage between power and politics in the hands of the nation state has ended. Power has been globalized, but politics is as local as before. Politics has had its hands cut off. People no longer believe in the democratic system because it doesn’t keep its promises. We see this, for example, with the migration crisis: it’s a global phenomenon, but we still act parochially. Our democratic institutions were not designed for dealing with situations of interdependence. The current crisis of democracy is a crisis of democratic institutions.

**QUESTION.** In which direction is the pendulum that you describe between freedom and security swinging at the moment?

**ANSWER.** These are two values that are tremendously difficult to reconcile. If you want more security, you’re going to have to give up a certain amount of freedom; if you want more freedom, you’re going to have to give up security. This dilemma is going to continue forever. Forty years ago we believed that freedom had triumphed and we began an orgy of consumerism. Everything seemed possible by borrowing money: cars, homes... and you just paid for it later. The wakeup call in 2008 was a bitter one, when the loans dried up. The catastrophe, the social collapse that followed hit the middle classes particularly hard,



dragging them into a precarious situation where they remain: they don't know if their company is going to merge with another and they will be laid off, they don't know if what they have bought really belongs to them... Conflict is no longer between classes, but between each person and society. It isn't just a lack of security, but a lack of freedom [...]

**QUESTION.** You are skeptical of the way people protest through social media, of so-called “armchair activism,” and say that the internet is dumbing us down with cheap entertainment. So would you say that the social networks are the new opium of the people?

**ANSWER.** The question of identity has changed from being something you are born with to a task: you have to create your own community. But communities aren't created, and you either have one or you don't. What the social networks can create is a substitute. The difference between a community and a network is that you belong to a community, but a network belongs to you. You feel in control. You can add friends if you wish, you can delete them if you wish. You are in control of the important people to whom you relate. People feel a little better as a result, because loneliness, abandonment, is the great fear in our individualist age. But it's so easy to add or remove friends on the internet that people fail to learn the real social skills, which you need when you go to the street, when you go to your workplace, where you find lots of people who you need to enter into sensible interaction with. [...] Social media don't teach us to dialogue because it is so easy to avoid controversy... But most people use social media not to unite, not to open their horizons wider, but on the contrary, to cut themselves a comfort zone where the only sounds they hear are the echoes of their own voice, where the only things they see are the reflections of their own face. Social media are very useful, they provide pleasure, but they are a trap.

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**1) No início da entrevista realizada por Ricardo de Querol há uma breve apresentação sobre o sociólogo Zygmunt Bauman. Aponte dois episódios marcantes em seu percurso.**




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**2) Qual é o ponto de vista de Bauman a respeito do fim do casamento entre poder e política? De que maneira isto afeta a democracia?**


**3) De acordo com Bauman, o que ocorreu em 2008 com a classe média devido ao excesso de consumismo ligado à ideia de liberdade experimentada nas últimas quatro décadas?**


**4) Bauman defende que as redes sociais podem ser armadilhas que criam uma zona de conforto onde o usuário só ouve o som da sua própria voz. Aponte dois argumentos que fundamentem a opinião do sociólogo.**
