Risking security

Paradoxes of social cohesion

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Mister Rector Magnificus, Ladies and Gentlemen,

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*, although the definition shifted somewhat – although not quite as much as the term "race". Spencer's pair of concepts can, at least for now, finally be proclaimed dead as a dodo, half a century after the fruition of Talcott Parsons' ambitious structural-functionalist theory of society – which was at the time familiar to every sociologist and many other social scientists, but which is today virtually unknown to 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 and so on – but apart from a handful of Marxist words which have entered the everyday language, notably ideology, this jargon has virtually become obsolete again. "Culture", used in the anthropological sense, has been with us for over 130 years now, but many shift uneasily in their seats whenever it is used without a ritual invocation of inverted commas.

Regarding the concept which forms the backdrop of this lecture, "security", it is not a technical term and has therefore, being part of everyday language, outlived most more specialised terms. In its 5,000 word entry on the word, the *Oxford English Dictionary*traces it back to 1432, and groups its definitions of security into twelve main categories. Even with the slghtly vacuous qualifier "human" ahead, the term is almost impossibly vague and wide-ranging. Introduced as an applied social science term in 1994 by the United Nations Development Programme in its Human Development Report of that year (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 limit its range of signification and operationalise it, have been met with hostility and skepticism among some scholars, while others defend its place in the analytical vocabulary of the social sciences (Alkire 2002, *Security Dialogue* 2004). Some deem it hopelessly fuzzy and impossible to operationalise; others have argued that it adds little to extant terminology. It could nonetheless be argued 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, to speak of my own chosen discipline, it may in fact turn out to be a concept we have been looking for in the last decade, a concept which may enable anthropologists to update and rephrase some of the classic, but chronically unresolved problems of the subject, notably the ones to do with social cohesion and integration, stability and collective identity. The eclectic methodology of contemporary social anthropology moreover makes that discipline 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 they may regard a passing anecdote or a chance event as just as valuable as the results of structured interviews. They relate to media, statistics and history writing, they collect life stories and sit in at public meetings and rituals, and they do their best, within the bounds of common decency, to peek over their 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 can be seen as the most humanist of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities.

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, offers a promising framework for future anthropological research. Using human security as a unifying concept for many different research projects, which the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the VU has recently decided to do, can counter internal fragmentation and redirect theory in necessary directions. In her inaugural lecture delivered here two years ago, Professor Donna Winslow (2003) offered a magisterial presentation of the recent literature on human security, as well as a discussion of the implications of the concept for international cooperation. Among other things, she noted 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, admittedly biased, vantage-point of the anthropologist, this reads like a shift from the harder social sciences such as economics to the kind of qualitative approaches that anthropologists represent.

Although the concept of human security, as it is currently being 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, clearly bounded 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 on the one hand and modern or individualist societies on the other. The human security theorist *par excellence*was nevertheless Emile 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-paced change.

The first generations of social scientists 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 model. Life in the Melanesian societies studied by the likes of Bronislaw Malinowski and Reo Fortune appeared profoundly insecure; people seemed 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, also customarily studied by anthropologists, they 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, which could be described more accurately as an almost chronic inability to look properly after their relatives economically. Ethnographies from India show that very many Indian women live in constant fear of male violence, men worry about dowry payments for their daughters and a thousand lesser expenses, and that everybody fears downward mobility, whether individual or collective.

Now, security naturally refers to much more than this – and that 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. Well, 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 the problems of human security. Nobody is immune. Nonbelievers often assume that religious people have a greater existential security than they do themselves, but it is an unconvincing general thesis. 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 an inhabitant of Amsterdam in the year 2005 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.

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You will by now have discovered that I could easily have spent the entire lecture discussing the concept of human security, but I fear we would all have

emerged none the wiser for it. Suffice it to say, without any further qualification for now, that it is a concept of great promise to the social sciences, which allows us to raise old questions in new ways, to develop interdisciplinary research projects and to grapple with both the huge global questions engulfing us all and local questions at the community level. It needs fleshing out in many directions.

The aspect of human security with which I will henceforth be concerned, is that to do with belonging. 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 most of them 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 a clear notion of the moral universe within which they lived. When contemporary social theorists speak of our era as somehow more insecure than the past, this is roughly what they 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) refers not to increased objective risks, but a heightened awareness of unmanageable risks; and Anthony Giddens's term *post-traditional society* (Giddens 1991) describes not a society where traditions are extinct, but one where a tradition can no longer be taken for granted, but must actively be defended vis-à-vis its alternatives, which have now become visible. Such 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. This I will now try to demonstrate.

Henrik Ibsen's plays from the latter half 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*, Ibsen's first masterpiece, was a play about a Christian 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 word; a good Protestant, 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, gravitate around the questions raised by Ibsen in the 1860s. "Be who you are fully and wholly, not piecemeal and partially," proclaims Brand, a prophet not only of evangelical Christianity but also of the integrity of the person. Peer Gynt, on his part, boasts of having received impulses from all over the world, introducing himself in the fourth act as a "citizen of the world in spirit" (*verdensborger av gemytt*). 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.

In order to begin to understand security in the sense of social belonging, we first have to consider personhood as such. I first realised this, belatedly, when some years ago I was writing a book about identity politics, realising one day that I had not done the groundwork of properly studying the foundations of *any* kind of identity, that is the person. This led me, among other things, in

the direction of developmental psychology and evolutionary theory, but that is another story. For now, we shall restrict ourselves to the person and his or her forms of attachment, seen as the basis for security.

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 can be 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 "authentic persons" have to play out their authenticity 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", cultureless and pure, coalesces with the faceless one, is tantamount to autism. There is no "other person" behind the social person.

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 needs it), 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, when he literally meets his maker. As Bob Marley once put it: "You can't run away from yourself".

Peer tries to to just this, and he thus sacrifices security for the sake of 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.

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 terrain of undisputed we-feeling. In this realm you may be *backstage*; you can speak your dialect, laugh at in-jokes, savour the smells of your childhood and know that you have an intuitive, embodied cultural competence which you succeed 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. Whoever meet 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 in order 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 was not 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 Azteks and the Spaniards interpreted each other into their respective pre-existent world-views. Neither group was ready to acknowledge that something completely new had entered their world, which required new cognitive maps or even an intellectual revolution. In a word, they were not yet modern.

The processes that create insecure situations secure take many shapes. Imperialist powers may try to reshape their new lands to make them less threateningly different, or they may erect physical boundaries against the aliens, as the architects of apartheid did in South Africa and Israel is doing presently. Dominated peoples may either try to imitate their rulers in order to mitigate the sense of insecurity on both sides, or they may establish their own

boundaries following the lead of the dominating group – 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, seem to become anomic, that is normless; alienated, confused and unhappy. In Douglas' intellectual mentor Durkheim's view, anomie was an important cause of suicide.

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. Safe, 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. 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 to other continents. Perhaps Jews and Palestinians, or Christians and Muslims, might want to give it a try?)

J. Clyde Mitchell (1956), who studied urbanisation in the Copperbelt in the 1950s, famously describes a situation in a beer hall in his *Kalela Dance*. 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 laugther, 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, which 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 bracketed by the anthropologists who, even if politically radical, were working at the mercy of the Colonial Office, the newly urbanised Africans were thrust into a post-traditional existence, where their former taken-for-granteds 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 manage to evade the knife are, incidentally, daughters of deeply religious men who have studied the Qu'ran and therefore know that Islam does not prescribe female circumcision.

In Somalia, according to the anthropologist Aud Talle (2003), an uncircumcised female body is conventionally 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 accustomed 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 just 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 all your 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 are 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 many 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.

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.

I have spoken of 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 an worriless migrant who regards the world as his oyster.

In the famous opening sequence of *The Satanic Verses*, where 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 evident.)

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 masterful 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 knotty and multilayered 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 also 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, and this 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. In an interview, Naipaul expressed deep suspicion of the term exile. He saw it as a concept of the privileged few, which seemed to say that the opportunities of the individual are limitless, that movement is enriching, ant 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 cost was high: lifelong solitude and lack of belonging.

In Naipaul's books, we encounter a world which appears comical in his early work – the characters are clowns who inadvertently parody the people they try to mimic – but which gradually turns sombre and dark: the persons 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.

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It is time to wind up. When I began to think seriously about this lecture, I saw the options – at least some of them – and made a decision which may have been risky, that is to say insecure. Instead of providing an overview of sorts of the social science literature on human security, or outlining a research programme, I decided to single out one dimension of the security complex, namely existential security as opposed to insecurity, and try my best to convince you, perhaps especially those of you who are not anthropologists, that it can be worthwhile to carry out qualitative, interpretive studies of people's quest for a balance between freedom and security, and that in order to do so, we have to – in the words of Geertz – "to figure out what the hell they think they're up to" (Geertz 1983: 58).

There is a final point, which I almost forgot. The paradox of cohesion mentioned in the title of the lecture has only been dealt with indirectly. But it is quite simple really. Every social group is like an inverted refrigerator. The purpose of the fridge is to create coldness inside, but in order to do so, it is forced to create some outward heat. With groups, it is the other way around. Their purpose is to create a cozy, trusting atmosphere inside – and in the present world, that can be very hard work indeed. But in order to create this ambience of trust and intimacy, it must by necessity emanate some outward coldness. No convincing, simple solution is offered to this dilemma by politicians or social philosophers, but as social scientists at least we have the privilege of being near the question.

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Before finishing, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Vrije Universiteit

Amsterdam for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime by appointing me to a Special Chair in the Anthropology of Human Security. This is a promising, so far largely undeveloped field which will enable me to pursue my old research interests as well as forcing me to develop intellectually along new lines. My relationship with the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology began a year and a half ago, following an invitation from Dr. Oscar Salemink to give some guest lectures. I was immediately struck by the vitality and variety of the department, the breadth and quality of the work carried out there and its congenial atmosphere. It is an up and coming anthropology department, and I am proud to be associated with it. I wish to thank his Excellency, the Chancellor, and the Board of Trustees of the Vrije Universiteit for making this possible. Dean Klandermans has impressed me thoroughly, not just as a more than competent leader and a keen intellectual mind in his own right, but perhaps especially for being a dean with a visionary research policy. In these times we need more of his kind. At the Department of anthropology, I have been warmly received by Professor Andre Droogers, who quickly introduced me to his own fascinating research group; Professor Donna Winslow has been an enthusiastic guide into her field, and among my many exciting new acquaintances at this faculty, I especially want to thank Dr. Oscar Salemink, who has been the nexus of my relationship to this university, and with whom I already have several joint ventures going. So far I have received all the support and generosity anyone could expect, and I am looking forward to years of fruitful collaboration with the Free University of Amsterdam.

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