

A world of insecurity

Anthropological perspectives on human security

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1. Human security and social anthropology

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Theoretical concepts go in and out of fashion so discreetly as to be almost unnoticed in the social sciences. For a hundred years, Herbert Spencer's conceptual pair structure and function was de rigueur, even if the definition shifted somewhat, although not as much as the term "race". Spencer's pair of concepts can now finally be proclaimed dead as a dodo, half a century after the fruition of Talcott Parsons' ambitious structural-functionalist theory of society – at the time familiar to every sociologist and many other social scientists, today ignored by everyone except the historians of the discipline. The 1960s and '70s saw the phenomenal resuscitation of the entire menu of a century old Marxist terms – surplus value, infrastructure, contradiction, Asian mode of production and so on – but apart from a handful of Marxist words which have deservedly entered the everyday language (such as ideology and exploitation), this jargon has virtually become obsolete again. "Culture", used in the anthropological sense, has been with us for over 130 years now, since Tylor, but many shift uneasily in their seats whenever it is invoked without a ritual invocation of inverted commas.

The concept of human security

The key concept in this book, "security", is not a technical term and can therefore, being part of everyday language, be expected to outlive most more

specialised terms. Even with the rather vacuous qualifier “human” ahead, the term is almost impossibly vague and wide-ranging. Introduced as an applied social science term by the United Nations Development Programme in one of its annual Human Development Reports (UNDP 1994), the term human security is meant to humanise strategic studies, to anchor development research in locally experienced realities, and to offer a tool to gauge the ways societies function seen from the perspective of their inhabitants.

Attempts to clarify the meaning of the concept, to operationalise it for use in empirical research, have been met with hostility and skepticism among some scholars, while others defend its place in the analytical vocabulary of the social sciences (see Alkire 2002 and the debate in *Security Dialogue* 2004). Some deem it hopelessly fuzzy and impossible to use in actual research; others have claimed that it adds little to extant terminology. It could nonetheless be argued, and in this book we do argue, that the term “human security” has an important job to do in reorienting social theory and building bridges between the different social sciences. In social anthropology, it may in fact turn out to be a concept which has been needed for some time, a concept that can enable anthropologists to update and rephrase some of the classic problems of the subject without bringing the excess baggage from functionalist thinking, notably the problems to do with social cohesion and integration, stability and collective identity. The eclectic methodology of contemporary social anthropology moreover makes it eminently suited to grapple with a multistranded concept like the one of human security. Anthropologists collect their data in both systematic and unsystematic ways, and may regard a passing anecdote or a chance event as being just as valuable as the results of structured interviews. We relate to media, statistics and history writing, we collect life stories and sit in at public meetings and rituals, and we do our best, within the bounds of ethical guidelines and common decency, to peek over our informants’ shoulders to see what they are up to when they think nobody is watching. Unlike many other scientists, anthropologists impose rigour on their material largely during analysis, not during data collection. As the late Eric Wolf famously said, anthropology is ‘the most scientific of the humanities, the most humanist of the sciences’ (Wolf 1964: 11).

What anthropologists look for when they sift and sort their diverse materials, are indications of patterns and regularities which can enable them to weave their strands into a tapestry. Asking for the ways in which people under different circumstances strive for security, and conversely identifying the factors that render them insecure, may offer a promising framework for future anthropological research. Using human security as a unifying concept for a variety of research projects, which we have endeavoured to do in this book, can help to counter internal fragmentation and to redirect theory in necessary directions. Donna Winslow (2003) notes that “the human security approach parallels the shift in economic development and international law from instrumental objectives (such as growth, or state rights) to human development and human rights” (Winslow 2003: 5). From the viewpoint of the anthropologist, this reads like a shift from the harder sciences of economics to the kind of qualitative approaches we represent.

Although the concept of human security, as it is currently used in the worlds of development studies and peace and conflict research, was introduced as late as the mid-1990s, it can be used to address questions which are as old as the social sciences themselves. The modern social sciences grew out of the frictions and tensions arising from the Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America in the 19th century, and questions to do with insecurity were at the core of the early grand theories. Marx famously spoke of alienation under capitalism, and Ferdinand Tönnies introduced the dichotomy between the tight moral community – the *Gemeinschaft* – and the loose, anonymous society – the *Gesellschaft*. Almost every leading theorist had his own foundational dichotomy between traditional or collectivist societies and modern or individualist societies on the other. The human security theorist par excellence was nevertheless Émile Durkheim, whose entire oeuvre gravitates around a deeply seated anxiety that modernity may entail a loss of societal cohesion because of its pluralism, individualism and fast change.

The first generations of social scientists, especially those lacking first-hand knowledge, portrayed traditional societies in a somewhat romanticising, stylised way owing much to Rousseau, assuming that life in closely knit, kinship-based societies was predictable and stable, unburdened with existential doubt and

disruptive challenges to tradition and authority. However, already the first generation of fieldworking anthropologists, who began to publish just after the First World War, described societies which did not seem to fit this view. Life in the Melanesian societies studied by the likes of Bronislaw Malinowski and Reo Fortune seemed profoundly insecure; people appeared to live in perennial fear of either witchcraft attacks or witchcraft accusations, and there were status anxieties associated with political power, gifting obligations towards relatives and economic uncertainties. Anthropologists describing the lives of small, tightly knit groups in Africa, Melanesia and South America show, sometimes inadvertently, that they live in a state of almost continuous anxiety. Anything from warring neighbouring tribes to poisonous snakes or crop failure could put their lives in jeopardy any day of the year.

If we move to more hierarchical, complex societies of the kind customarily studied by anthropologists, they also seem to offer little more by way of security for their members. It is sometimes said of Egyptians that they tend to die of anxiety in middle age, usually connected with money problems, more specifically an almost chronic inability to look properly after their relatives economically. Ethnographies from India show that many Indian women live in constant fear of male violence, men worry deeply about dowry payments for their daughters and a thousand lesser expenses, and that everybody fears downward mobility, whether individual or collective.

Security naturally refers to much more than this – and this could be said to be the strength and the weakness of the concept. Most individuals are, presumably, secure in some respects and insecure in others. In official documents from the UN Commission for Human Security, “freedom from want and freedom from fear” are stressed as common denominators of the concept (UNDP 1994, cf. Alkire 2002). However, if we are to take this delineation in a literal sense, it must in all fairness be pointed out that every society – even the most stable and well-organised one – has its own wants and fears.

Every society, group and individual on earth has its way of dealing with questions of human security. Nobody is immune. Nonbelievers often assume that religious people have a greater existential security than they do themselves, but

such a generalisation is unwarranted. If one belongs to a religion with a notion of hell, or divine intervention, or both, then one had better mind one's step.

Moreover, it is often assumed that insecurity is more pronounced in the global era than it was formerly, given the fundamental vulnerability, the proliferation of risks, the environmental crisis, AIDS, the alienating individualism of neo-liberalism, fears of terrorist attacks or outbreaks of war, or the loss of faith in canonical tradition, including religious salvation and protection from supernatural entities, that are assumed to accompany this era. A cursory look at the historical and ethnographic records do not support this view. The risk of being the victim of a terrorist attack for a citizen of Amsterdam in the early 21st century can safely be assumed to be much less than the risk of being bitten by a poisonous snake for an Azande in the 1920s. The threats of starvation, disease and war in the poorer countries, horrible as they are, were unlikely to be much less in premodern times than what is the case today, although their impact was for obvious reasons different.

This book

This volume engages with two distinct bodies of literature, one of which is limited in volume and recent in history, while the other is huge and with a long, distinguished past. The first is, of course, the restricted, but growing literature on human security. Most writings on human security tend to be narrowly policy-oriented and strongly focused on insecurities rather than security itself. Moreover, in spite of programmatic statements about placing people first, analyses of human security – often written by political scientists and macrosociologists – tend to focus on the national and international levels. This book, by contrast, directly addresses questions concerning how people create a situation of (relative) security, and how various dimensions of human security – economic, political, existential, environmental – interact.

The anthropology of human security, as it is developed in this book, aims to combine the classic concerns of anthropology with cohesion, agency and power, with an appreciation of the transnational dimension in contemporary lives. The contributors thereby move beyond both the nostalgia implicit in some

of the globalisation literature, as well as the old-style cultural relativism tacitly assuming that wholly traditional lives are preferable to partly modernised ones.

Creating secure lives in a complex, turbulent world entails hard work. Security-building activities are confronted with risks, some of them transnational; with insecurities associated with war, environmental problems, crime etc.; and also with individualisation and ideological tendencies favouring individual freedom at the expense of sacrificing security (see Bauman 2001). However, unlike comments on the 'postmodern condition' which argue that contemporary lives are bound to be fragmented and 'liquid', this book shows how much people are willing to invest in security.

The contributors to this book also indicate a wide range of factors militating against security and, accordingly, the many ways in which people living under different circumstances make efforts to strengthen their sense of security.

For convenience, this book has been divided into three parts, although themes necessarily interact and overlap. The first four chapters, following this introduction, concentrate on the political economy of human security, indicating a framework where state politics, popular resistance, market forces and the material struggle for survival interact. The next four chapters focus on the existential dimensions of human security, often summarised under the general heading of identity, looking largely but not exclusively at majority/minority relationships. The final section, comprising three chapters, emphasise the varying role of state power and social planning in creating conditions for (in-)security..

Writing about popular protests in Bolivia, Ton Salman describes a common dilemma: Although public protest was risky in Bolivia before the election of Evo Morales in 2006, it was nonetheless perceived as a 'lesser evil' when compared to the government's policies, which placed much of the population in an extremely precarious economic situation. Salman thus shows that people are not necessarily obsessed with security in the sense of safety, but may expose themselves to considerable dangers in order to enhance their long-term security.

Writing from Morocco, Bernhard Venema analyses the economics of ethnicity and state power. The development of a capitalist market for land and produce in the Middle Atlas has made the local Berbers' economic situation precarious and unstable. Venema shows how appeals to religion and tradition have strengthened the local communities, often in ways inimical to the state's aims, and rarely with clear economic benefits, but giving the tribal members a sense of continuity and belonging.

Sandra Evers, writing about the precariousness of everyday life in the Seychelles, is concerned with the ways in which the Seychellois state has used an official security discourse as a pretext for limiting people's personal freedom, and how the result has in fact been an extremely insecure situation for most Seychellois. The government, she writes, has even tried to monopolise Seychellois memory and history. Evers' analysis shows how limitations on individual freedom may threaten security, and is complementary to Salman's perspective in illuminating ways.

Marjo de Theije and Ellen Bal argue, in their chapter about Brazilian goldminers in Suriname, that while taking apparently extreme physical risks, the goldminers nonetheless make short-term investments in trust and, in the longer term, believe in material security as a compensation for the risks taken.

The second part opens with Ellen Bal and Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff's chapter about the reflexive identity work engaged in by Hindustanis (local term for people of Indian descent) in Suriname and in the Netherlands. The Dutch-Hindustani are doubly removed from their ancestral land, having undertaken two intercontinental migrations in historical memory. The chapter is about existential security, threatened by alienation and a sense of insecurity.

Edien Bartels and her co-authors, also writing from the Netherlands, continue the discussion of cultural identity as a dimension of security, showing how minority identities may enhance the internal sense of security in the group, but may lead to anxieties and (subjectively experienced) insecurity in greater society. Both majorities and minorities are inclined to feel insecure about their belonging and sense of identification in contemporary Western European societies.

With Andre Droogers' chapter on Pomeranian Lutheran migrants in Brazil, the focus is moved away from Western Europe, but the issues of identity and existential security remain salient. Working with historical as well as contemporary materials, Droogers demonstrates the crucial role of the German Lutheran church in creating a sense of cultural continuity for the 'Teuto-Brazilians' historically, and how the group has tried to find new sources of collective identity when the German identity became politically problematic during the twentieth century. Like several of the other contributors, Droogers emphasises belonging and collective organisation as conditions for security.

Also starting with a focus on the symbolic or meaningful dimension of security, Oscar Salemink moves, in his wide-ranging analysis of spiritual healing in Vietnam, towards a demonstration of the interrelationship between existential security, physical (health) security, and economic security. Where the state and market are unable to deliver credible solutions to such anxieties, spirit mediums seem better equipped to deal with the totality of Vietnamese's insecurities.

Opening the final part of the book, Lenie Brouwer delineates her field to a working-class and minority-dense area in Amsterdam, where local authorities have set up Internet and other computer facilities for the citizens in an effort to empower them and facilitate their participation in greater society. By discussing how the clients at a digital centre use ICT to enhance their integration in Dutch society, Brouwer shows how security and freedom (in the sense of autonomy) can be two sides of the same coin, even if in other contexts they may be mutually opposed.

Marion den Uyl, also writing from Amsterdam, analyses policy and ethnicity in Bijlmermeer, a neighbourhood built in the 1970s as a 'model suburb', but today largely inhabited by minorities and seen by the city authorities as a problem area. Drawing on the concepts of trust and social capital, den Uyl suggests that security is unevenly distributed in Bijlmermeer, and that the character of the social networks inside and outside of the area, not the built environment itself, account for the high levels of insecurity. Demolition and rebuilding is, in a word, unlikely to help.

Finally, Dick Kooiman's chapter about the precarious situation of princely states in India on the eve of Independence (1947) shows, as a useful contrast to

Evers' analysis of an omnipresent political power, how former rulers deprived of political power may concentrate their efforts on the ritual and ceremonial aspects of their powerless office, thereby creating a sense of continuity and security among themselves and their followers. It would arguably not be too far-fetched to note the similarities with the ceremonial monarchies of Western Europe, which symbolise continuity in a world otherwise marked with change and lack of predictability.

Security and belonging

Security and belonging in the whirlwind of the contemporary world are common themes in all the chapters of this book, in spite of their empirical diversity and differing emphases. Although people may in a traditional past have been no more secure in their lives than we are – in many cases they were far less secure – at least they tended to belong to a community by default. Nobody challenged their group membership, they knew who to turn to in times of need and scarcity, and they had relatively clear notions of the nature of the moral universe in which they lived. When contemporary social theorists speak of our era as somehow more insecure than the past, this is roughly what they tend to have in mind. Zygmunt Bauman's liquid modernity (Bauman 2000) concerns the floating, shifting qualities of values and social structure in our era; Ulrich Beck's risk society (Beck 1992/1986) emphasises the growth of man-made risks which have become incalculable in their consequences; and Anthony Giddens's term post-traditional society (Giddens 1991) describes a society where a tradition can no longer be taken for granted, but must actively be defended vis-à-vis its alternatives, which had now become visible. These concepts, and the analyses underpinning them, suggest that the research questions raised by Durkheim and his collaborators a century ago, concerning the conditions of social integration and the human consequences of social disintegration, remain more relevant than ever before. The chapters in this book, briefly summarised above, speak for themselves. Allow me to add some personal thoughts.

Henrik Ibsen's plays from the latter third of the nineteenth century are widely respected for their psychological depth and their accurate depiction of profound contradictions in the bourgeois family of pre-First World War Europe.

However, in some important ways his earlier plays *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* (Ibsen 1972 [1867–8]) speak more directly to the sensibilities of the early 21st century than the dramas dealing with late-19th century bourgeois society. *Brand*, arguably Ibsen's first masterpiece, was a play about a Protestant fundamentalist despairing at the moral decay and confusion he saw all around him, and his attempts to bracket off his own existence and that of his flock of faithful, from the surrounding turmoil. His attempt to escape from modernity can be described as an attempt to create a controlled space where all questions could be answered, a community which was predictable and morally consistent. *Brand* is a puritan in the literal sense of the term; he seeks purity and simplicity. By contrast, the protagonist of Ibsen's next play, *Peer Gynt*, is an entrepreneur and an adventurer who lies and cheats his way across the world, who makes a small fortune in the, by then illicit, slave trade, who poses as a prophet in North Africa and as a cosmopolitan gentleman on a Mediterranean coast, before returning to his native mountain valley only to discover that his personality lacks a core. The struggles involving collective identification in the contemporary era, with which much of my research for nearly twenty years has incidentally been concerned, revolve around the questions raised by Ibsen in the 1860s. "Be who you are/fully and wholly/not piecemeal and divided," proclaims *Brand*, a prophet not only of evangelical Christianity but also of the integrity of the person. *Peer Gynt*, for his part, boasts of having received impulses from all over the world, introducing himself in the fourth act as a "Norwegian of birth, but citizen of the world in spirit". Whereas *Brand* can be said to inhabit a closed universe, *Peer Gynt's* universe lacks boundaries. The two characters cover, between them, the span between fundamentalism and collectivism on the one hand, and voluntarism and individualism on the other. *Brand* stands for security, while *Peer* stands for freedom and insecurity. The contrast between the two, and attempts to stake out third ways, are part and parcel of the experience of the children of immigrants in Western Europe, to mention just one contemporary parallel. Notwithstanding the chapters in this book which show that freedom presupposes security and vice versa, in this kind of context it is easy to see that the two need not always be complementary, but can be opposing in an either-or way.

In order to begin to understand security in the sense of social belonging, we first have to consider personhood. I first realised this, belatedly, when some years ago I was writing a book about identity politics (Eriksen 2004), realising one day that I had passed far too lightly over the groundwork of studying the foundations of any kind of identity, that is the person.

The Latin term *persona* originally meant mask, which indicates that personal identity is shifting and can be treacherous (cf. Mauss 1960). Life is a stage (Shakespeare), and personality is like an onion – layer upon layer, but with no core (Ibsen). When all the layers of makeup and make-believe are peeled away, do we then encounter the real person – or do we instead meet a faceless monster? The answer from social science is: neither. Even “real persons” have to play out their realness through an identity which is recognisable to others. He or she must, for example, possess a linguistic identity. The phantasmagoric point zero, where the “real person” coalesces with the faceless one, is tantamount to autism. There is no “other person” behind the social person (see Morris 1994 for a full treatment).

Personal identity is shaped through social experiences. Some of them are easily forgotten, some can be interpreted to fit a present state one wants to belong to (it is never too late to obtain a tragic history or a happy childhood if one really needs one), some may be more or less fictional, and yet others cannot be modified at all. In this sense, personal biographies are reminiscent of national historiography and religious myths of origin. Personal experiences are as malleable as national histories, neither more nor less. They can attach us to a great number of different communities based on gender, class, place, political persuasion, literary taste, sexual orientation, national identity, religion and so on. Yet they cannot be bent indefinitely; certain facts about ourselves are unchangeable. One can deny them, but they keep returning – as the ageing Peer Gynt discovers in the final act. As Bob Marley once put it: “You can’t run away from yourself”.

Peer tries to do just this, and he sacrifices existential security on the altar of unfettered freedom; Brand does the opposite. A parallel to the contrast between Peer Gynt and Brand is found in a metaphor used among some West African peoples. In describing what a person is they compare it with a tortoise. It

may stick its head out, making itself visible and vulnerable, but it then retracts its head into the shell, rendering itself hidden and invincible. This metaphor seems to travel well into the world of mass media and reality TV, that infamous Dutch invention. Some of our contemporary tortoises prefer to stay inside their shells most of the time, while others live almost continuously with their heads stuck out for all to see.

Secure and insecure sociality

What the tortoise metaphor does not claim, is that there exists an insulated, pure self in the inner recesses of the individual, a self which is independent of its surroundings. Such a creature is, besides, difficult to envision. For example, we depend on thinking through linguistic categories, and if we should usually keep our thoughts to ourselves, at least we share them with a few confidantes. The metaphor of the tortoise, transposed to contemporary modern societies, is best understood as stating that human beings switch between being socially extroverted and directed towards the open, uncertain external world, and being socially introverted, limited to that which is secure and familiar. It deals not so much with the internal life of the individual as with two forms of sociality; the secure and the insecure, the closed and the open.

Secure sociality moves in a sphere of undisputed we-feeling. In this realm one may be backstage; one can speak one's dialect, laugh at in-jokes, savour the smells of one's childhood and know that one has an intuitive, embodied cultural competence which one succeeds in performing without even trying. In a field of secure sociality, everyone is predictable to each other, and if they are not, there are ways of demarcating displeasure which are immediately understood by others. A relaxed intimacy engulfs secure sociality. It is related to Tönnies' concept of *Wesenswille*, which in his view characterised life in the *Gemeinschaft*, that traditional community where everybody knew each other and had a limited horizon of opportunities. The *Wesenswille* recommends itself, it makes us behave along certain lines without asking critical questions.

Insecure sociality is, to a much greater extent, characterised by improvisation and negotiations over situational definitions. People who encounter one another in this kind of field are much less secure as to whom they

are dealing with, and as a result, they are less sure as to who they are looking at in the mirror. The opportunities are more varied and more open to a person in a state of insecure sociality than to someone who rests contented in a condition of predictable routines of secure sociality, but the risks are also much greater.

Insecure sociality appears, typically, in cosmopolitan cities, along trade routes and – especially after the industrial revolution – in societies undergoing rapid change. Suddenly, something new happens, and one finds oneself in a setting with no preordained script to be followed. One is faced with the task of rebuilding the ship at sea.

A typical reaction to this kind of insecurity is withdrawal, but it is equally common to try to redefine the situation to make it resemble something familiar. When Columbus became the first European to set foot in the Caribbean, he was convinced that he had reached India. Later conquistadors were aware that they had arrived in a country which had not been described in the Bible, that is an entirely new land with unknown and undescribed inhabitants. Many of them still tried to interpret their experiences through biblical interpretations. In *The Conquest of America*, Tzvetan Todorov (1989) shows that the Aztecs and the Spaniards interpreted each other into their respective pre-existent world-views. Neither group was ready to acknowledge that something entirely new had entered their world, which required new cognitive maps or even an intellectual revolution. In a word, they were not yet modern.

Is insecurity necessarily bad?

The work amounting to making insecure situations secure takes many shapes. Imperialist powers may try to reshape their new lands to make them less threateningly different, or they erect physical boundaries against the aliens, as the architects of apartheid did in South Africa and Israel is doing presently. Dominated peoples either may try to imitate their rulers to mitigate the sense of insecurity on both sides, or by establishing their own boundaries – separatism, revolution or independence.

Is insecurity a good or a bad thing? That depends. In social anthropological theory, different terms are being used, which provide different answers to the question. Mary Douglas (1966), who belongs to a tradition focusing on the study

of social integration and assuming it to be a good thing, regards departures from the existing order as anomalies. They are cumbersome since they do not fit in. Many person who appear as anomalies, besides, become anomic, that is normless; alienated, confused and unhappy. In Douglas' great intellectual mentor Durkheim's view, anomie was an important cause of suicide (Durkheim 2002/1899).

An opposite approach is found in the early work of Fredrik Barth (1963), who, in the early 1960s, directed a research programme about the entrepreneur in Northern Norway. According to Barth's definition, the entrepreneur was someone who bridged formerly discrete spheres; who found new commodities to sell in new locations, new ways of running a business, new niches and so on. He thrived on uncertainty and change. In his purest form, Barth's entrepreneur was a Peer Gynt; poorly integrated into the moral community, but hardly a candidate for suicide. It may perhaps be said that the entrepreneur fares like everybody else in the age of neoliberalism, which values freedom so highly but neglects security: Whenever one has success, the range of options and the scope of personal freedom feel fantastic, but the moment one hits the wall, freedom is reinterpreted as insecurity and the choices as a kind of coercive compulsion. The entrepreneur becomes an anomaly the moment he fails to succeed.

It has been well documented that identification in our day and age can be an insecure kind of task with many difficulties and poor predictability. People who formerly had no mutual contact are brought together, new cultural forms arise, and the dominant ideology dictating that life should consist in free choices puts pressure on everyone. Good old recipes for the good life may not have been lost, but they are conventionally discarded as reactionary and inhibiting. The result may just as well be frustrated confusion as positive self-realisation.

Even without the aid of this kind of freedom ideology, capitalism is capable of creating insecurity and new social dynamics. It has been a massive force, uprooting people from their conventional ways of doing things, moving them physically, giving them new tasks and bringing them into contact with new others. When mining began in the copper-rich areas of the eastern parts of present-day Zambia, just after the First World War, workers were recruited from all over the colony. They spoke many languages and had many different customs

and kinship systems, but very soon, the workers began to sort each other, in a rough and ready way, on the basis of ideas about social distance (see e.g. Mitchell 1956). The people hailing from the western regions were seen as a category apart, likewise the Lozi speakers, the matrilineal peoples and so on. Some of the groups had experienced regular contact before urbanisation, and had conventionalised ways of dealing with each other. Some even enjoyed an institutionalised joking relationship with each other. (This wonderful African institution deserves being exported elsewhere. Perhaps Israeli and Palestinians, or Christians and Muslims in Europe, might want to give it a try?)

Insecurity and rapid change

J. Clyde Mitchell (1956), who studied urbanisation in the Copperbelt in the 1950s, once described a situation in a beer hall. A man and a woman are drinking beer. A second man joins them. He has a few coins which he puts on the table, intending to spend them on beer in a minute. Suddenly, the woman snatches a coin and sings, in a teasing voice, "An X has lost his money..." She belongs to the Y's, who have a joking relationship to the X'es. Instead of joining in the laughter, the man becomes angry and says that he is far from being an X; as a matter of fact, he is a Z, and the Z's have no joking relationship whatsoever to the Y's. The woman retorts that to her, the X'es and the Z's are the same kind anyway. (Norwegians who are treated as Swedes in Copenhagen, something that happens very often, can relate to the man's reaction.)

This vignette illustrates the social insecurity that arises when societies change quickly. Just as a fish discovers the water only the moment it is being hauled out of it, so does identification become an explicit problem only when it can no longer be taken for granted. The Bisa, the Lozi and other groups who met in mining towns like Luanshya, developed ethnic identities which they had never had before, but they also immediately began to question the significance of their new ethnic identities. Trade unions were also important in their new lives, and quite soon, Africans began to differentiate from another through education and achievements in the modern sector of society.

Notwithstanding the rigid racial hierarchy of the Copperbelt, which was sometimes reluctantly bracketed by the anthropologists working at the mercy of

the Colonial Service, the newly urbanised Africans were thrust into a post-traditional existence, where their former taken-for-granted had to be defended, or else could be questioned. Another telling example of this transition is the changing significance of female circumcision among Somali women in exile. Because of the civil war and the near-total dissolution of the Somali state, a considerable proportion of the Somali population is exiled – many of them in neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia, but there are also many in Europe and North America. In local communities in Somalia, nearly all women are circumcised. Among the few who avoid the knife are, incidentally, daughters of deeply religious men who have studied the Quran and thus know that Islam does not prescribe female circumcision.

Entering post-traditional society

In Somalia, according to the anthropologist Aud Talle (2003), an uncircumcised female body is perceived as imperfect, unappetising and grotesque. Most Somali women in Somalia are oblivious of the fact that most women in the world are not circumcised. Then some of them are dislocated to England, Canada or Norway, and soon discover that the attitudes towards circumcision in their immediate surroundings are different from what they have been used to. The very woman who was pure and perfect on the dry savannah of the Horn is suddenly transformed into a mutilated victim on the streets of London. Nothing has changed except the circumstances. But this is enough for a seed of doubt to be sown. Will she really choose circumcision for her daughters, when nobody except a few Africans do it in her new homeland? Is circumcision really necessary for a girl to become a proper woman? She may decide not to let her daughters be circumcised, despite the fact that this decision hurls her into cultural insecurity. Suddenly, she no longer follows the hallowed script detailing how to be a good Somali woman; she is forced to improvise and to trust her own judgements.

Cases of female circumcision which are known in Western countries lead to strong indignation – some speak of it as “moral panic” – in the majority; but the fact is that in this case, the path from a traditional to a post-traditional identity can be surprisingly short. As many as half of the Somali women

interviewed in a Canadian survey indicated that they did not want their daughters to be circumcised. Some of them had only spent a couple of years in the country. In Somalia, the figure might have been two or three per cent.

When a Somali woman begins to question her own cultural tradition in this way, a deep ambivalence begins to ferment. If you have been engulfed in an unquestioned tradition your whole life and make a single individual choice contradicting the traditional script, it is as if the entire fabric becomes unravelled. In theory, from that point nothing prevents you from asking other questions to tradition – why should I accept being subordinate to men; why are we Muslims; what exactly does it mean to be a Muslim?

Most Somali women in exile may limit themselves to asking a few critical questions to their traditions, but their daughters tend to be less modest. A kind of liberal attitude which is widespread in our societies, not least among those who want to help the new arrivals to become similar to themselves, may nonetheless result in a mixture of pity and resignation when it turns out that many of the women in question are not willing to sever all ties (or chains, according to the liberals) to their dated and oppressive tradition. Sometimes, they are under pressure from their surroundings; perhaps their fathers, husbands and brothers do not want them to learn the language of their adopted country, and they may resort to violence or the threat of violence to prevent “their” women from becoming “liberated”. But this is hardly the whole story. Many immigrants – both women and men – remain faithful to tradition because they are familiar with its feel and smell, it gives them a sense of security and a clear, safe identity, and besides, it offers resources they need to survive; such as work, a social network and the right to be themselves. They feel the cold breath of the chronic insecurity of late modern society, and some of them immediately withdraw into their shell to avoid being infected with pneumonia.

What exactly it is that provides a sense of security, varies. You may be an entrepreneur in one place, but then you become a dreaded anomaly in another. There is no simple answer available, to analysts or to citizens. Those who demand the total victory of individualism and free choice, forget their own need for security – I have more than once observed Norwegian anthropologists at international conferences, huddled together around their own table and enjoying

themselves quite a bit – and they also tend to forget that rights imply duties. Yet, those who romanticise the intimate, tradition-bound communities are guilty of an equally grave error, since they tend to forget that no such communities recommend themselves; and that it is by virtue of courageous leaps into the unknown, into risk and insecurity, that the world changes. Humans, in other words, have both roots and boots.

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Such is one predicament of security facing us in a world increasingly made up by post-traditional societies. The theoretical questions about individual and society which were raised by the likes of Tönnies and Durkheim a century ago remain valid, but they need to be refashioned in order to fit the requirements of an era of mass migration, global capitalism and hegemonic individualism.

We have considered the literary characters Brand and Peer Gynt, Zambian miners and Somali women in exile. Let me now, in a bid to sharpen the argument, move to a late modern incarnation of Peer Gynt, who does not travel to the Orient, but who comes from the Orient to make himself a life as an entrepreneur. This man is initially a worriless migrant who regards the world as his oyster.

In the famous opening sequence of *The Satanic Verses* (Rushdie 1988), where the actors Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta fall out of Air India's flight 420 from Bombay to London, later to be fished out of the English Channel, Gibreel improvises an English translation of an old Hindi film song: "O, my shoes are Japanese/These trousers English, if you please/On my head, red Russian hat/my heart's Indian for all that". As every Indian above a certain age knows, the source is Raj Kapoor's film *Mr. 420* from 1955. (In Hindi, the number 420 has connotations of sin and treachery. The kinship with Peer Gynt is clear!)

In an essay written a year or two after becoming the victim of an Iranian fatwa, Rushdie explained the deeper meaning of the book. It "celebrates hybridity and fears the absolutism of Purity," he explains (Rushdie 1991). Yet, both his great novel and the dramatic aftermath of its publication indicate that Rushdie's penchant for impurity is countered by two formidable antagonists.

Both of them can be seen as absolutist, both demand purity, and both prefer simplicity to complexity. It is well known, even among many of those who have not read Rushdie's novel, that it is a sophisticated satire lampooning literalist forms of Islam. It is less known that the book also, and almost to the same degree, makes fun of Margaret Thatcher's Britain. It was during her tenure that Norman Tebbit invented "the Tebbit test", which entailed that people who lived in Britain but did not cheer for a British cricket team at international matches, were dangerous fifth-columnists. Cricket is a huge sport in many of the British immigrants' countries of origin, not least in India and Pakistan. Rushdie, thus, does not only turn against religious fanaticism, but also cultural intolerance and nationalist homogenisation. Rushdie might, in the same breath, have criticised multiculturalism, being an ideology which prefers security to insecurity, and which – according to its critics – thereby sacrifices freedom. Rushdie prefers the impure hybrids to the clearly delineated groups, which is not an uncontroversial option in a world where there is a great demand for simplifications. In his seminal book on nationalism, Ernest Gellner (1983) compares the homogenising force of nationalism with Modigliani's paintings, where "neat flat surfaces are clearly separated from each other, it is generally plain where one begins and another ends, and there is little if any ambiguity or overlap", contrasting them with Kokoschka's impressionist canvases made up by a multitude of tiny specks of colour (the pre-nationalist world). A few years later, Ulf Hannerz (1996) suggested, in a friendly critique of Gellner, that perhaps Kokoschka had a future after all, thanks to the emergence of new, changing cultural mosaics. Whatever the case may be, the contrast between Modigliani and Kokoschka may offer a better metaphor for the tensions characterising group integration and disintegration in the present era, than simplistic contrasts between individualist neoliberalism and fundamentalist collectivism. A world characterised by many small differences was, in the modern era, reshaped to a world consisting of a few major ones – the ethnic, religious and national ones – but the development hinted at by Hannerz shows that the last word is by no means said yet.

Rushdie's appeal to the liberating qualities of post-traditional society has a formidable opponent in another postcolonial author of global significance, namely the Nobel laureate V. S. Naipaul, whose belief in the actual freedom

involved in so-called free choice is less sanguine than Rushdie's. Naipaul has repeatedly expressed deep suspicion regarding the term exile. He sees it as a concept of the privileged few, which seems to say that the opportunities of the individual are limitless, that movement is enriching, and that one is somehow placed in an exalted position as judge and jury if one is fortunate enough to be in exile. Sir Vidia regards the condition of the exile as a punishment, not as a release. The condition might give increased insight, but the price is stiff: lifelong solitude and lack of belonging.

In Naipaul's books, we encounter a world which appears comical in his early work – the actors are clowns who inadvertently parody the people they try to mimic – but which gradually turns sombre and dark: the actors grapple for something they have lost but will never find; a core, an attachment. Although Naipaul, like many other postcolonial writers, deals with fragmented and dislocated identities in his work, he never celebrates them. To him, the loss of community, security and roots is merely tragic.

In Rushdie, the reader encounters a world where insecurity is just an other word for freedom, where the right to create and re-create oneself by mixing this and that is enriching and liberating. The span between Brand and Peer Gynt can easily be recognised in the relationship between Naipaul and Rushdie. It is in the tension between these positions that we should begin to look for an understanding of our era's simultaneous obsession with freedom and security. This book is a beginning, showing not only that the debate continues in all continents, but also that human security could be an eye-opener for a social anthropology which struggles to find its place in a post-cultural relativist, thoroughly disenchanted world.

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