

# Individualization, sociology and sub-politics: Implications for political theory

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## Abstract

It has become increasingly imperative for contemporary international political theorists to demonstrate the distinctiveness of political theory contributions to theorisations of the political and public realm (Walsh, 2003). This is particularly so in the face of the emerging phenomenon of prominent international sociologists theorising on politics and the public realm in the shadow of widely held misconceptions that the discipline of political theory has been unwilling to conceptualise the public realm outside the state. Bauman's recent work *In Search of Politics* (1999), *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and *The Individualized Society* (2001) cover a range of themes held together by his observation that society can no longer guarantee a collective remedy for individual concerns. Bauman recognises that the problem in contemporary society is that "the most common troubles of the individuals-by-fate are *not additive*. They simply do not sum up into a 'common cause'" (2001:48).

According to Bauman, the demise of citizenship means that the public arena is filled with the concerns and preoccupations of individuals *as individuals* leaving little room for other considerations. "The 'public' is colonized by the 'private'; 'public interest' is reduced to curiosity about the private lives of public figures, tapering the art of public life down to a public display of private affairs and public confessions of private sentiments" (2001:49). Similarly Beck in *The Reinvention of Politics* (1997), *Democracy Without Enemies* (1998) and *Individualization* (2002) distinguishes between politics and sub-politics claiming the latter category as a sociological reinventing of politics and public life. The paper explores what is at stake for the discipline of political theory and political theorizations of the public realm in the face of blatant appropriations of these central political concerns by some international sociologists. The paper argues that the discipline of political theory offers key insights into the nature of the political and the public realm that are obscured by an analysis of politics by sociologists.

## **The political, sociology and the re-configuration of politics**

Whilst the latest issue of *PS: Political Science and Politics* (June 2002) considers the future of political science, discussion within the discipline of political science and between the social science disciplines more generally on the question of the relationship between political theory and sociology are noteworthy for their absence. The symposium 'What is Political Theory' was the most highly attended at the American Political Science Association 2001 conference, San Francisco and it was clear there was not an agreed upon notion of what political theory is. This is reinforced by the British Political Studies Association conference roundtable 'Contemporary Political Theory: the State of the Discipline' held at Kings College Aberdeen, Scotland, April 2002, where participants canvassed a broad range of contemporary political theories. In a general sense, politics is associated with power and political theory with concepts of justice and liberty (although not all political theorists are in agreement with this). Whilst there is clearly a great deal of contemporary interest in political theory, the interest is not just within the discipline (as highly contested as that is). Critical sociologists are also theorising politics and attempting to subsume politics under the rubric of sociological studies. This is being played out against a background with some players arguing that the disciplinary distinction between political studies and sociology are 'artificial' and others arguing that there are important differences between political studies and sociology that need to be maintained. It has become increasingly fashionable to subsume matters political under the rubric of sociology. The implication is that sociology is the discipline that subsumes all others (the banner of social sciences also presumes this to a large degree). Whilst Beck and Bauman both make spirited arguments for a reconfiguring of politics with Beck "reinventing it" and Bauman "searching for it", they leave important distinctions between 'the political' and 'politics' unexplored and provide important insights into why political theorists need to distinguish political theory from sociology.

### **Beck (1997) and Bauman (1999) on politics**

Beck's *The Reinvention of Politics* (1997) identifies a fundamental shift in the way that politics is played out and attempts to theorize this displacement with his conceptualisation

of subpolitics as a sociological rendering of these complex political processes. His aim is to rethink modernity in the new global social order from a sociological perspective. "Of course, a conceptual renaissance of sociology presumes sociological and social controversy over the guiding theoretical and political ideas. A contribution to this is to be presented here" (1997:3). Beck's conceptualisation of 'reflexive modernisation' is a central concept in his refiguring of "the concept, site and subject of *politics*. The conjecture is that the second modernity into which we slid sometime ago is a *political modernity*, a modernity, that is, which stimulates the *reinvention of politics*" (1997:5). Whilst this is relevant to traditions of self-reflection and self-criticism in modernity it is also something else, a change in the industrial modernization of the advanced developed countries. Beck understands this process of modernization as refracted rather than instrumentally rational and linear, as a rule of side-effects as the motor of social history (1997:3). The reinvention of politics implies a shift from not just rule enforcing but rule-altering politics, a politics not just played out for politicians but a politics for society not politics limited to power politics. It does not mean the universalization of state and welfare politics (as this is political in the old sense of the term). It does refer to the increasing situations that individuals find themselves in that are not comprehensible in the prevailing theoretical paradigms, institutions and processes. Many individuals find that the prevailing political institutions are unable to respond in any way that matters. Beck's explicit goal is to supplement and replace the concept of politics with the concept of subpolitics in reflexive modernity and the main contrast of his book is the political/unpolitical.

The discussion of subpolitics (1997:94-109) signals the return of the individual to society. The term individualization refers to the disembedding and reembedding of individuals that is not voluntary or historical but occurs all at once through the conditions of the welfare states in the advanced western societies since the 1960s. Individualization means the transformation of the certainties of industrial society to a compulsion to invent certainties for oneself and others. In outlining the relationship between politics and subpolitics, Beck suggests that this individualization does not remain private but becomes political in a new sense as individuals shift into becoming 'individualised individuals'. Beck recognises a 'double world' of complex interplays between symbolically rich political institutions (industrial modernity) and everyday life political practices that remain largely concealed (reflexive modernity). "On the one hand, a political vacuity of the institutions is evolving and, on the other hand, a non-institutional renaissance of politics. The individual is returning to society" (1997:98). Beck argues against the widely held view of the end of politics (although he doesn't refer to it like this), suggesting that the position is based on a category error that equates politics with the state and politics with the political system (1997:98). For Beck, "politics breaks open and erupts *beyond*" and this is widely misunderstood. (1997:99). The top-down approach to politics overlooks the self-

organisational possibilities that can filter through society setting into motion 'subpolitically', "the political constellation of industrial society is becoming *unpolitical*, while what was unpolitical in industrialism is becoming *political*. This is a category transformation of politics with *unchanged* institutions, and with intact power elites that have not been replaced by new ones" (1997:99). Moreover, Beck suggests emerging the distinction between polity, policy and politics to get subpolity and subpolitics (1997:103).

Beck discusses 'the politics of politics' in his chapter on the reinvention of politics (1997:132-160) He focuses on the importance of the politics/non-politics distinction because not everything is political and differentiates between politics and politicization. He supplements his distinction between politics and subpolitics in the return of politics after the East-West conflict with another distinction between *rule-directed* and *rule-altering* politics. Rule-directed politics operates *within* the systems of rules in industrial and welfare state society in the nation state (simple modernity). Rule-altering politics aims at a 'politics of politics' because it alters the rules of the games themselves. This is identified as meta- or super-politics comprised of switching the rule system and raising the question of what system of rules should be switched to. "The distinction between official politics and subpolitics, which is orientated to the systemic structure of society, must therefore be contrasted with the distinction between *simple* (rule-directed) and *reflexive* (rule-altering) politics. The latter is measured by the *degree* and *quality* of politics (1997:134). Beck locates the contradiction of the modern state simultaneously 'withering away' and 'being reinvented' summing it up in the formula, "*withering away plus reinventing equals metamorphosis of the state*" (1997:139). Beck suggests that the political left-right metaphor that emerged with bourgeois society may not easily be displaced without credible alternatives. He locates the coordinates of politics and conflict there in the future arranged around three key dichotomies: *safe/unsafe*, *inside/outside* and *political/unpolitical* and three key questions: what is your attitude towards first, *uncertainty*, second, *strangers* and third, toward the *possibility of shaping society* (1997:149-150).

Bauman's (1999) *In Search of Politics* examines the changing meaning of politics from a critical sociological perspective by searching for public space, agency and vision. The search for agency questions existing political agencies for paradoxically being unable to offer effective agencies of political action. The self-acknowledged 'most contentious' chapter is the final chapter outlining a broad vision that could be useful for reform. Bauman's concern is human freedom. He identifies a central paradox that individuals generally consider themselves free in their everyday existence, yet feel that there is little they can do to change the way things are in the world that they live and wonders how these two beliefs can exist at the same time. If individuals are free, why do they believe they cannot actively change the world they live in? And what sort of freedom tolerates

apathy and discourages new ways of thinking about being among free individuals in matters that are of concern to them all equally. Bauman is struck by how we live with the contradiction, how we don't seem to notice it much and are not too concerned when we do. It is important to know how individuals live with this central contradiction. For Bauman it is important to ask why it is important to know this and what is there to know anyway? "It is with this question that this book tries to come to grips. The answer it comes up with is, roughly, that the growth of individual freedom may coincide with the growth of collective impotence in as far as the bridges between private and public life are dismantled or were never built to start with; or, to put it differently, in as far as there is no easy and obvious way to translate private worries into public issues and, conversely, to discern and pinpoint public issues in private troubles. And that in our kind of society the bridges are by and large absent and the art of translation seldom practised in public" (1999:2). In other words, a mass of private issues are not made 'public' by having them on public display. The 'art of translation' is missing in what passes for contemporary public debate.

Bauman argues that the chance of changing this situation "hangs on the agora - the space neither private nor public, but more exactly private and public at the same time" (1999:3). His idea of the public good is of a space where private problems come together in ways that matter although the problem is that earlier public/private spaces are nowhere in sight. The art of politics (particularly democratic politics) is about two key things. First, its about 'dismantling' the limits to citizens' freedom and second, its about self-limitation meaning the capacity to make citizens free "in order to enable them to set, individually and collectively, their own, individual and collective, limits. The second point has been all but lost. All limits are off limits." (1999:4). Bauman borrows from Castoriadis who observed that the problem with contemporary society was that it had ceased to question itself. He believes that this is where the discipline of sociology "enters the stage" (1999:7). The central argument of the book is that individual liberty can only be achieved and secured collectively. However, contemporary society moves to privatise the very means that can guarantee individual liberty. This is further compounded by the privatisation of utopian visions and models of the good with models of the 'good life' being separated from models of the good society. This post-ideological era means that individuals do not concern themselves with questions about the good society and trade off concerns about the public good for the freedom to live their own lives. The nexus of freedom and insecurity loom large - "we won't get far without without bringing back from exile ideas such as the public good, the good society, equity, justice and so on - such ideas make no sense unless cared for and cultivated in the company of others" (1999:8).

## Bauman, sociology and individualization

In *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* (2001) Keith Tester interviews Bauman over the spring and summer of 2000 around five themes including politics. The conversations are centred around three key questions: Who is Zygmunt Bauman? What does he do? Why does he do it? Bauman is centrally concerned with the demise of public life and politics more generally. The question of who Bauman is, is summed up by the observation that "he is a private man who invites participation in public life" (2001:6). Bauman does sociology and believes that it "is more capable than any other academic discipline of capturing and embracing the entirety of human experience" (2001:7). Having acknowledged sociology as uniquely placed to understand human experience, Bauman goes on to argue that human experience is oblivious to the 'boundaries' between the social, the political, the economic, the philosophical and the poetic and so is sociology. One of the profound strengths of sociology is its inability 'to build up high walls' between itself and disciplines like politics and philosophy. "The discursive formation bearing the name of sociology is porous on all sides and is notorious for its enormous, insatiable power" (2001:40). Bauman is suspicious of disciplinary boundaries suggesting that they should be ignored "for a more all-embracing and relevant knowledge of the social world" (2001:7). Sociology most embraces human experience in its entirety and this apparently is its central strength. Why does Bauman do it? At the most fundamental level, Bauman is a contemporary social theorist that urges men and women to embrace freedom rather than necessity.

Whilst seeing the central strength of sociology as its capacity to be all embracing, Bauman is critical of the "umbrella term" postmodernity which he views with increasing unease (2001:96). He wants to be clear about the distinction between postmodern sociology and the sociology of postmodernity and is irritated by the confusion between misunderstandings of postmodernity and the postmodern. Whilst acknowledging Giddens 'late modernity' and Becks 'second modernity', Bauman prefers his own term 'liquid modernity' for capturing both the continuous (melting, disembedding) and the discontinuous (no solidification, no re-embedding). Bauman uses the term 'liquid' to emphasise the changes and continuities (2001:98). In the final conversation on 'politics' the central question is who are the agents of politics in liquid modernity? (2001:150-158). For Bauman the crisis of agency is the central concern of democratic politics. It is pointless to blame politicians with the issue extending to citizens who do not participate in law making, let alone actually being present and listened to when the laws are being deliberated. Bauman identifies two processes as having a direct bearing upon this situation. First there is globalisation, that takes the power out of politics and economics

out of political control. Secondly, there is complex processes “awkwardly dubbed” individualization that consists in the dismantling of societal safety nets where individuals experience increased freedom and paradoxically increased insecurity. Globalisation undermines interest in politics robbing it of much of its practical sense whilst individualization ensures that intent in politics is undermined by being unable to be expressed in any way that is meaningful (2001:151).

Bauman's *The Individualized Society* (2001) is a collection of papers and essays (written over the last three years) that cover a diverse range of themes. These themes include labour, local and global, freedom and security, modernity, difference, critique, progress, poverty, welfare, education, identity, faith, love, reason, private morality, democracy, violence, postmodern uses of sex and immortality. Bauman provides an overture of 'Lives told and stories lived' and the collection is divided into three subheadings: 'The Way We Are', 'The Way We Think' and 'The Way We Act'. The prime concern of the collection is what Bauman refers to as the “process of relentless *individualization*” (p.6). Tracing the shift from the social individual (a term Bauman does not use) to the individualized individual is “of the utmost sociological relevance” (p.6). In the 'society of individuals' supra individual factors shape the belief that the individual is responsible for their choices and any situation they happen to find themselves in. For Bauman, “the added value of 'joining forces' and 'standing arm in arm' is difficult to spot, and the impulse to engage (let alone engage critically) with the way the human condition, or the shared human predicament, is shaped is weak or non-existent” (p.9). Bauman's self confessed obsession is to inquire into the reason why the stories told today do not “reach beyond the narrow and painstakingly fenced off enclosure of the private and 'subjective self'?” (p.12). The paramount task of sociology is to prevent the foreclosing of possibilities (rather than insisting on the closure of complexities) that make individuals increasingly feel that there is nothing they can do to change the “no choice” situation.

Another common theme of the collection is a radical widening of the political agenda from the present *decolonization of the public sphere* (p.14). Bauman elaborates upon Arendt's insight about “the emptiness of political space” in the contemporary body politic where there is a lack of meaningful interventions about the way collective life is lived (p.93). This “conspicuous absence of agency” means that “the most painful and least answerable question” in contemporary times is not what is to be done, but who is going to do it? (p.111). Bauman argues that contemporary politics is played out in an arena where capital can move with great speed and local authorities feel as though their resistance is futile. Governments fall over themselves kneeling at the throne of capital making clear they will not use their regulatory powers to restrain the liberties of capital. “More generally, it means a docile population, unable and unwilling to put up an organized resistance to

whatever decisions capital might take" (p.26). In the new millennium, being disengaged and uncommitted is the hallmark of 'managerial wisdom'. In the global order of power, time and space are reconfigured. "Those who can afford it live solely in time. Those who cannot, live in space. For the first, space does not matter. As to the second, they struggle hard to make it matter" (p.40). Individualism is a key aspect of modern society, yet the process of individualization is something that is very different from individualism. Bauman makes clear that individualization is not a choice and that escaping individualization by not participating "is emphatically *not* on the agenda" (p.47). He quotes from Beck who observed that "how one lives becomes a *biographical solution to systemic contradictions*" (p.47).

A key question is whether there can be politics in the individualized society? Bauman recognises that the problem in contemporary society is that "the most common troubles of the individuals-by-fate are *not additive*. They simply do not sum up into a 'common cause'" (p.48). He gives the example of the talk show that hammers home the message that although many of the participants have similar troubles they are expected to work them out for themselves. He recognizes, borrowing from de Tocqueville, that increasing freedom in society has led to indifference, where the individual is the worst enemy of the citizen, "sceptical or wary of the 'common good', of the 'good society' or 'just society'. What is the sense of *common* interests unless they let each individual satisfy his or her own?" (p.48/49). Similarly to the Canadian political philosopher Ralston Saul, Bauman claims individualization is directly responsible for the 'slow disintegration' of citizenship. The demise of citizenship means that the public arena is filled with the concerns and preoccupations of individuals *as individuals* leaving little room for other concerns. "The 'public' is colonized by the 'private'; 'public interest' is reduced to curiosity about the private lives of public figures, tapering the art of public life down to a public display of private affairs and public confessions of private sentiments" (p.49). The lack of security in the individualized society leads to an inability to exercise political will and imagine an alternative.

Although the collection of papers and essays cover a range of themes, what holds them together is Bauman's observation that society can no longer guarantee a collective remedy for individual concerns. "Individuals have been offered (or, rather, have been cast into) freedom of unprecedented proportions - but at the price of similarly unprecedented insecurity" (p.159). What is striking however, is the way in which Bauman's analysis of the individualized society challenges understandings of what mainstream sociology is as a discipline. This need not be surprising given that Bauman's understanding of sociology is continental (read political) in the French and German tradition rather than the more bland empirical sociology emanating from the United States of America. This explains his

reliance on a great deal of political theory (Plato, Aristotle, de Tocqueville, and Arendt) even though he does not directly mention the term 'political theorists' in the collection. In fact, he says that his insights have relevance for social theorists, sociologists, social scientists, philosophers and psychologists (p.140). Rather paradoxically, he concedes that sociology as a discipline is changed by the ascendancy of the individualised individual, yet continues to understand political studies as the narrow realm of the demise of the state (p.111, p.203). This is further compounded by his turn to ethics through Levinas in an exploration of the possibilities of 'the world of the multiplicity of others' (p.181). Overall, the collection provides an outstanding elaboration of the importance of understanding the implications of the individualised individual for the discipline of sociology.

## **Beck, politics and sub-politics**

Beck's *Democracy without Enemies* (1998) is concerned with what comes after postmodernity and the complex interplays between individualization and globalisation. In chapter three 'The withering away of solidarity, places without community and community without places', Beck outlines what individualization does not mean and clears up common misconceptions about the term. For Beck, individualization is a two fold process of disembedding ways of industrial society (family, gender, class) and re-embedding new ones (where individuals produce their own biography). These processes of re-embedding referred to as individualization is not something that is freely chosen but is something that people are condemned to as such as there is a certain sense of a paradoxical compulsion. Life in the contemporary welfare state is one where every decision becomes a personal risk. As well as this, individualization is a collective fate, not an individual one that is not experienced passively. It is significant because it signals a new relationship between the individual and society (1998:35). A sense of community can no longer come from the top-down but instead emerges from the bottom-up. Individualization intensifies social inequality as the income gap widens and more people are effected by poverty and unemployment. There are increasing problems with identity and organising as a political force. The processes of individualization mean people cope individually rather than in classes with the common perception that social crises appear to be individual ones with individuals not identifying their problems as social or political. It is in individualized society that conflict arises along factors related to socially identifiable features such as skin colour, ethnic identity, sex, age, sexuality and disability (1998:36).

Beck is keen to establish the credentials of his category subpolitics as the individuals return challenging the long held assumption that community and political engagement are necessarily bound to particular locations acknowledging that the relationship between community and locality has undergone a metamorphosis. The globalisation of political engagement has meant the emergence of localities without communities and transnational (political communities) that are not tied to a specific location. Moreover, there has been the socially 'astonishing' and not well understood emergence of an 'unexpected renaissance' of global political subjectivity existing inside and outside current institutions. It is in this sense that Beck suggests that social movements, citizen initiative groups and non-government organisations have taken power politically. The political systems (with politicians and parliaments) work with an incorrect definition of politics and have "fallen victim to a self-deception" (1998:37) as the politics of today is about self-organisation. For Beck, this self-organisation is not the same as the liberal understanding of a free play of social forces but is instead subpolitics where society is shaped from the bottom up. The common good and guarantee of public peace are to be found outside the traditional political institutions than within them. What appears to be lack of consensus (an unpolitical existence in private life) in the old understanding of politics represents the struggle for a new dimension in politics. The idea that politics has lost its 'spark' rests on a category error that equates politics with the state and political system. This conceptualisation overlooks the failure of governments to come to grips with political experience, and this very failure may activate the mobility of a new type of agency possible on all levels of society. Politics would recede and subpolitics would emerge. Subpolitics provides possibilities for re-inventing politics post Cold War.

In the foreword of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, Scott Lash points out that in Anglo-Saxon sociology, Beck's theory of reflexive modernisation is comprised of two central theses: the environmental (risk thesis) and the lesser known individualization thesis. The latter thesis has largely been ignored in Beck's work and the collection of essays (with another foreword by Zygmunt Bauman and an interview with Beck p.202-213) seeks to redress this omission. The context of the authors' discussion is situated within the international dispute about core principles in the social sciences. There are those who argue that the social and political landscape has changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet empire in 1989 and that this change is not apparent in the disciplines of sociology and political science. The other position (which constitutes the majority) suggests that no such shift has occurred. This positioning between those who argue that there has been a fundamental break and those who argue there hasn't provides a rich terrain for sociology at the national and international level, and according to the authors', "will revitalize the discipline and help it to regain public attention" (xx). Beck and Beck-

Gernsheim position themselves on the side that argues that there has been a categorical break in the contemporary social and political terrain. In their view, “the suppression of the new is one of the great traumas of modern capitalism; it has brought forth a huge structure of postponement and denial, which claims that everything remains as it was” (xx). For them, the fundamental question (beyond asserting that there has been an epochal change) is how sociology in its dispute over continuity or discontinuity will respond theoretically, methodologically and organizationally to meet future challenges.

The authors’ claim that the term individualization is surrounded by a great deal of misunderstanding. They attempt to dispel confusion by distinguishing between the neo-liberal economic understanding of the individual and their own term they refer to as *institutionalised individualism*. The neo-liberal view of the individual understands the human being as a totally self-sufficient entity with a capacity for action that comes from within. In contrast to this, they deploy a specifically sociological understanding of individualization that recognises civil, political and social rights as well as paid employment focussed upon individuals rather than the group. It can be understood as a disembedding of the practices of industrial society (nation, class, family, gender) without any form of re-embedding. In his interview, Beck explains that it doesn’t mean individualism (in the atomistic sense as increasing isolation) and it doesn’t mean individuation (in the psychological sense of developing into an autonomous person). It bears no resemblance to the market individualism of Thatcherism or emancipation as it is understood by Habermas. “Individualization is a concept which describes a structural, sociological transformation of social institutions and the relationship of the individual to society” (p.202). The authors’ understanding of individualization suggests individuals are liberated from traditional roles through the detraditionalization of social classes. This is evident in the changes in fundamental social rights (particularly in relation to welfare states), paid employment, family structures, housing conditions, and patterns of leisure, the geographical location and dispersal of populations, memberships in trade unions and clubs and voting patterns. Communities are held together less by traditions and more increasingly by a general transformation of society that Beck has paradoxically referred to as “capitalism without class” (p.205).

In the chapter “Freedom’s Children” the author’s claim that Western Europeans are not living in an age defined by a decline of values suggesting that “instead, we are threatened by something much ‘worse’” (p.157). They go on to characterise this as suffering *from* freedom and not from a crisis, although strictly speaking, it may be more correct to refer to “Liberty’s Children”. In the absence of any discussion of the importance of the public realm (and its tangible relation to freedom despite evidence that the authors are familiar with the work of Arendt, pp.175-6, 210), this raises an unacknowledged ambivalence that

is not immediately apparent. In some sense the authors seem to be equating freedom and liberty and it is clear that they are not the same things at all, regardless of how many sociologists and more particularly, some political theorists, continue to use the terms as though they were the same thing. It is not just that society is losing its connections with past traditions, it would seem that some traditions, especially political traditions, have been totally eclipsed by rather rudimentary knowledge of political history from the French revolution to the present that is thoroughly saturated by discourses of liberty. This is even more so today with the decline of the public realm (as opposed to the authors' discussion of public welfare). Individuals go about their business in the private realm (which in political tradition originally meant deprived) with unprecedented liberty in the delusion that they are more 'free'. Overall, the authors provide an overview of institutionalized individualism that provides a provocative and challenging glimpse of sociological practices that go beyond the confines of class as a central organising principle for Anglo-Saxon sociology. However, there are few insights for political science (broadly defined) except for a sociological reinventing of politics and public life that distinguishes between politics and sub-politics (in other words a colonisation of political science by sociology and sociological insights). The general analysis of the implications of individualization understood in a sociological sense goes some way towards their goal of reinvigorating the discipline of sociology into the future.

## **Implications for political theory (preliminary comments)**

The following provides a very preliminary sketch of provisional key points about the implications for political theory of Beck and Bauman's sociological re-rendering of politics. To begin with, it is important to understand the difference between political theory and sociology when international critical sociologists claim it is the job of sociology to interpret the 'human condition' and that it is the most able discipline to do so (see Bauman in Beilharz (2001:340-341)). Whilst the two theorists do not advocate merging the two disciplines together they explicitly utilise a conceptual framework that sees politics as a part of sociology. There is a great difference between political theory (freedom, dignity) and social theory (existence, companionship) that needs to be reasserted. It is also important to recognise that there is a huge difference between politics and the political, something that is significantly underplayed by both sociologists. Beck's identification of sub-politics replacing politics as it is more conventionally understood, with the emergence of a new type of politics in the contemporary arena, is hardly an original observation. The withering away of community has echoes of Marx and leaves Beck in the paradoxical

situation of recognising new politics emerging from the dismantling and withering of the public realm. Bauman's call to examine freedom and dignity is a repeat of earlier arguments made by Arendt in the 1960s except he wants to develop a social relation of freedom (as opposed to a political one). There are many times when it is apparent that Bauman confuses liberty and freedom obscuring the difference between the two terms. Not all political theory is about power and there are important insights about freedom and political theory that are obscured. Bauman's claim that we need to turn to *the agora* (as a realm both public and private) seems conceptually confused when contrasted to Arendt's understanding of the social as a realm that is not public or private. Further interplays between the political theorist Arendt with sociologists Beck and Bauman reveal that the discipline of political theory already has the resources to theorise the complexities of individualization and globalisation that offers insights different to those offered on contemporary politics by sociologists and social theorists more generally.

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