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Frontiers and Contemporary Thinking: Zygmunt Bauman and Salman Rushdie

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Abstract

*This paper looks into the nature of contemporary modernity as reflected by the metaphorical discourses of Zygmunt Bauman, an outstanding sociological writer, and Salman Rushdie, a famous novelist. This approach to the two writers' echoing discourses focuses upon their new perceptions of frontiers, which are crucial in their inquiries. When Rushdie weaves a whole lecture, later published in book form under the title *Step Across this Line*, around the idea of frontier, he echoes Bauman's vocabulary and perceptions when he explores his own ideas of modern "liquidity." Rushdie, whose book-length essay came out in 2002, never references Bauman's *Liquid Modernity*, published in 2000. Arguably, Rushdie may have never read Bauman's book. However, the similarity of their perceptions upon the "liquid" nature of modernity, especially when applied to frontiers not only spatially but also temporally, is striking. Bauman's statements that "in the fluid stage of modernity, the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and exterritorial elite," that "holding the ground is not that important if the ground can be reached and abandoned at whim, in a short time or in no time," that "being modern means being perpetually ahead of oneself, in a state of constant transgression" find a mirror in Rushdie's contentions that "in our deepest natures, we are frontier-crossing beings," that "we are living in a frontier time, one of the great hinge periods in human history, in which great changes are coming about at great speed."*

Keywords:

Frontier, Frontier-crossing, Quest, Liquid modernity, Transgression

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Born into one language, Urdu, I've made my life and work in another. Anyone who has crossed a language frontier will readily understand that such a journey involves a form of shape-shifting or self-translation.

Salman Rushdie, *Step across This Line*

Rather than homelessness, the trick is to be at home in many homes, but to be in each side and outside at the same time, to combine intimacy with the critical look of an outsider, involvement with detachment – a trick which sedentary people are unlikely to learn.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*

Liquidity, Liquefaction. Metamorphosis and Automorphosis

In the late eighties and early nineties, Zygmunt Bauman's project was one of tuning sociology to the condition of postmodernity. Thus, *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987) and *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992) were conceived to give substance to that project. However, with the new millennium approaching in the late nineties, Bauman discovered a new configuration of our age, which he called "liquid modernity." This concept initiated and germinated a series of books, all of which gravitate around metaphors of "liquidity" and "liquefaction": *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love* (2003) and *Liquid Times* (2007). His most recent publication *Collateral Damage: Social Inequalities in a Global Age* (2011) does not abandon the idea and the metaphorical richness of liquidity; it only shifts the focus from its more general aspects to inequality.

Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* opens with a quotation from Paul Valéry which ends with the interrogation whether the human mind can "master what the human mind has made." (Bauman, 2000: 1) The author implies that this most recent stage of modernity is, like all the other issues that lend themselves to the sociologist's investigation, the result of what the human mind has created and projected upon the environment we inhabit. Therefore, Bauman structures his book around the idea that emancipation, individuality, time/space, work and community are creations of the mind which govern our lives. His thesis is that all these major aspects of our lives are now liquefying or already liquid. The "afterthought" opens with one quotation from Theodor W. Adorno

about our thinking which generates more thinking, and another literary quotation, this time the comment Milan Kundera made starting from the remarks of a Czech poet Jan Skácel that a poet's verses are a discovery of something dormant and hidden. Taking up the Czech poet's idea, which is not new after all, Kundera argues that "To write, means for the poet to crush the wall behind which something 'that was always there' hides." (Bauman, 2000: 202) This reinforces the connection between Bauman's own writing in this book and the literature of a Czech poet mediated by a border-crossing novelist, with whose spirit Rushdie connects.³ It also implies stepping across the border between sociology and creative writing, and it reveals thinking and writing as border-crossing endeavours.

The essential characteristic of liquids, which Bauman translates into defining aspects of our contemporary existence, is that they "neither fix space nor bind time." (Bauman, 2000: 2) While solids freeze time, liquids are "snapshots," they are not fixed in space or time and they travel light. Bauman's philosophical observation about the protean nature and temporariness of liquids may be related to Rushdie's sense of the frontiers as being not only shifting and permeable, but also temporary and therefore liquid. The "Step across This Line" chapter in Rushdie's book of essays opens with the primeval creation of life on Earth in the moment when a creature stepped across the line separating water from land, and then moves towards the idea that each birth reiterates that originary gesture:

Our own births mirror that first crossing of the frontier between the elements. As we emerge from amniotic fluid, from the liquid universe of the womb, we, too, discover that we can breathe; we, too, leave behind a kind of waterworld to become denizens of earth and air. (Rushdie, 2002a: 75)

This idea has a whole array of implications: that the origin of life is liquid, that life is, like that liquid origin, a series of transformations, a continuous metamorphosis, that life begins with a border-crossing act (our birth) and that the space we inhabit is interstitial – we come from a liquid element to inhabit a space which is "of earth and air." That may

³ Milan Kundera is a writer who has lived and written across borders, and upon whose writing and experience Rushdie has often reflected in terms of border and border-crossing.

also read as a statement of our defining “frontier-crossing” nature, which is explicitly made in the essay⁴, and also of our essentially hybrid nature. For Rushdie, frontier-crossing is not only a primordial act which laid the biological foundations of our existence that is now in our genes, but also a rhetorical strategy. His own discourse mirrors this act of transition when he moves further from the birth of life and the birth of each of us, which reiterates that moment, towards and into the idea that, in its very essence, the history of humankind is one of such crossings of liquid borders, land borders, and as of late air space borders:

In its victorious transition we recognize and celebrate the prototype of our own literal, moral and metaphorical frontier crossings, applauding the same drive that made Christopher Columbus’s ships head for the edge of the world, or the pioneers take to their covered wagons. The image of Neil Armstrong taking his first moonwalk echoes the first movements of life on earth. (Rushdie, 2002a: 76)

Rushdie’s incursion into this history of border-crossings ends with the conclusive remark that “we are living in a frontier time” (Rushdie, 2002a: 104), which is a metaphorical reinforcement of our old-age tendency that has entered a new stage, which in Bauman’s terms is one of “liquid modernity.”

Bauman argues that “the first solids to be melted and the first sacreds to be profaned were traditional loyalties, customary rights and obligations which bound hands and feet, hindered moves and cramped the enterprise.” (Bauman, 2000: 3) So eroded and liquefied have family, community, and even larger social bonds become that nowadays they look like “zombies,” (Bauman, 2000: 8) i.e. the ghosts of what they used to be. This ghostliness is everywhere in Rushdie’s writing, and the rather strange feeling one often has that frontiers themselves are melting or even collapsing partakes in the more general process of liquefaction.

Bauman accounts for modern time in terms that associate it with space. That space, according to Bauman, is not the space within borders, but crossing borders. The sociologist argues:

In modernity, time has history, it has history because of the perpetually expanding “carrying capacity” of time – the lengthening of

⁴ In the same edition of the book, Rushdie argues that “in our deepest natures, we are frontier-crossing beings.” (Rushdie, 2002: 76)

the stretches of space which units of time allow to “pass,” “cross,” “cover” – or conquer. (Bauman, 2000: 9)

Rushdie’s statement that “we are living, I believe, in a frontier time, one of the great hinge periods in human history, in which great changes are coming about at great speed” (Rushdie, 2002: 104) acquires more depth if read in conjunction with Bauman’s contention, in which time continues to be translated into spatial images of transgression:

Once the distance passed in a unit of time came to be dependent on technology, on artificial means of transportation, all extant, inherited limits to the speed of movement could be in principle transgressed. Only the sky (or, as it transpired later, the speed of light) was now the limit, and modernity was one continuous, unstoppable and fast accelerating effort to reach it. (Bauman, 2000: 9)

Indeed, “speed” being an essential characteristic of modernity, it is just obvious that the technological progress which increased its velocity from one stage to the next, turned space into a territory which has been gradually “conquered” by time. Time and its resistance to being “outstretched” have been at stake. However, that resistance and limits have been transgressed. The higher the velocity, i.e. the rate of speed, the more visible the progress, and progress means, putting it crudely, being able to travel faster and faster, and thus shrink space to the point of maximum compression.

For Rushdie “the frontier is an illusive line, visible and invisible, physical and metaphorical, amoral and moral.” Referencing the border-crossing Arthurian legend, the *Fianna* epic tales, or the aboriginal Australian mythologies of Wondjina, the writer argues that any border-crossing is transgressive. At the same time, like Bauman, Rushdie considers that “the final frontier they are fated to cross is not space, but time.” (Rushdie, 2002a: 78) Bauman contends that modernity itself, and our journey through it, is transgressive:

Being modern means being perpetually ahead of oneself, in a state of constant transgression (in Nietzsche’s terms, one cannot be Mensch without being, or at least struggling to be, Übermensch); it also means having an identity which can exist only as an unfulfilled project. (Bauman, 2000: 28-29)

With this remark, the sociologist argues not only that modernity itself can be regarded as a journey in which border-crossing

transgressions occur frequently, but also that the individual's (or migrant's, in Rushdie's terms) journey through it implies a series of transformations of the self. Indeed, Bauman insists that "human beings are no more 'born into' their identities. /.../ Needing to *become* what one *is* is the feature of modern living – and of this living alone /.../." (Bauman, 2000: 32) Bauman also sees this making of our individualities, this continuous process of identity shaping by analogy with art; shaping our identities, about which we permanently feel insecure, is similar to the process of giving shape to shapelessness in a work of art:

The search for identity is the ongoing struggle to arrest or slow down the flow, to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless.
(Bauman, 2000: 82)

Bauman describes our biographies in terms of a permanent quest for our identities whose solidity we might trust, but which we can never achieve. Our liquid modernity has liquefied our identities and now they "are more like the spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set." (Bauman, 2000: 83) Like all other distinctions, the distinctions of our own individual beings are fluid, dissolving boundaries; in other words our inner maps, like the maps of the territories we inhabit, are fluid, their boundaries continuously melting. According to Bauman, who references and quotes Harvie Ferguson, selfhood is losing authenticity and becomes not just a glossy surface with a rather unmanageable liquid underneath, but an "ironic" selfhood (Bauman, 2000: 87) in the sense that it no longer fuses its bits and pieces but it highlights incongruities and gaps instead. Thus "divided we shop," which is another form of self-quest with disruptive effects. (Bauman, 2000: 89-90)

Time and again in his fiction, in his essays and in interviews, Rushdie has insisted on recurrent patterns of migration and travelling, exile and border crossing as experiences which have shaped and defined human culture and civilization. Those are also the patterns which have shaped Rushdie's own history and the recent history of humanity, which is one of continuous migration and global reshaping. What Rushdie also thematizes in his writing is that travelling, migration and border crossing are deeply and continuously transformative. In other words, we become what we are by travelling, we are permanently shaped and re-shaped, i.e. transformed or metamorphosed by the quest. Like liquids, we never

actually stay put or shaped for long. Like the spaces and the frontiers we cross, we are protean, and like Proteus we change shapes. The archetype of quest underpins our imagination, and our imagination shapes and reshapes both ourselves and the spaces we inhabit and travel across. The metaphoric freshness and persuasiveness with which Rushdie makes this point echo another kindred spirit apart from Bauman's, who is of course more inclined to analyze these aspects sociologically. The nature and eloquence of Rushdie's arguments here are an echo of Northrop Frye's. Thus, in the terms of Frye's archetypal theory, but without hinting any reference, Rushdie argues:

The idea of overcoming, of breaking down the boundaries that hold us in, and surpassing the limits of our own natures, is central to all the stories of the quest. The Grail is a chimera. The quest for the Grail is the Grail. (Rushdie, 2002a: 77)

Metamorphosis is a process undergone by virtually anything and everything there is, but "automorphosis" is the transformation of the self, a term coined by Rushdie in his novel *Fury*, which may apply to any instance of self-transformation.⁵ Any border-crossing implies "automorphosis" and Rushdie's metaphoric example is literary again:

Alice at the gates of Wonderland, the key to that miniature world in her grasp, cannot pass through the tiny door through which she can glimpse marvelous things until she has altered herself to fit into her new world. (Rushdie, 2002a: 79)

The writer shows that Alice's transformation is not only physical but also emotional. Being a mirror of our world, Wonderland is a world through which Alice travels, as we all travel through life; she grows up as we grow up, and with every stage of this process her fear diminishes until Alice is able to see the Queen's kingdom for what it is, i.e. merely "a house of cards." Rushdie explains:

Alice the migrant at last sees through the charade of power, is no longer impressed, calls Wonderland's bluff, and by unmaking it finds herself again. (Rushdie, 2002a: 79)

⁵ It is interesting that the word is actually used in petrology, and it refers to "metamorphosis of solidified igneous rock by solutions from its heated interior" (see <http://www.answers.com/topic/automorphosis>) and therefore it is a form of liquefaction.

Most of Rushdie's characters are migrants, and migrancy always implies transgressive crossing of frontiers, which permanently transforms them. Looking back on *The Satanic Verses* in *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie celebrates "mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. /.../ *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves." (Rushdie, 1991: 394) Moraes Zogoiby, the protagonist and narrator of *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a hybrid through whose veins a mixed blood runs and who steps across more than one line. His mother Aurora's palimpsestic paintings of which the Moor is the centre are an epitome of aesthetic and political hybridity, which reflect the Moor's hybrid soul and migrant self. The three protagonists of the "disorienting" story in *The Ground beneath Her Feet* travel through "the membrane of the sky" from India to England and then to America. Ormus Cama, the Orphic character, develops "double vision" of this and another world and fuses the two worlds in music. In *Shalimar the Clown*, Max Ophuls, a French Jew who leaves Europe for America, where he becomes the ambassador of the US in India, and his daughter India/Kashmira, who never meets her Kashmiri mother, and who is an American for whom India is alien, are hybrid characters moving across frontiers because "in civilization there are no borderlines" (Rushdie, 2005: 141) Qara Köz-Lady Black Eyes, the narrator Mogor dell'amore, the emperor Akbar in *The Enchantress of Florence* are all migrants and hybrids. However, in *The Enchantress of Florence* Rushdie also explores two opposite drives in the human mind and soul: travelling versus staying put, rootedness versus rootlessness or unrootedness. Two characters in the novel are emblematic of this opposition: on the one hand, there is Jodha, Akbar's imaginary queen, for whose sake the emperor always returns home from his battles, and on the other hand, there is Qara Köz-Lady Black Eyes, the migrant, who eventually erases Jodha. The conflict is symbolically won by the migrant, and the story's dénouement resolves it with the victory of migrancy over rootedness. Before this clear victory of rootlessness in *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rai Merchant, the narrator of *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, seriously questions the deep seated valorization of rootedness in settled cultures, considering that the "non-belongers" are an important, albeit repressed category:

*But what about **outsiderness**? What about all that which is beyond the pale, above the fray, beneath notice? What about outcastes,*

lepers, pariahs, exiles, enemies, spooks, paradoxes? What about those who are remote? (Rushdie, 2000: 42-43)

Travelling and Migrancy

Developing on the idea that “modern time has become, first and foremost, the weapon in the conquest of space,” Bauman argues that “velocity of movement and access to faster means of mobility steadily rose in modern times to the position of the principal tool of power and domination.” (Bauman, 2000: 9) In liquid modernity the panopticon and engineering of Ford’s model of power by surveillance has been replaced by the seduction of consumerism. Being encouraged to consume, this new Brave New World system keeps its subjects in its grip in a way which always promises pleasure and happiness to be within everybody’s reach in malls and hypermarkets. Rushdie captured this *Zeitgeist* in his novel *Fury*. Apart from the seduction of consumerism, there is this easiness of travelling in the nick of time made possible by the progress of technology, this acceleration of the speed of movement which “has presently reached its ‘natural limit’” and which allows power to “move with the speed of the electronic signal – and so the time required for the movement of its essential ingredients has been reduced to instantaneity.” (Bauman, 2000: 10-11) Bauman’s keen observations about the tremendous impact of the mobile phone and all sorts of wireless gadgets which, spatially speaking, render even sockets unnecessary, to which one may add the relatively recently created cyberspace which not only connects but crosses locations, all these technologies have exploded the difference between “close by” and “far away,” enabling “power” to control us from an ambiguous never located distance. So Bauman contends that this post-Panoptical power is “exterritorial” and operates through “escape, slippage, elision and avoidance, the effective rejection of any territorial confinement.” (Bauman, 2000: 11) Like a liquid, it “spills out” or it may leak insidiously through all the media channels it has created.

At the level of textuality, Bauman’s sense of time/space is translated into hypertext. Malik Solanka, the protagonist of Rushdie’s novel *Fury* creates a hypertextual work in progress titled “Galileo-1”, where links are electronic, not narrative. Like in Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths,” which the novel references, everything exists at once.

Solanka's hypertext is also hybrid and fantastic and it taps into the market, the consumerist paradise, "offering games to play, video segments to watch, chat rooms to enter and, naturally, things to buy." (Rushdie, 2002b: 186-187) Moreover, the hypertext lends itself to endless "metamorphosis" and "transmutation," old myths are given a "contemporary twist" by web users who are not familiar with them; it "swells" and "grows," and it is no longer an individual project, but a work of collective imagination. Neither is the hypertext contained within borders: it is Solanka's way of crossing the line from its fiction into the imagined "reality" of New York and of the other imagined world of Liliput-Blefuscu, which translates Rushdie's postmodernist idea that the frontiers are softening and the worlds fuse.

The arm of power is military force. About that, Bauman comments in the same terms of liquidity, which characterizes and defines our stage of modernity. Blows are delivered by "stealthy fighter planes and 'smart' self-guided and target-seeking missiles – delivered by surprise, coming from nowhere and immediately vanishing from sight." The strategy of this new type of war relying on this insidious mobility is no longer "the quest of a new territory, but crushing the walls which stopped the flow of new, fluid global powers." (Bauman, 2000: 12) It is here that Bauman and Rushdie meet again: frontiers melt down, in Rushdie's terms they may become "membranes" like "the membrane of the sky" in *The Ground beneath Her Feet*. Both Rushdie and Bauman imply that the melting down or liquefaction of frontiers may be dangerous. In Rushdie's novel *The Ground beneath Her Feet* the Orphic character Ormus Cama creates a world of collapsing barriers through music, and that may stir a sense of freedom and exhilaration. However, boundary breaking may have rather alarming consequences: Ormus develops a "double vision" which gives him access to our world and the world beyond at the same time. In order to keep his sanity and to avoid terrible headaches caused by "double vision" he covers one of his eyes with a patch. Later in his life, Ormus loses "double vision" but he still envisions disaster and calamities, and Rai Merchant, the novel's narrator, grows apprehensive of Ormus's visions of worlds in collision, too.

Like Alice, Rushdie "the migrant sees through the charade of power" in every book he writes. He knows that power may be tyrannical and the tyrants he revealed in *The Satanic Verses* backlashed against him. He also knows that it may hide in the Palaces of the New Rome, which

is New York in *Fury*, and that it controls its borders and may build new frontiers where the old ones have collapsed. In *Step across This Line* Rushdie analyzes “the universe of control” at the frontier. The frontier may be less of a space and more of a moment - the moment of truth, Rushdie argues, when “our liberty is stripped away – we hope temporarily.” (Rushdie, 2002a: 79) Here Rushdie and Bauman meet again. In *Collateral Damage*, Bauman describes the frontier inspection and the frontier space as a universe of control in similar terms. When he speaks about the inefficiency of the state, Bauman also argues that airport vigilance against terrorism is just a means of inducing panic in order to give citizens an artificially created sense of protection. The sociologist remembers one such incident he watched on TV when passengers were “sniffed all over by dogs, kept in endless queues for security checks, submitted to body searches they would normally consider outrageously offensive to their dignity,” and instead of protesting, “they were jubilant and beaming with gratitude.” (Bauman, 2011: 20) Both Rushdie and Bauman argue that at the frontier the innocent people are interrogated and inspected, the immigrants infallibly suspected of criminal plans and subjected to supplementary, often humiliating interrogation and control, while those who actually have criminal intentions manage to slip away.

Both Rushdie and Bauman connect borders and the universe of control with migration. For Rushdie, who sees himself as a migrant, “the migrant, the man without frontiers, is the archetypal figure of our age.” However, emigrants - a desperate category of migrants, are either chased away or fenced out by walls built by the communities they try to enter. In their turn, the migrants build “a confining stockade” of their own, “the walls of their own culture they have both brought along and left behind” (Rushdie, 2002a: 81-82) to isolate themselves from the new hostile environment. These are the new walls and new frontiers upon which both Bauman and Rushdie cast light. Bauman dedicates a whole chapter in *Liquid Times* (Bauman, 2007: 27-54) and his latest book *Collateral Damage* to this issue of inequality, showing that the refugees are literally fenced out and kept in an endless transit zone which leads them nowhere and ensures them no future. Rushdie also writes about the old obsession of keeping the Barbarians out of the gates of the polis, and he

wonders, quoting from J. M. Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*: "What will become of us without Barbarians.?" (Rushdie, 2002a: 83)

In *Collateral Damage*, Bauman shows that the mobility and fluidity of movement in the city is prevented by the new "gated communities" developing an increasing fear of strangers, whom they deem to be potentially dangerous. However, as Bauman argues, "behind the walls, anxiety grows instead of dissipating." (Bauman, 2011: 66-67) These are the new walls and the new frontiers built at a time when migration melts frontiers, and their erection is, according to both writers, a sign of intolerance and obtuseness, and a source of injustice and unfair treatment.

If people are in a continuous transformation along their journey through their existence as modern individuals, communities are as loose and liquid as individuality. Bauman argues that communities have been liquefied by so many factors that at the end of the twentieth and early twenty first century they are "as fragile and short-lived as scattered and wandering emotions, shifting erratically from one target to another and drifting in the forever inconclusive search for a secure haven: communities of shared worries, shared anxieties or shared hatreds – but in each case 'peg' communities, a momentary gathering around the nail on which many solitary individuals hang their solitary individual fears." (Bauman, 2000: 37) Both individualities and communities are liquefying and liquid, and like liquids they are mobile, they fill space but 'for a moment' and they travel light. (Bauman, 2000: 2)

In spite of fears and anxieties, in spite of the artificially induced sense of insecurity and against all odds, Rushdie declares: "the most precious book I possess is my passport." (Rushdie, 2002a: 91)

Frontiers and Beyond

Rushdie argues that during the Middle Ages, frontiers created new lands of European culture and new peoples. Looking into the history American culture, referencing and quoting the thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner in a paper delivered in 1893 about the significance of the frontier in American history, Rushdie reinforces the idea that the frontier has led to the development of America. So revealing and true to the American frontier spirit is Turner's argument that Rushdie quotes it extensively, letting it speak about a development which turned America

into what it is today. Turner's diction is surprisingly fresh, and it relies on metaphors of liquidity:

This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. (Rushdie, 2002a: 85)

Everything else in America is the result of this movement: the frontier is the concrete physical expression of the American spirit, and it is around it and from it that the American nationalism, the American political institutions, the American intellectual life and a whole frontier literature of migration and frontier-crossing emerged and developed.

There are also other less palpable frontiers and other frontier-crossings in Rushdie's *Step across This Line* and in his other writings. One is that of crossing into another language, which he himself has been doing, experimenting with various ways of doing it from one novel to the next. He sees it in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, which is "a celebration of the open world and of the open frontier as well." (Rushdie, 2002a: 83) Orson Welles's film *Touch of Evil* illustrates another border-crossing about which Rushdie has written in his novels, i.e. is the frontier of the skin. Apart from these, there are of course the frontiers separating genres and the frontiers separating worlds, which Rushdie has always crossed in his novels of magic realism and also, of course, in his novel of "hyperreality" which is *Fury*. There is the frontier between children's books and books for adults, which Rushdie crossed when he wrote *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luca and the Fire of Life*.

"Non-places"

Bauman's interest in our liquid time/space, in the patterns of nomadism which have supplanted those of settlement consecrated by "solid" modernity inevitably lead him to what he calls "emic places, phagic places, non-places, empty spaces." (Bauman, 2000: 98-104) According to Bauman, trips to the temples of consumption transport us to another place:

To go for such a trip is like being transported to another world rather than witnessing the wondrous transubstantiation of the familiar one. The temple of consumption (in sharp distinction from the 'corner grocery shop' of yore) may be in the city (if not erected, symbolically,

outside the city limits, off a motorway) but is not a part of it; not the ordinary world temporarily transmogrified, but a 'completely other' world. (Bauman, 2000: 98)

Bauman references and quotes Michel Foucault's heterotopic "boat" and translates Foucault's metaphor into his own discourse about "non-places." The temple of consumption is therefore "a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given to the infinity of the sea; it can accomplish that 'giving itself to infinity thanks to sailing away from the home port and keeping its distance'." (Bauman, 2000: 99)

"Non-places" seem to be the only 'beyond,' the only 'somewhere else(s)' of our liquid modernity. They are Foucault's heterotopia. Bauman explains that the word was coined by Georges Benko, following Marc Augé, and they were called "alternatively, after Garreau, 'nowherevilles'." Rushdie's fiction is replete with them, and in *Step across This Line* he dwells on one of them in particular, the "universe of control" which is the airport. The non-place

is a space devoid of the symbolic expressions of identity, relations and history: examples include airports, motorways, anonymous hotel rooms, public transport...Never before in the history of the world have non-places occupied so much space. (Bauman, 2000: 102)

Non-places probably best typify our world and time of fluidity and of melting or no frontiers as one possible version of the many versions our world has.

Conclusions

Frontiers melt under the pressure of migration and mobility. Rushdie is one of those hybrid and "translated men" whose life was changed dramatically by the new frontier between India and Pakistan just eight weeks after he was born. Thereupon, Rushdie has been cutting and traveling across borders and stepping across lines. Bauman's emblematic example of such transgressive spirit is Derrida. The sociologist explains:

In Contre-allée, a book published recently in cooperation with Catherine Malabou, Jacques Derrida invites his readers to think in travel – or, more exactly, to 'think travel'. That means to think that unique activity of departing, going away from chez soi, going far, towards the unknown, risking all the risks, pleasures and dangers that the

'unknown' has in store (even the risk of not returning). (Bauman, 2000: 206)

This sounds like an echo of the dangerous transgressions about which Rushdie talks in *Step across This Line*. By typifying Derrida's transgressive spirit, Bauman connects this "*métèque*," this "cultural hybrid" and his cultural "statelessness" with the rest of the impure, hybrid, "mongrel" and "translated men." This means, in the case of Derrida and all the others like him, "having more than one homeland, building a home of one's own on the crossroads between cultures," and this home "was built on language." Everything else Bauman says about Derrida and his hybrid self which opened his eyes towards "the inherent plurality and undecidability of sense (in *L'Écriture et la différence*)" holds true for Rushdie. (Bauman, 2000: 207) To Derrida, Bauman adds the examples of Beckett, Borges and Nabokov, all of whom are constantly on Rushdie's mind and to whose themes and ideas he always responds. Referencing George Steiner, who is also a hybrid, Bauman argues that it is because they were 'at home' in and moved easily across several linguistic and cultural universes that they are the greatest among contemporary writers. Indeed, these hybrid writers demonstrate that the language frontiers are the most permeable of all.

Although he admits that "for all their permeability, the borders snaking across the world have never been of greater importance," (Rushdie, 2002a: 90) Rushdie celebrates the crossing of borders, of language, geography, and culture. In his *oeuvre*, frontiers separate East from West, and those borders are permeated by migration; dream / illusion / imagination / fiction from reality, and those frontiers melt into the hybrid mode of magic realism; the physical from the spiritual, and those borders are permeated by aesthetics of transgression; skin from skin (i.e. race), and those frontiers are permeated by politics and aesthetics of transgression.

Reiterating the idea that cultural and linguistic hybridity is "self-translation," Rushdie relates it to Nabokov's "journey across the language frontier" in "Note on Translation." What Rushdie does here is to "translate" Nabokov's observations and remarks about translating books and poems into his own effort when he was a young writer "to 'translate' the great subject of India into English" and "to allow India itself to perform the act of 'verbal transmigration'." (Rushdie, 2002a: 98)

We know how dangerously transgressive Rushdie was to do so; the whole collection of essays *Step across This Line* is a reinforcement of the writer's memory of the *fatwa* years, an assessment of the present of 2002 and at the same time a glance on the after all not so dark side of what the future of frontiers has in store for us.

For Rushdie and Bauman, the frontier is a reality which, like arguably everything else, is projected by the human mind and imagination, with which the mind feels the need to get to grips despite and beyond its illusiveness and shiftiness. While Rushdie's focus is the frontier in *Step across This Line* because his experience has been so shaped by it since very early in his life, and especially in the *fatwa* years, Bauman stresses the liquid nature of modernity. However, the two writers meet across the space charted by their ideas, and thus we see Rushdie's frontiers liquid or liquefying and Bauman's liquid modernity as a space of melting frontiers.

Associative approaches across sciences and various fields of human thinking, either interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary, reflect the need of the human mind to enhance its horizons by cutting across disciplines traditionally considered distinct. They are frontier crossing endeavours, and they have resulted in new larger fields and protean discourses like Bauman's and Rushdie's.

Interpenetrating fields of knowledge lead to hybridity of discourse. Thus, Bauman draws his concept of "liquid modernity" from a state of matter studied by the science of chemistry. Bauman "translates" the term used in chemistry into a metaphor, which serves him as a concept in his sociological thinking. Equipped with this kit of translated metaphors, he brings the literature of Orwell and Huxley to bear upon his newly created concept, the two writers' dystopias providing Bauman with the contrast of "solid" modernity that he needs in his demonstration of "liquidity." Rushdie's text is hybrid in the same way. When he looks into the notion, sense and metaphor of frontier in *Step across This Line*, the writer draws on biology, history, his own experience, and of course literature.

This interdisciplinary approach to Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* in conjunction with Rushdie's *Step across This Line* looks at how two thinkers reflect on contemporary phenomena and how they highlight some of their essential aspects. Their discourses are frontier-crossing and thus charting a territory of fissures and connections at the same time, but

readers often go beyond their beyonds, looking for ways in which their reflections cross frontiers and connect. Thus, interdisciplinary approaches are just a response to the border-crossing and polymorphic spirit of texts like Bauman's and Rushdie's.

The more one reads in order to cross the frontiers of disciplines and to make connections, the more obvious further associations become. Thus, Bauman's ideas around liquidity in *Liquid Modernity* and his theory of it in *Liquid Love*, *Liquid Times*, *Collateral Damage*, and Rushdie's ideas around frontier in *Step across This Line* and other fiction and non-fiction writings, which echo each other on the themes of hybridity, migrancy, translation, further connect with Homi Bhabha's postcolonial analyses of hybridity and liminality, and Arjun Appadurai's examination of a transnational culture in *Modernity at Large*.

Such is the perception of what is called "horizon": from a distance, we see the apparent intersection (i.e. frontier) of the earth and sky, but the closer we move towards it, the frontier disappears, and the further we keep moving, the more horizons we see. Are they signs of limitation, or of free vistas? As we near each line, we realize that horizons are both limitations and invitations. They are also there and not there at the same time, i.e. projections of our minds.

Author's biographical information



Dana Bădulescu, assistant professor PhD and postdoctoral researcher teaches modernist and postmodernist British and American literature, basic elements of literary theory and critical thinking, poetics and translations at *Alexandru Ioan Cuza* University of Iasi, Romania. She is now a POSDRU grantee doing her research on Salman Rushdie and his writing as emblematic for our contemporary world. She focuses her research on the intriguing and often dangerous imbrication of art, politics, ideology and religion vs. secularism in Rushdie's writing. She is also expanding her research interests to include hybrid or diasporic identities in the age of globalization through Romanian writer of Armenian origin Varujan Vosganian and French writer of Lebanese origin Amin Maalouf. Her constant interests lie in Modernism and modernist aesthetics and ideologies, Postmodernism and postmodernist aesthetics and ideologies, Postcolonialism, Postcommunism, migration, hybridity, globalization, and (especially the cultural dimensions of) translation. Since 2006, she has published several articles on Salman Rushdie (*Salman Rushdie's "Unfettered Republic of the Tongue" in **Fury**, "Philologia", 2006; The Boulder of History Is Rolling in Salman Rushdie's Novel, "Sphere of Politics", October 2011; Rushdie 'the Translated Man', "Sphere of Politics," December 2011; Rushdie's Joyce in Analele Științifice ale Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" of Iași, New Series, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Tome XIV Supplement 2011, ISSN - 1841- 916X, coordinated by Oana Macari, pp. 119-130). Her article *Varujan Vosganian's Novel of Postmemory* has been recently published in the June 2012 issue of "Word and Text" journal.*

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