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**Human Insecurities in Southeast Asia: Uncertainty, Risk and Trust**

**Victor T. King, Institute of Asian Studies**

Our seminar advertisement suggests that we are going to examine such matters as ‘climate change and its social and economic impact, transnational crimes and the consequences for local communities, clean and drinkable water, indigenous land rights, sexual violence and forced migration’. Some of the causes of increasing human insecurity are then identified within social changes arising from national, regional and global events and processes with reference to the rather vague notion of economic integration, but also the more directly apprehended occurrences of the ‘scramble for national and natural resources, including energy resources, armed conflicts and wars…, accelerated urbanization, large scale commercialization of everyday life and local economies, local and global crimes, and climate change’.

This is an enormous agenda, and the original conception of a seminar covering crime, land rights, climate, water, migrant workers, development, security policies, and regionalisation has not been realised. Why, well for one reason, a number of my colleagues in UBD thought that it was not relevant to their research. My sense is that they interpreted the seminar theme not in local or human terms but in terms of international relations, politics at the national and regional level, security and strategic studies, in other words security and insecurity as a preoccupation of national governments and not in terms of local level and individual insecurities. And this is, of course, one of the central problems in examining security and insecurity – at what level do we address it? And when we decide on this, we find that the different levels or spaces of security and insecurity may well be in conflict. In other words, actions taken to ensure the security and integrity of the nation-state or increasingly in the case of ASEAN to secure regional peace, stability and cooperation, may work against the rights, freedoms and security of individuals and communities. Ideally the security of individuals and communities and the political and physical integrity and security of the nation-state within which they live should be mutually reinforcing, but this is certainly not always the case. On a number of occasions in my own experience, and I am referring to my circumstances as a citizen of the United Kingdom, the decisions of my political leaders, taken, as they argue, in the interests of the nation-state cut across and compromise my own sense of what I need to be secure and my immediate community’s perception of what is needed to ensure our local level collective security. This is hardly surprising; national-level policy-making in a complex society will invariably affect the interests and the perceptions of security of some segment or segments of society. And these actions are clearly identifiable for me at least in the UK – a reduction in the resources provided for the police force (as a result of the need to cut the public deficit, but this increases the fear and anxiety about crime levels and the threat to individual security and well-being), increases in taxation (which take money out of our pockets which we might have used to ensure that we are more secure), increases in higher education fees (which makes it difficult for families to ensure that their children will have the training and education necessary to ensure their future occupational and economic security) and so on. Now these are obviously somewhat trivial examples of insecurity in a wealthy country. How much more serious for those countries in which one’s very life is at risk because of inter-ethnic conflict, civil war, uncontrolled violence and crime, poverty and unemployment, disease, environmental destruction, and loss of rights in land. And that some of these problems have to be laid at the door of the governments which preside over their citizens because either they have generated some of them, or failed to address them, or quite simply they do not have the capacity or will or interest to help solve them.

So what are we going to do in this two/three-day seminar to occupy ourselves productively? Well, we clearly see clean, safe, secure and reliable water supplies as a security issue in Southeast Asia. Land grabbing by state and private organisations, population displacement through transmigration and forced eviction, and inter-ethnic strife and the construction of ethnic stereotypes; street homelessness as an individual and charitable problem and not one for which the state is responsible, as well as health care arrangements; the physical safety of children on their way to school; mass media, language and human security; as well as natural disasters, local responses to these and disaster risk reduction, management and support; the plight and security of migrant workers across the region; youth violence in schools; political development, democratisation, ethnic-based movements and inter-ethnic violence, gender insecurity, good governance and Islam; boundaries, ethnicity, foreign investment and religion, and poverty and vulnerable employment; and finally regional security and civil society in ASEAN.

Perhaps a few remarks are in order about the conceptual foundations of human insecurities and the ways in which concepts in the social sciences and particularly in my own field of sociology and anthropology intertwine with considerations of security and insecurity. What comes to my mind immediately when someone refers to issues of insecurity? For me I think straightaway of higher levels of uncertainty, vulnerability and a lack of protection; more particularly, higher risks attached to the exercise of one’s everyday routine and a lack of trust in social and other kinds of relationships, particularly when one is having to deal with those who exercise power, influence or control over our life chances and circumstances. For those who experience it, or perceive themselves to be insecure there are issues of an absence of the ability to make decisions about one’s own life, that one does not have a say in the way in which one’s own community and, at a higher level, the nation-state is run; that one’s life lacks meaning, that there is a lack of generally accepted norms and values that are observed or that one is unable to identify with the dominant norms of society; that one feels a sense of isolation or marginalisation.

What does this remind a sociologist of? For me the concept of ‘alienation’ comes to mind formulated by Karl Marx in the context of the development of industrial capitalism and the loss of connection between what workers produce and why they are producing it, and their loss of control of their working lives; they become dependent human beings who sell their labour power and their whole self to others; they become an instrument of others and can no longer realise themselves as social beings; their lives are fragmented and mediated through money relationships or capital. A related concept is that of Emile Durkheim’s ‘anomie’, a sense of disconnection with the social world as a result of urbanisation and individualisation; a breakdown of the social bonds between an individual and his or her society or a mismatch between individual expectations, desires and behaviour and the wider society; a synonym, though perhaps not quite what Durkheim had in mind is ‘normlessness’ or perhaps a more appropriate concept would be one of estrangement or a lack of identification with the dominant values and ideals of the society within which one lives. *In extremis*, of course, this could lead, and Durkheim studied it, to the taking of one’s own life – *Suicide*. Over one million people die by their own hand every year. The [World Health Organisation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Health_Organization) (WHO) estimates that it is the 13th leading cause of death globallyand the National Safety Council rates it sixth in the United States. It is a leading cause of death among teenagers and adults under 35. The rate of suicide is much higher in men than in women, with men (especially young men) worldwide three to four times more likely to kill themselves than women (especially young women). There are also from 10 to 20 million non-fatal attempted suicides every year across the globe. Presumably we would conclude from this that males experience greater insecurities then females, and that as part of our attention to human insecurities we should not overlook the gender dimension of these phenomena.

The issue of human security is also becoming much more attention-grabbing in academia. It has emerged from an increasing interest in the consequences of globalisation, and particularly the continuing problems of poverty and civil war in such places as sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the developing world; for many of us involved in development studies, environmental studies, global economics, international relations and security studies, and the sociology of inequality, it has become a very significant research theme. In my own discipline of anthropology it has perhaps not been given the attention it deserves, or it has remained rather more implicit in quite a lot of the research on the ground that we do. Nevertheless, more and more anthropologists, and especially those who have become involved in the application of the discipline to real-world problems and issues are examining such matters as food security, health care, and the plight of some exploited minority groups.

The Civil Society and Human Security Research Unit at the LSE is promoting the study of a range of security issues under Professor Mary Kaldor; it emphasises that it concentrates on the individual and the community in which he or she lives as opposed to the security of states and borders, and on the ways in which ordinary people shape or try to shape decisions that affect their lives and security; in this connection it examines the disjunctures between institutions and everyday life. Perhaps the most high profile organisation is the Human Security Gateway, an independent research centre, funded by public and private sponsorship, and affiliated with Simon Fraser University, Vancouver; it maintains an online database of resources on human security issues; produces an annual Human Security Report, the Human Security Brief series, a miniAtlas of Human Security, an e-Newsletter, and security statistics which include the incidence of organised violence around the world, the number of fatalities and the number of onsets and terminations of violence. It refers back, as does the LSE Unit, to the concept of human security formulated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in its *Human Development Report* of 1994. This focuses on the well-being or quality of life of the individual and not global or nation-state vulnerabilities; it emphasises the importance of securing freedom from want and fear, and it categorises security into seven types: economic, food, health, environment, personal (in relation to crime and violence), community (particularly in relation to inter-ethnic issues and minority group rights) and political (with reference to basic human rights). The Gateway also compiles a list of recent relevant publications on human security issues around the globe, and a brief glance at those for Southeast Asia gives us an immediate flavour of what is happening in this field of studies in our region: maritime security and the South China Sea, water resource management, vigilantism and terrorism, youth violence, protection for refugees and asylum seekers, the status and safety of international migrant workers, disputed border issues, the decentralisation process in Indonesia and disregard for the central judicial authorities, reforms and sectarian violence in Myanmar. What comes through in several of these publications and reports is the whole issue of violence, either state-generated or emerging from political movements, from ethnic groups or particular segments of society like young people. A book which attempted to capture this relationship between uncertainty, insecurity and violence was that by David Roberts (*Human Insecurity: Global Structures of Violence*, London: Zed Books, 2007).

The increase in uncertainty in our globalising world has been documented tirelessly by many writers in the age of late modernity. But I wanted to mention briefly an important sociological thinker, and someone who I chanced to listen to when he was delivering public lectures in my own university in Leeds. Zygmunt Bauman, the Polish sociologist, Jewish exile from his homeland, and someone for whom uncertainty was an immediate and everyday experience in communist Poland in the 1950s and 1960s, arrived in Leeds, in my home university, in 1971 as Professor of Sociology. He has remained there during his long and distinguished career in the UK. He was given Emeritus status in 1990, and The Bauman Institute was established in his honour in Leeds in September 2010 when he came to deliver a public lecture to mark its foundation. He has just turned 87 years of age. He was influenced in particular by the work of Antonio Gramsci, but he brought together a whole range of ideas from social and political philosophy. A one-time Communist himself, he has never entirely left the Marxist fold. He argues that the major task of modernity (which he refers to as ‘solid’), emphasising matters of control and order rather than alienation and anomie, has been to remove unknowns and uncertainties, to make order, to allocate people a place in the division of labour, to rationalise, bureaucratise, categorise, and address personal insecurities. He suggests that following rules and regulations is also evaluated as a morally good thing to do in the modern condition. However, the process of order-making is never complete; some people are never administered in this way; they remain ‘strangers’, ‘outsiders’ and in certain cases people to be feared. They have to be controlled or eliminated. Here he links modernity to the terrible events of the Holocaust, but there are other cases of genocide which could also be included.

Bauman then moves from ‘solid’ modernity to his ‘liquid’ world, and what has come to be referred to as the ‘post-modernity’ of the latter half of the twentieth century, though we should note that Anthony Giddens, (who, before his distinguished career in sociology began, graduated in 1959 in sociology and social psychology at a University tucked away in the north of England, which I also attended to read sociology and geography some eight years after Giddens left), like Bauman also sees post-modernity which, he calls ‘late modernity’ or ‘developed modernity’ as an extension of the same forces which shaped modernisation (*Modernity and Self-identity: Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity, 1991. It is a ‘reflexive modernisation’ in which people are less concerned with the precedents that were set by the generations that went before them; I’ll qualify this is a moment.

Instead of producers we become consumers; security is given up in return for freedom and the freedom to purchase and enjoy. Insecurities are more diffuse, more unpredictable, and in attempting to capture this uncertain state of affairs Bauman wrote several interrelated books from the year 2000 (enormously prolific, he has written approaching 60 books) starting with *Liquid Modernity* (2000, Cambridge: Polity), *Liquid Love: on the Frailty of Human Bonds* (2003, Cambridge: Polity), *Liquid Life* (2005, Cambridge: Polity), *Liquid Fear* (2006, Cambridge: Polity*), Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty (*2006, Cambridge: Polity), and most recently *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (2011, Cambridge: Polity). Interestingly in *Liquid Modernity* we return to the problem of outsiders; in a world of consumers (or those who can afford to consume), we find, in the West at least, those who live on ‘sink estates’, are unemployed, spatially and socially segregated, involved in crime, are feared; they live in a world of insecurity and uncertainty themselves and they inflict it on others, so that those who can afford to consume, increasingly live in walled and gated communities, employ bodyguards, with security alarms and particularly vicious dogs. What are of special interest to me here are the connections between both the experience and the perception of uncertainty and social and cultural groupings, and, as, Bauman suggests, the frailty of human bonds in late or liquid modernity. Bauman refers to social and spatial differentiation, but in his most recent book on culture, he begins to explore cultural identities, which is what interests me in the recent work I have been doing.

I should also note in passing an important paper by Olivia Harris which connects with these concerns from an anthropological perspective (‘The Temporalities of Tradition: Reflections on a Changing Anthropology’, in Václav Hubinger [ed] *Grasping the Changing World: Anthropological Concepts in a Postmodern Era*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 1-16), where she advises us (anthropologists that is) that processes of globalisation require us to ‘rethink’ our ‘founding categories’ and ‘redefine’ our ‘projects’ (p.1). She places perceptions of time in three chronological ‘moments’: ‘modernist’, ‘structuralist’ and ‘postmodern’, the first, a rupture with the past and the creation of tradition and otherness in relation to its opposite ‘modernity’, in which reason and rationality achieved a certain, confident and autonomous status; then the synchronic complexities of Lévi-Straussian structuralism and the search for the deeper realities underlying superficial events, surface expressions, and observable processes, which present us with the temporality of continuity, and finally, and this is where insecurity again enters front stage, the post-modern moment of fluidity and indeterminacy, where, rather than linear or systematic contrast, we find a constant process of re-creation; of impermanence, where we privilege the marginal, and agency. But Harris also makes the important point that in this post-modern world, and in response to uncertainty, social groups ‘defend continuity, and their rights to claim and express particular links with the past’ (p.11).

Though sometimes frail, our bonds of cultural identity, of our connection with the past, of our celebration of tradition, and the mutual support which underpins these claims for continuity, are sometimes all we have to counter our feelings of insecurity. Hence there has been a veritable explosion in Southeast Asia in the study of cultural politics and the politics of identity, and though people are constrained by social structures or the contexts within which they find themselves, and some people are more constrained than others, there are varying degrees of human agency (again as Giddens indicates in *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, 1984, Cambridge: Polity). What is of increasing interest to me, which bears on our theme of insecurity, are the ways in which identities and ethnicities are constructed, often in the face of perceived threats and insecurities, and because of the domination of some by others. And, in turn, the cultural expressions of these inter-ethnic relations, which, as we know, in the case of Indonesia, have often resulted in violence.

Although the concepts of the ‘solid’ and the ‘liquid’ have been popularised by Bauman, an earlier concept, which I find overlaps with some of his work is that of risk. Just as we experience uncertainty but also construct it, so with risk; perceptions of risk are socially constructed; they represent different evaluations, different estimates of our life chances on the basis of institutional and historical context, cultural values and ways of life. ‘Fate’ is certainty, and ‘risk’ is uncertainty. How do we decide upon what is potentially dangerous or harmful and what is not? One of the first major sociological contributions to the study of risk was that of Mary Douglas (and her co-author Aaron Wildavsky) in their construction of four ways of life in terms of ‘group’ and ‘grid’, different permutations of social organisation which endow people with perceptions that serve to strengthen the very institutional context within which they are embedded, and in this instance help explain people’s outlook on risk and uncertainty, and determine who to blame if things go wrong (Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory*, 1992, London, New York, Routledge, and with A.B.Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: an Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers*, 1982, Berkeley: University of California Press). It depends then on cultural ways of life (egalitarian/collectivist [fears risks], individualistic/ hierarchical [resist claims of risk]) in determining what states of affairs individuals see as worthy of taking risks to attain a particular goal. What levels of uncertainty will they be prepared to tolerate and how do they organise themselves to be able to cope with them? It seems to me, though she is working in a rather different, more anthropological tradition from Bauman, that Mary Douglas is talking about the condition of ‘solid’ modernity, and the aversion to subversive or marginal behaviour. As in Bauman’s work on the Holocaust she draws attention to the need to focus resentment and blame on those who are perceived to be different, who defy authority and institutions, and who live on the edge of what is defined as ‘society’. Nevertheless, her ‘group’ and ‘grid’ template has come in for considerable criticism, and evaluations of risk need to address the interrelationships between attempts at providing scientific, measurable calculations of uncertainty and risk, the knowledge of the probable consequences and possibilities of an event or process, the perceptual dimension of those calculations, based on values and beliefs, and importantly the political dimension of framing risk (in which the risk under scrutiny is subject to negotiation and contestation among political actors who have particular interests, goals and agendas) (see, for example, Asa Boholm, ‘Risk and Social Anthropology: Critique of Cultural Theory’, *Ethnos, Journal of Anthropology*, 1996, 61, pp. 64-84; ‘The Cultural Nature of Risk: Can there be an Anthropology of Uncertainty?’, *Ethnos, Journal of Anthropology*, 2003, 68, pp. 159-178).

And then, what is it that is intimately related to issues of uncertainty and risk –I think it is trust, which is also a social construct. To handle uncertainty and risk we must strive for trust in our relationships. Economists, of course, are constantly concerned about the reliability or trustworthiness of transactions. But we have seen in our international financial system, driven by global, electronic technology, how uncertainty and risk have become deeply embedded in those transactions. We used to trust financial institutions with our income, our lives, our future; this trust has increasingly diminished. And trust is something which we usually rely on when we negotiate the edge between having confidence in what we know and in addressing the contingencies of new possibilities. Without trust there is paralysis and increasing uncertainty because contingency creates dependency, and if we are dependents can we trust those we are dependent upon.

In this connection I am reminded of what has probably become one of the most influential monographs in the study of Southeast Asia, and certainly appears in the top ten of the most quoted studies of the region; I refer to James C. Scott’s *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (1977, New Haven, Yale University Press). The central idea, though probably not expressed in quite this way is ‘trust’ and one might add ‘respect’. Peasant values and the ways in which they evaluate the behaviour of others’ are oriented to the need to secure an adequate level of subsistence (the ‘subsistence ethic’); the concern therefore is with the security of supplies of basic foodstuffs and other basic needs, with the fairness of taxation and other demands made upon the peasantry and with such things as charitable donations and other gifts or provisions provided by local elites to their dependents. Scott and his co-researcher Benedict J. Kerkvliet, who also adopted this perspective in his study of the Hukbalahap movement and the Philippine peasantry, focus on the character and quality of patron-client relations and the consequences of the breakdown or breach of these for peasant security (*The Huk Rebellion: a Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, 1977, Berkeley: University of California Press). Once the traditional paternalistic moral order breaks down with the intervention of the market, capital and profit, then the likelihood is resistance and possibly violence. In other words, the emphasis is on respect for the subsistence needs of the rural poor, on mutual support, reciprocity, give-and-take, fairness and justice in the face of the potential and actual insecurity of one’s livelihood, in short trust.

We should, however, take note of the pivotal work in social history, specifically labour history, on which Scott and Kerkvliet drew. It was E.(dward) P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*, during the period 1780-1832 (1963, London: Victor Gollancz; revised in 1968) and his influential ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’ (*Past and Present*, 1971, 50, pp. 76-136, a journal which he founded with Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill and others of the New Left in the UK in the 1950s) which did not simply re-write history from the perspective of the downtrodden (history from below), but captured the values, perspectives and culture of those living at the margins, those who had been left out of history, just as Scott’s Southeast Asian peasantry had been. Thompson says, in his Preface to his book, ‘I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the [Luddite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luddite) cropper, the "obsolete" hand-loom weaver, the "Utopian" artisan, and even the deluded follower of [Joanna Southcott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joanna_Southcott), from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been dying. Their hostility to the new industrialism may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not’. I might add on a personal note, that in the radical north of England, in the old industrial heartland of a country that condemned so many to insecurity and uncertainty in the wake of the industrial revolution, Thompson, a Marxist historian, like Bauman later, a one-time Communist, lectured at the University of Leeds from 1948 until 1965, and during that time wrote his now famous *The Making….* before he left for the newly founded University of Warwick in 1965 which he then resigned from a few years later in protest at the increasing commercialisation and business orientation of that university.

So, I think there are areas of our work which resonate directly with some of the central and crucial concepts in the social sciences, those which go back to the founders of sociology and anthropology, and those which have made an important mark on our thinking in the tumultuous times of post-war modernity and late modernity – in my terms and as I use and interpret them here - ‘uncertainty, risk and trust’.