

# ***LIQUID FEAR: BAUMAN'S METAPHORICAL INSIGHTS IN RELATION TO COVID-19 FEAR METAPHORS***

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## **Abstract**

In this study I attempt to demonstrate how Zygmunt Bauman's insights published in his book entitled *Liquid Fear* (2006) benefit the cognitive study of the emotion of fear by drawing correspondences between Bauman's liquid reality and the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on my, largely unpublished, linguistic study of fear and on metaphors pervading Bauman's work, I extrapolated key components of the FEAR frame. Having also conducted the study of concepts that dominated the Covid-19 media narratives, I relate and analyse the validity and transferability of conceptual domains within selected contextual models of social and verbal behaviours related to fear. Bauman's metaphorical observations are woven into the analytical patchwork of this paper.

**Keywords:** Bauman's *Liquid Fear*, Covid-19 pandemic, anxiety/fear, conceptual domains/frames, fear metaphors, media discourse

## **1. Introduction. Some methodological choices**

In *Liquid Fear*, Zygmunt Bauman (2006, p. 2) stated that "Fear is at its most fearsome when [...] it haunts us with no visible rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen." The recent pandemic has unlocked a considerable degree of anxiety while the world's population has experienced the largest and longest lockdown in living memory. Residing within and without, conceptually fear manifests itself, among other domains, as A FLUID IN A CONTAINER, A HIDDEN ENEMY, A TORMENTOR, AN OPPONENT, AN ILLNESS, INSANITY, A SOCIAL SUPERIOR (Kövecses, 2007, pp. 23, 40, 48-49); it appears to have its own social, cultural and linguistic identity. In the present study, fear is shown to be a dynamic emotion, its nature resonating differently with specific contexts, agents and circumstances. Cognitive linguistic tools are employed in what is largely a tribute to the aforementioned work of Zygmunt Bauman while, at the same time, the author's intention is to relate Bauman's insightful metaphors to the anxieties that have governed people's lives since the outbreak of Covid-19. The paper explicates the contemporary validity and transferability of conceptual domains within

selected contextual models and demonstrates how Bauman's insights benefit the cognitive study of the emotion of fear. The map of fear metaphors pervading Bauman's work is then superimposed on the metaphorical map of Covid-19 anxieties present in current media discourse. The study underlines a degree of correspondence between Bauman's liquid reality and the Covid-19 pandemic, which began exactly one and a half decades later.

This paper is partly a cognitive and partly a socio-cultural study of the conceptual model of fear extracted from Bauman's *Liquid Fear* (2006). Fear is one of the key constants shaping societies and individuals in the western world and it is not unreasonable therefore to see fear as critical in the understanding of such threats and risks as the recent Covid-19 pandemic. The methodology applied in the study of the relevant concepts includes the cognitive study of fear and fear-related concepts which were the subject of my PhD thesis conducted between 2009 and 2014 (Dixon, 2015a). Apart from linguistic insights, the study equipped me with various tools for the better comprehension of the mechanisms that govern fears on both a physiological and socio-cultural basis. The cognitive tools and approaches to the study of metaphorical and metonymical concepts, owe much to such scholars as Lakoff (1982, 1990, 1993, 2002), Lakoff and Johnson (2003), Johnson (1987), Kalisz (2001), and Kövecses (1990, 2002, 2006).

One of the most comprehensive studies of fear was conducted by Kövecses, who in his *Emotion Concepts* (1990) exemplifies the rich imagery that the concept of fear has evoked among the speakers of English. The table below provides a summary of the conceptual metaphors and metonymies contained in his study:

**Table 1:** Fear metaphors and metonymies based on Kövecses (1990, 2006)

<b>FEAR</b>	
<b>CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS</b>	<b>CONCEPTUAL METONYMIES: PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS FOR FEAR</b>
FEAR IS A FLUID	PHYSICAL AGITATION: He was shaking with fear.
IN A CONTAINER: The sight filled her with fear.	INCREASE IN HEART RATE: His heart pounded with fear.
FEAR IS A (VICIOUS) HIDDEN ENEMY: Fear slowly crept up on him. The thought continued to prey on her mind.	BLOOD LEAVES FACE: She turned pale.
FEAR IS A TORMENTOR: My mother was tormented by fear.	SKIN SHRINKS: That man gives me the creeps.
FEAR IS A SUPERNATURAL BEING: He was haunted by fear.	HAIR STRAIGHTENS OUT: That was a hair-raising experience.
FEAR IS AN ILLNESS: Jill was sick with fright.	INABILITY TO MOVE: I was rooted to the spot.
FEAR IS INSANITY: Jack was insane with fear.	INABILITY TO BREATHE: She was breathless with fear.
	INABILITY TO SPEAK: I was speechless with fear.
	INABILITY TO THINK: My mind went blank with fear.
	(INVOLUNTARY) RELEASE OF BOWELS or BLADDER: I was almost wetting myself with fear.

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THE SUBJECT OF FEAR IS	SWEATING: The cold sweat of fear broke out.
A DIVIDED SELF: I was beside myself with fear.	NERVOUSNESS IN THE STOMACH: He got butterflies in the stomach.
FEAR IS AN OPPONENT IN THE STRUGGLE: Fear took hold of me.	DRYNESS IN THE MOUTH: My mouth was dry when it was my turn.
FEAR IS A BURDEN: Fear weighed heavily on them.	DROP IN BODY TEMPERATURE: The blood turned to ice in his veins.
FEAR IS A NATURAL FORCE: She was engulfed by panic.	SCREAMING: She was screaming with fear.
FEAR IS A SOCIAL SUPERIOR: His actions were dictated by fear.	WAYS OF LOOKING: There was fear in her eyes.
	STARTLE: You made me jump.
	FLIGHT: He fled from persecution.

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My fear research yielded several more metaphors and metaphonymies that I have discussed in papers published in 2011 and 2013a and 2013b. The study also focused on various mechanisms explaining the ways in which people internalise fear-related emotions aroused by different entities: for example, fears of monsters (real and imagined) as well as media-embedded and/or driven fears/panics. The study also addressed fear-related superstitious behaviours (verbal and nonverbal) through the prism of cultural concepts and image and cultural schemas. The conceptual verbalisations of fear that were studied were mostly found embedded in discourse and media narratives. In addition to Zygmunt Bauman (2006), I consulted the works of other leading sociologists, mainly because of their sizeable contributions to the study of specifically modern fears; among these were Frank Furedi (1997, 2007), Barry Glassner (2009), Ulrich Beck (1992) and Lars Svendsen (2008). In general terms, these authors addressed real and perceived threats, such as terrorism, crime, killer viruses and food scares, people's attitudes to risks, modern sources of vulnerabilities and the politics of fear.

## **2. Bauman's 'liquid' philosophy and the use of liquid metaphors**

Zygmunt Bauman (19.11.1925 – 9.01.2017), a renowned Polish-born sociologist was a prolific author, whose works on the condition of modern society, though not overly optimistic, show a keen sensitivity and commitment to humane topics. His methodology and dense yet elegant style have been admired by some (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008) but not entirely approved of by others, in particular for a lack of clear definitions and the extensive use of metaphors (Nijhoff, 1998; Korstanje, 2008; Jensen, 2012). One of the dominant concepts found in Bauman's books, as often expressed in their titles, is that of *liquid*. This concept can be seen as rudimental to his theories and vision of the modern world: for instance, in *Liquid Fear* (2006), which is devoted to fears plaguing the post-9/11 world. Other 'liquid' books by Bauman include *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love* (2003), *Liquid*

*Life* (2005), *Liquid Times* (2006), *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (2011), *Liquid Surveillance* (2012), *Liquid Evil* (2016) and *Liquid Generation* (2018).

Bauman explains his *liquid* theory is explained by in *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (2011, pp. 11-12):

I use the term ‘liquid modernity’ here for the currently existing shape of the modern condition, described by other authors as ‘postmodernity’, ‘late modernity’, ‘second’ or ‘hyper’ modernity. What makes modernity ‘liquid’, and thus justifies the choice of name, is its self-propelling, self-intensifying, compulsive and obsessive ‘modernization’, as a result of which, like liquid, none of the consecutive forms of social life is able to maintain its shape for long. ‘Dissolving everything that is solid’ has been the innate and defining characteristic of the modern form of life from the outset; but today, unlike yesterday, the dissolved forms are not to be replaced, and nor are they replaced, by other solid forms—deemed ‘improved’ in the sense of being even more solid and ‘permanent’ than those that came before them, and so even more resistant to melting. In the place of the melting, and so impermanent, forms come others, no less—if not more—susceptible to melting and therefore equally impermanent.

In arguing in favour of the term ‘liquid modernity’ Bauman vividly employs the concept of *liquid* as is evidenced/illustrated in the text through the epistemic qualities of fluids: liquid versus a solid state, as well as the permanency and impermanency of liquid shapes/forms, and the ability of solid liquids to melt or dissolve. Referring to various aspects of modern life, Bauman frequently, and with a certain attachment, draws upon the LIFE IS FLUID IN MOTION conceptual metaphor. This concept is well illustrated in *Liquid Modernity* (2000), where he explains the relationship between the concept of fluidity and an ever-changing reality:

Liquid life flows or plods from one challenge to another and from one episode to another, and the familiar habit of challenges and episodes is that they tend to be short-lived. You may assume as much of the life expectation of the fears currently gripping expectations. What is more, so many fears enter your life complete with the remedies of which you often hear before you have had time to be frightened by the ills which these remedies promise to remedy (Bauman, 2006, p. 7).

Bauman’s liquid metaphor, no doubt, owes much to the notion of Heraclitus that things are in a state of constant flow and flux, which in turn was grounded in the Folk Theory of Essences. Heraclitus’ metaphor THE ESSENCE OF BEING IS CHANGE captures the essence of Being that is governed by stable patterns of change (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, pp. 359-360). Bauman, on the other hand, is more preoccupied with the impermanence of things. His liquid themes address various aspects of modernity, culture, the modern generation, modern approaches to security and surveillance, the emotions of fear and love and also the perception of evil, all of which he sees as fluctuating and changing rather than being stable or fixed. Although Bauman’s metaphors in their entirety are not always fully conventional, many of them allude to and expand on well-established metaphorical concepts. The concept of fluidity and change that permeates his

writing may be expressed by the metaphorical concepts of LIFE as being FLUID (IN MOTION) as well as the ontological metaphor PEOPLE ARE LIQUID (Wright, 2002). LIFE IS FLUID IN MOTION may be seen as contiguous with the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MOTION (Kövecses, 2002) particularly because life events are embedded within the timeline. LIFE IS FLUID (IN MOTION) may be justified by Bauman's possible perception of some properties of liquids that could be summarised by the following mappings:

FLUIDS (IN MOTION)	LIFE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• behaviour of fluids: flow, trickle, ooze, etc. and behaviours of objects in fluids</li> <li>• formlessness/flexibility of fluids and their ability to take the shape of a container</li> <li>• change of state is motion (contract/expand/flow, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ perception of episodes in life, events, challenges, seasons, (etc.) as passing by/ moving (swiftly, flowing, surfacing, drowning, etc.)</li> <li>→ formlessness/ephemerality of the concept of life, life may be 'moulded' or controlled by schedules, plans, norms, etc.</li> <li>→ life, as we understand it, is a process in constant shifts/motion</li> </ul>

One could argue that some fluids do not move: for instance, ponds are water reservoirs that seemingly do not move, but then, correspondingly, the lives of various people may also appear stagnant. The quality of being stagnant, however, is only a matter of perception. On an individual level, human perception mechanisms are basically limited to 'here and now'. This limited perception is further confined by a narrow range of vision, while vantage point and human senses curtail observations to that which is observable. What is 'perceived' is rarely factual, for instance, physical forces, such as gravity and pressure, may appear constant, but their values imperceptibly shift due to various conditions and locations. The motion of, for that matter, planets, and other life supporting/ sustaining systems is ceaseless and thus motion, however imperceptible, is a defining feature of all things. Hence life and motion are interconnected – events and states shift, merge and converge, and people are submerged in this constant tidal flow of events, challenges, duties and engagements of all kinds. Furthermore, a romantic view of life as being metaphorically compared to the sea/ocean with high and low tides may also be found in discourse. Conventional examples that cumulatively lead to the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS FLUID (IN MOTION) are as follows:

#### LIFE IS FLUID (IN MOTION)

The deadline for this project is rather *fluid*.

The *fluidity* of the schedule meant that the students had no idea which lecture was when.

Their partnership slowly *dissolved*.

The *pool* of ideas for the new project is steadily increasing.

The boundaries between these two events are rather *liquid*.

They *liquidated* a potential threat by taking particularly decisive action against their competitors.

We were *flooded* by responses.

Sweet childhood memories *flooded* his mind and a warm sensation *spilled* across his chest.  
*Waves* of gratitude *filled* her day.

A mixture of emotions *trickled* at first and then *the dams* broke and all the emotional anguish took over.

They *went with the tide* and succumbed to the will of the people.

With *fluid bonding* often comes emotional attachment.

The ever-changing reality sometimes takes *tidal* proportions.

Kick-off is usually at three o'clock and by half past one, the whole area around the stadium was *overflowing* with people.

At lunchtime the pubs are *teeming* with people.

There was a sudden *surge* in the crowd.

Spectators *trickled in* slowly taking their places.

A *ripple* of laughter went through the room.

Peter certainly knows how to *splash out* on things in life – a good car, exotic holidays. He likes to live well.

In life, it is best to go with the *flow*.

Bauman suggests that the ‘flow’ of people’s lives is often interrupted, obstructed and controlled by fear but sometimes, there is a remedy. Take, for example, the fear of God that is instilled by the Church and the Bible but which comes with the remedy that requires observing God’s governance and laws. Similarly, fear of authority is taught, and it comes with rules, norms, codes, etc., which must be followed. This topic is expanded on in Dixon, 2015a. This idea is coherent with the metaphor FEAR GOES INTO A PERSON FROM OUTSIDE (Kövecses, 1990, p. 81)

FEAR GOES INTO A PERSON FROM OUTSIDE

He put fear of God into her.

What they heard cast fear into their hearts.

The sight struck terror into their hearts.

That threw a scare into him.

Fear of Covid-19 emerged from the outside and was reinforced by the quantity of news reports of illness and death, and policies that were designed to ‘put a lid’ on the spread of the virus.

### 3. The fluidity of fear and the Covid-19 pandemic

In an interview conducted by Stuart Jeffries in 2005<sup>1</sup>, Bauman stated: “Civilisation, the orderly world in which we live, is frail. We are skating on thin ice. There is a fear of a collective disaster. Terrorism, genocide, flu, tsunamis.”

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Jeffries, “Modern lover”. *The Guardian* (Published on-line) Sat 12 Nov 2005 17.06 GMT [<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/nov/12/shopping.society>] (accessed on 2.09.2022).

In the interview, Bauman sees ‘living in fear’ as a prevailing condition of modern humanity and outlines the possible disastrous scenarios that have embedded this condition in human consciousness. The threats he listed are grounded in recurring, but also relatively recent, experiences of large portions of the world’s population, which, inevitably, make such fears palpable. Fear, however, no longer needs first-hand experience due to the large number of media channels that publicise anxiety-inducing stories. Media generated fears are as ‘liquid’ as the ‘stream of news’, particularly when a certain act of terror appears, disappears and reappears as a key feature or major news item. The rationing of a news item has the potential to manipulate its recipients. The manipulation lies in bringing news stories in and out of focus, which results in the recipients’ automatically switching on and off their attention. If a threat persists in the media for a period of time, the audience will naturally become wider and follow the story with increased involvement or even emotional attachment; and given the right amount of exposure to media-generated fears, individuals are likely to fall into the fear trap engineered by the authorities controlling media output.

When Bauman published *Liquid Fear* in 2006, he was unaware that on the brink of the third decade of the millennium, further stress-inducing events would develop, leading to even greater fears among the world’s populations. Indeed, particularly the most recent events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic with its strict lockdowns, economic instability, the war in Ukraine and the widespread energy crisis, confirm that nothing is more constant than change itself, with yet more fears flowing swiftly (FEAR IS FLUID and FEAR IS A NATURAL FORCE), and the news channels supplying new waves of terror and unrest.

In *Liquid Fear*, Bauman discusses a number of fear-related issues, which show how fears colonise people’s minds and thus take over their lives. Below, I suggest a ‘liquid’ model of fear loosely based on the content of Bauman’s book.

**Table 2:** The ‘liquid’ model of fear based on Bauman’s *Liquid Fear* (2006)

<b>Fear experienced by an individual as a member of a society (frame building components)</b>		
<b>Inner self</b>	<b>Fear within a concept/ frame</b>	<b>Socio-cultural context</b>
Emotional state (resulting from elevated levels of cortisol)	Fear-induced physiological and psychological condition/manifestations	Experiencing situations that elevate/trigger or alleviate a fear response
Inner fears (experienced or imagined; existential traumas; etc.)	Fear instincts; fear of/for things/objects/entities/forces real/imagined dangers;	A social response to fear/ threat: acquiring the rules of social conduct and developing appropriate verbal behaviours. Acquiring and/or adopting values (moral, existential, economic, etc.)

Table 2 (cd.)

Fear experienced by an individual as a member of a society (frame building components)		
Inner self	Fear within a concept/ frame	Socio-cultural context
Ability or inability to control fear (on both a physiological and psychological level)	Fear-induced physiological and psychological behaviours and responses Listening to self/others	Being conditioned to respond to certain threats in specific ways (through education, media, authorities, etc.)
Responding to the quality of a fear-governed life (succumbing, overcoming/managing, avoiding)	FFF response (freeze, fight, flight) - making life choices	Ability/impaired ability/inability to function in a society

I propose a ‘liquid’ model that is both metaphorical and referential. This assures a certain flexibility in the model’s application, particularly because fears that control the lives of individuals are extremely complex given the nature of fear as an emotional state and its being linked to specific socio-cultural settings and scenarios. The model could be used to extrapolate from when investigating a specific aspect of fear or fear-driven contextualised response. One of the lessons imparted by Bauman (2006, p. 132) is that fear, much as it is predictable, is a force (EMOTIONS ARE FORCES; FEAR IS A NATURAL FORCE) if not a mechanism that has *perpetuum mobile*-like properties: “Once visited upon the world of humans, fear becomes self-propelling and self-intensifying; it acquires its own momentum and developmental logic and needs little attention and hardly any input to spread and grow – unstoppably.” Here Bauman perceives fear as a FORCE, a(n) (SENTIENT/DIVINE) ENTITY, a PLANT or an (ORGANIC) OBJECT. Particularly, the self-propelling, self-intensifying features of fear, when applied in the context of Covid-19, can be used to explain a range of actions and reactions of the agents exposed to the threats posed by a killer-virus. The tripartite model consists of three major frame-building components for fear; the individual and his/her internal/inherent fear-arousing experiences/mechanisms (left part of Table 2); the learnt/acquired socio-cultural responses to fear triggering both positive/negative (right part of Table 2), and the generalised abstract components of the fear frame (the central part of the table).

#### 4. Covid-19: key concepts and domains and Bauman’s ‘liquid’ philosophy of fear

The sudden onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a number of far-reaching and life-changing measures affecting millions of individuals and requiring reaction and proaction on a vast scale by government authorities. To put key aspects of the pandemic into some perspective, the table below provides a compressed summary of the scale of problems and the entities involved, organised in an (A) to (D) cascade of overlapping interdependencies and consequences:



**Table 3:** Key interdependent concepts governing the onset of Covid-19

<b>(A) Key actors</b>	<b>(B) Key problems</b>	<b>(C) Key measures</b>	<b>(D) Key consequences of (C)</b>
- ordinary people	- new virulent strain	- controlling virus spread	- broken/strained social bonds
- governments	- of SARS virus	- introducing a restrictive lockdown	- mental health issues
- state administration	- rapid virus spread	- managing health care	- emotive issues
- institutions	- death toll	- publicising the risks and	- ethical issues
- organisations	- medical system overload	- stigmatising certain behaviours/	- information overload (misinformation,
- support workers	- shortages	- teaching new social behaviours/	- disinformation)
- pharmaceutical companies	- leadership/crisis management	- responses	- people policing each other (further
- scientific researchers	- policy development and	- introducing transfer	- weakening of social bonds)
- data specialists	- implementation	- of responsibilities	- acceptance of/resistance to vaccination
	- economic concerns	- providing a semblance of safety	- programmes
	- (employers, employees)	- scientific advice	
		- developing vaccines and vaccine rollouts	
The corresponding key concepts/frames			
- SOCIETY	- (KILLER) VIRUS	- RESTRICTION (OF	- SEPARATION
- PEOPLE	- DEATH	- MOVEMENT)	- EMOTIONAL RESPONSE
- STATE	- RESOURCES	- CRISIS MANAGEMENT	- CONFUSION & UNCERTAINTY:
- INSTITUTION(S)	- ECONOMIC	- INFORMATION	(MIS)INFORMED
- LEADERS	- TRANSACTION	- EDUCATION	- MISINFORMATION
- (STRUCTURED) ENTITIES	- CRISIS	- RESPONSIBILITY	- DISINFORMATION
	- SAFETY		- ACCEPTANCE / RESISTANCE
	- LEADERSHIP		- MORALITY
	- UNCERTAINTY		- VALUES
			- SOCIAL BONDS

While from the start of the pandemic the concepts above affected the lives of millions of people, the table below lists the actual metaphorical domains and image schemas that have transpired from the study of the Covid-19 media narratives and TV news reports covering roughly the period between March 2020 and September 2021.

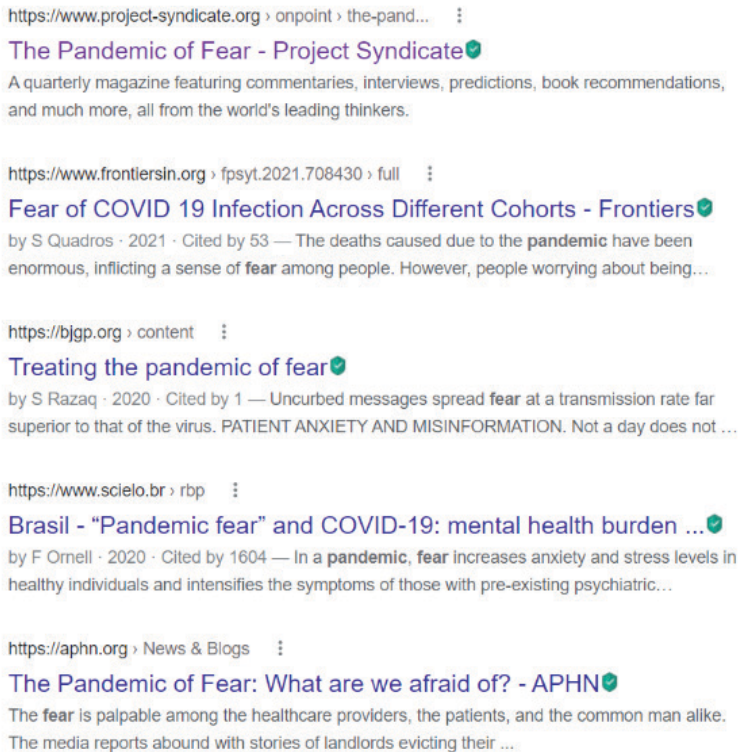
**Table 4:** Metaphorical domains, image and cultural schemas from the media, timespan March 2020-September 2021

	<b>Covid-19 pandemic</b>	<b>Corona virus</b>
DOMAINS	CONTAINER	ENTITY (ENEMY, FRIEND)
	WAR	WILD ANIMAL
	DISASTER	WAR
	JOURNEY	HEALTH
	SPORT & GAMES	NATURAL / PHYSICAL FORCE
	HEALTH	(HIDDEN) ENEMY
	DEATH	DEATH
	NATURAL DISASTER	
	NATURAL / PHYSICAL FORCE	
SAFETY		
IMAGE SCHEMAS	CONTAINMENT	
	UP/DOWN	
	CONTROL; BLOCKAGE; ENABLEMENT	
	PATH/ SOURCE-PATH-GOAL	
	FORCE	
	NEAR/FAR	
	TOUCH	
	CONNECT/DISCONNECT	
RESISTANCE		
CULTURAL SCHEMAS	UNCERTAINTY	
	STRENGTH	
	SURVIVAL	
	RESILIENCE	

The range of domains listed in Table 4 is somewhat conservative as it is confined to those that are most common, while the concepts/frames in Table 3 could suggest a wider range of domains that may potentially add to the yield of conceptual metaphors linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. Table 4 includes cultural schemas, which involve people's attitudes to safety, danger, and other notions that are shaped by communities and societies (Sharifian, 2011, 2017).

Tables 3 and 4 illustrate a selection of concepts and conceptual frames that have pervaded the Covid-19 discourse. These two tables thus provide a bridge between Bauman's fear philosophy discussed in *Liquid Fear* and the recent pandemic. While being an advocate of Bauman's insights, I have selected only a handful of relevant observations from his work to demonstrate how fear compounds and

generates even more fear. Quite justifiably, the Covid-19 pandemic has been termed 'the pandemic of fear', and this is illustrated by Fig. 1 with a screenshot rendering the result of a simple Google search of a string of words 'pandemic of fear'. All five sites are devoted to the Covid-19 issues:



**Figure 1:** Screenshot of sites related to Covid-19 (28.12.2022). Word-string: 'pandemic of fear'

The Covid-19 pandemic has also been associated with such terms as 'infodemic' and 'misinfodemic', particularly because of the sheer quantity of news reports, speculation, assurances by authorities, policies and recommendations, all of which reached unprecedented levels. People, having been locked down in their homes, willingly exposed themselves to TV and the Internet, which were the only sources of information in such uncertain times. Unfortunately, the vast number of news reports were coupled with a deluge of inadequate, often misleading, and even false news. In fact, the inundation of news progressed from information to disinformation and finally to misinformation. The difference between disinformation and misinformation is worth explaining. The former is news the content which is difficult to interpret by an average recipient. At the start of the pandemic news content was unintelligible to many people because of its scientific or quasi-scientific formulations, while it was also frequently of a speculative nature. Especially early reports lacked consistency by constantly being adjusted with the result that it further

confused an already confusing issue. In the early stages of the pandemic the passive recipients of pandemic discourse had to internalise the number of precautions they were required to take, follow the everchanging symptoms of the new virus and comprehend the seriousness of the problem, exacerbated by the ever-increasing number of unknowns. Misinformation refers to the disreputable character of some news items causing an already confused audience to fall victims to potentially dangerous or fatal advice on how to protect themselves from the virus.

To summarise, there are at least three major shortcomings of the modern media: the number of ways of disseminating information, the quality of reporting and the fact that anyone can now be a news purveyor (Castells, 2013, p. 19) through Instagram, a personal blog, tweets, posts, podcasts and various messaging services.

## 5. Liquid fear: fear of uncertainty in relation to Covid-19

At the start of *Liquid Fear* Bauman states:

Fear is at its most fearsome when it is diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us with no visible rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen. ‘Fear’ is the name we give to our uncertainty: to our ignorance of the threat and of what is to be done – what can and what can’t be – to stop it in its tracks – or to fight it back if stopping it is beyond our power (Bauman, 2006, p. 2).

This kind of uncertainty is evocative of several metaphorical concepts: FEAR IS A HIDDEN ENEMY (Kövecses 1990), FEAR IS AN UNANCHORED OBJECT AFLOAT, and FEAR IS A UBIQUITOUS ENTITY. Bauman posits that fear stems from ignorance and uncertainty; thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that UNCERTAINTY IS FEAR. This concept is coherent with the way people normally respond to mystery, lack of knowledge and ability to comprehend a peculiar situation. Not knowing or understanding something causes fear and anxiety, confusion, suspense, and less frequently, nervous excitement and anticipation. Fear resulting from not possessing (reliable) facts could mean that fear is in ‘not knowing’, which in turn yields a metonymy NOT HAVING (RELIABLE) FACTS/INFORMATION FOR FEAR.

Most fearsome is the ubiquity of fears; they may leak out of any nook or cranny of our homes and our planet. From dark streets and from brightly lit television screens. From our bedrooms and our kitchens. From our workplaces and from the underground train we take to get there or back. From people we meet and people whom we failed to notice. From something we ingested and something with which our bodies came in touch (Bauman, 2006, p. 4).

FEAR IS LIQUID and FEAR IS A UBIQUITOUS ENTITY metaphor, which may be derived from this citation are coherent with new experiences of threats that affect people’s perception of fear. These are either related to old kinds of threats

gaining new dimensions or new kinds of threats that arise from new territories for threats to 'inhabit'. The new territories have no political or solid boundaries (they often have liquid boundaries), as is the case with cyberspace, where such threats as internet viruses, cyber predators and criminals can adversely affect multiple aspects of people's lives (Bauman, 2018). Furthermore, experience of new territories which people now 'visit', results in an increased number of concepts people have to cognise and internalise.

Bauman's vision of modern times is disturbingly pessimistic, as may be seen in the following observation: 'when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen' Bauman (2006, p. 2) is actually referring to an enemy that has an uncanny advantage by being everywhere but not being detectable. The feature of this enemy, the metaphorically HIDDEN ENEMY, is what has compounded the problem of modern-day terrorism and, in particular, characterised threats posed by Islamic extremists. Among the many threats posed in recent decades by members of Al-Qaeda were those mounted by so-called 'sleeping cells' or 'sleeping enemies' which could launch surprise attacks anywhere because they were undetectable to intelligence agencies. In particular, after 9/11 ordinary people started to be suspicious of other people who could be in any way affiliated to Muslim communities, which could mean people from their close circles, work, neighbourhood or any passers-by in the street who were considered potentially dangerous. This ubiquity of a potential threat posed by other individuals elicited feelings of mistrust, which affected the quality of human relations. In this and other ways terrorism and the Covid-19 virus have much in common, as both involve other human beings transmitting danger. In the case of terrorists it is the transmission of their extreme ideology by launching bloody attacks on civilians, while in the case of Covid-19 the transmission is of a potentially lethal virus. This similarity is extended and illustrated below by mapping the correspondences of WAR ON TERROR onto the WAR ON CORONAVIRUS, launched in March of 2020

**Table 5:** Epistemic correspondences between the WAR ON TERROR (based on Bauman, 2006) and the WAR ON CORONAVIRUS

<b>Selected aspects of WAR ON TERROR(ISM)</b>	<b>Corresponding aspects of WAR ON CORONAVIRUS</b>
Enemy: terrorist sleeping cells	Enemy: virus cells
Malignant Enemy	Virulent Enemy
Enemy's inconspicuous presence (undetectability)	Enemy's inconspicuous presence (invisibility)
Battles fought everywhere (no clear/liquid fronts)	Battles fought everywhere (no clear/liquid fronts)
People fearing their neighbours (fear of the other)	People fearing everyone (fear of one another)
Fear of death	Fear of death

There are several important implications from the frame of WAR: fighting the ENEMY, winning battles (big/small victories), forming allies to gain an advantage, protecting civilians, dispatching help, suffering casualties and experiencing loss, creating a semblance of SAFETY and making assurances that the conflict/problem can be resolved. Both conceptual metaphors, WAR ON TERROR and WAR ON CORONAVIRUS, share these elements of the frame. Moreover, waging wars on killer terrorists and killer viruses involves wars with no clear fronts (Eco 2007), with all-out resources, and with ordinary people becoming combatants.

## 6. Social responsibility, social bonds and the Covid-19 pandemic

According to Svendsen ‘fear is contagious’ (2008, p. 14) and fear is a ‘commodity’ (2008, p.19); both of these aspects of fear were present during the Covid-19 pandemic. Significantly, fear was marketed and ‘sold’ as a commodity with much paraphernalia, including life-supporting equipment (respirators, ventilators, devices measuring blood-oxygen saturation), PPEs (Personal Protection Equipment), and later vaccines. Considerable shortages, questionable contracts and problems with distribution of equipment further raised levels of anxiety among increasingly distraught populations, thus confirming the verity of the notion that ‘fear breeds fear’.

In addition, people were subjected to a constant barrage of instructions that were published as slogans, labels, posters, leaflets and memes (Wicke and Bolognesi, 2020; Busso and Tordini, 2021; Irzam Sarif et al. 2021; Szulich-Kałuża, 2021). For instance, in the UK, among the repeatedly publicised pandemic slogans were:

- STAY HOME → PROTECT THE NHS → SAVE LIVES
- STAY AT HOME → STAY SAFE or STAY AT HOME → SAVE LIVES
- STAY ALERT → CONTROL THE VIRUS → SAVE LIVES
- DISTANCE SLOWS THE SPREAD → STAY 2M APART WHEN OUT
- STAY AT HOME → STAY PUT

These slogans display a high conceptual content during the biggest lockdown experienced by the modern world. Conceptually resonant, they were as alarming as they were motivating for people to take active responsibility for the well-being of others. The success of these slogans was in tapping into people's conceptual systems by activating such frames as FEAR (fear for others and for oneself) and DISTANCE (observing physical distance is good and necessary to stay safe). In contrast, some slogans were evocative of the concept of HOME associated with SAFETY as well as social responsibility, which, respectively, transmitted such messages as 'there is safety at home' and 'social responsibility is staying at home'.

The strain of separation from people's loved ones and impaired human/social contact became manifested through psychological disorders and increased anxiety

(Sasaki et al. 2020). Also, the restrictive and punishing lockdown accompanied by social distancing left a scar on social bonds, which Bauman (2006) sees as frail though essential to social coherence (Dixon, 2015b),

For human bonds, the crisis of trust is bad news. [...] All in all, human relations are no longer sites of certainty, tranquillity and spiritual comfort. They become instead a prolific source of anxiety. (Bauman, 2006, p. 69)

HUMAN BONDS ARE A BRITTLE OBJECT (compare to THE HUMAN MIND IS A BRITTLE OBJECT, Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002), as they can be easily strained, broken or even shattered. Similar views on social bonds are shared by other social philosophers and scholars: Svendsen (2008), Furedi (2006 and 2007) and, to a degree, Glassner (2009).

## **7. Covid-19: An ENEMY TO FIGHT or SOMEONE TO LIVE WITH?**

An ENEMY TO FIGHT or SOMEONE TO LIVE WITH? is a question posed by Muhammad (2020) in his article of the same title. Here Muhammad argues through the means of image schemas and conceptual domains that seeing Covid-19 as an ENEMY does not offer a conceptual frame for reconciliation and thus humanity adapting to a new threat, while the FRIEND(SHIP) domain suggests a more amicable conceptual outcome. In a search for the answer to the same question, I found a number of newspaper texts that suggest that Covid-19 is here to stay, the search having been conducted on 19.09.2022:

- COVID is here to stay: countries must decide how to adapt (<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00057-y>)
- COVID Is Here to Stay - Scientific American (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/covid-is-here-to-stay1/>)
- Covidishereforgood,scientistssay.Thearestremainsunpredictable.(<https://www.nbcnews.com/science/science-news/is-covid-here-to-stay-endemic-rcna9559>)
- Majority Of Americans Think Covid-19 Is Here To Stay, Poll Finds (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/roberthart/2022/01/27/majority-of-americans-think-covid-19-is-here-to-stay-poll-finds/?sh=51993b8324c3>)
- The Guardian view on the coronavirus big state: it's here to stay (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/24/the-guardian-view-on-the-coronavirus-big-state-its-here-to-stay>)

As these newspaper headlines indicate, Covid-19, like many other contemporary threats, has already been absorbed into human experience and has become a part of everyday life. Moreover, if anything, the pandemic has already been overshadowed by more recent threats of 2022, which are dramatic in different ways and serious in that people are yet to learn their full significance.

## 8. Calamity and potential danger zones

In the following passage Bauman, rather disturbingly, envisages and outlines spine-chilling disasters and calamities, which may yet occur. However, some have already surfaced and have begun to affect the lives of millions. For instance, when Bauman writes about 'a malicious genie' could Covid-19 fit this description? Moreover, the 'petrol taps' did not entirely 'run dry' but shortages have been experienced, and fuel prices have risen, while in Poland the price of electricity alone has trebled since the start of the conflict in Ukraine. A similar situation, though perhaps less drastic, can be observed in many other European countries to the point of the European Council urging its members to increase reliance on fuel sources independent of Russia.

There is also that third, perhaps the most terrifying, zone, a sense-numbing and mind-chafing grey zone, as yet unnamed, from which ever more dense and sinister fears seep, threatening to destroy our homes, workplaces and bodies through disasters – natural but not quite, human but not completely, natural and human at the same time though unlike either of them. The zone of which some over-ambitious yet hapless accident-and-calamity-prone sorcerer's apprentice, or a malicious genie imprudently let out of the bottle, must have taken charge. The zone where power grids go bust, petrol taps run dry, stock exchanges collapse, all-powerful companies disappear together with dozens of services one used to take for granted and thousands of jobs one used to believe to be rock-solid, where jets crash together with their thousand-and-one safety gadgets and hundreds of passengers, market caprices make worthless the most precious and coveted of assets, and any other imaginable or unimaginable catastrophes brew (or perhaps are brewed?) ready to overwhelm the prudent and the imprudent alike. Day in, day out we learn that the inventory of dangers is far from complete: new dangers are discovered and announced almost daily, and there is no knowing how many more of them and of what kind have managed to escape our (and the experts'!) attention – getting ready to strike without warning. (Bauman 2006: 5)

One could say that these observations are almost like a premonition of fears and calamities that have brewed (or have been brewed) between 2020 and 2022. These lines show how prescient Bauman was in anticipating possible new threats and catastrophes. His vision, however, was not that of a prophet. It resulted from his sombre understanding of human nature and the mechanisms governing the modern 'liquid' world.

## 9. Conclusions

In this paper I have attempted to show the applicability of Bauman's metaphorical perceptions of fear to the study of Covid-19. Using his insights, I developed a tripartite 'liquid' model of fear that is experienced by an individual as a member of society where inner-self experienced fears have corresponding socio-cultural contexts and corresponding conceptual frames. I then discussed a number of Covid-19 related concepts by mapping them onto Bauman's most relevant observations.



'Derivative fear' is a steady frame of mind that is best described as the sentiment of being susceptible to danger; a feeling of insecurity (the world is full of dangers that may strike at any time with little or no warning) and vulnerability (in the event of the danger striking, there will be little if any chance of escape or successful defence; the assumption of vulnerability to dangers depends more on a lack of trust in the defences available than on the volume or nature of actual threats). A person who has interiorized such a vision of the world that includes insecurity and vulnerability will routinely, even in the absence of a genuine threat, resort to the responses proper to a point-blank meeting with danger; 'derivative fear' acquires a self-propelling capacity. (Bauman, 2006, p. 3)

This susceptibility is almost like a 'virus'. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that FEAR is infectious, and that it may spread as quickly as a contagious disease. The concept of fear may be old, but it is shaped anew with every threat that gains focus because of its immediacy and relevance. Every new threat is thus reinvented by those who experience it, particularly when people's perceptions are crowded, as was the case with Covid-19, with news and policies they could not quite fathom. The 'fear' frame, like many other frames, is in constant flux and new metaphorical domains become the concept-building components.

The reading of *Liquid Fear* does not leave its readers with their sense of vulnerability intact. Bauman's observations regarding fear as an emotion and fear as a socio-cultural concept leave few stones unturned. He was able to explicate the bleakness of fear as an inseparable, rather than a meek companion that may dim people's experience of well-being. If a community of people is incapacitated by fear (as, to a degree, was the case during Covid-19), this concept may be summed up by a metaphor FEAR IS A PERNICIOUS AND DEBILITATING FORCE or FEAR IS EVIL (Dixon 2013). Such a community will not be able to experience any life-supporting emotions and feelings such as joy, happiness, satisfaction or even love. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted people's lives to a very high degree and generally lowered people's capacity to thrive as human beings. Many people, in an attempt to counteract some of the effects of social separation, engaged in various on-line schemes. However, such projects did not reach all those who needed help. The poor, the elderly, the apathetic, the depressed, the anxious and the sick, are just a few of those who could not reap the benefits of social media self-help groups.

There are many lessons that Bauman imparts in *Liquid Fear*. One such lesson is that 'life with fear is liveable', which is neutral to positive in its force.

Like all other forms of human cohabitation, our liquid modern society is a contraption attempting to make life with fear liveable. In other words, a contraption meant to repress the potentially disarming and incapacitating dread of danger, to silence such fears as derive from dangers that can't be, or should not be for the sake of the preservation of social order, effectively prevented. (Bauman, 2006, p. 6)

Considering the concepts discussed in this paper, it may be stated that FEAR IS A FORCE, and a very debilitating one (Table1, metonymic effects for fear, Kövecses, 1990). Fear is contagious and ultimately a threat to social coherence, particularly because social bonds may become more fragile due to fear and mistrust. When the ENEMY to be fought is 'everywhere but nowhere to be seen' (Bauman, 2006) then the ENEMY tends to get the upper hand. The experience of fear is exacerbated by lack of facts/appropriate knowledge and the resulting lack of understanding of what is happening. FEAR IS AN UNANCHORED OBJECT AFLOAT and DANGER IS AN ENTITY PRESENT AT EVERY LOCATION. Many fears go into the people from outside (misinfodemic), while many others stem from the fear of death. COVID-19 IS AN ENTITY PEOPLE HAVE TO LIVE WITH. The killer virus has evolved, and people have adapted to living with Covid-19.

A common saying states that ignorance can kill, but so can fear. People who succumb to fear have fewer survival chances than people who can distance themselves from sources of anxiety. A more optimistic concept is in the property of liquid forms in that they are only as permanent as the containers that give them shape. Fear perceived by Bauman is liquid (2006) and thus it corresponds to the metaphorical concept FEAR IS FLUID IN A CONTAINER (Kövecses, 1990). As a liquid or FLUID IN A CONTAINER, fear may assume as many shapes as there are containers to hold it; PEOPLE BEING CONTAINERS FOR FEAR hold as much fear as they choose to absorb.

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