

Chapter 2

Of Risk, Uncertainty, Safety, and Trust: (Re)Locating Human Insecurities

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Abstract This overview considers four concepts: uncertainty, risk, safety, and trust. In addressing issues of insecurity and uncertainty we tend to think immediately of such processes and events as climate change and its social and economic impact; transnational crimes and the consequences for local communities; regional security and conflict; access to clean and drinkable water, food, shelter, health care, education, and a sustainable livelihood; sexual, ethnic, and youth violence; and forced migration, land-grabbing and population displacement. A range of causes of increasing human insecurity can also be identified: social changes arising from national, regional, and global events and processes with reference to processes of economic integration, but also the more directly apprehended occurrences of the scramble for natural resources, armed conflicts, accelerated urbanization and industrialization, and the large-scale commercialization of everyday life. But these issues have to be located within a conceptual discussion of the complex relationships between safety and risk and between uncertainty and trust derived from the work of Zygmunt Bauman, Anthony Giddens, Mary Douglas, Olivia Harris, James C. Scott, and E.P. Thompson.

Keywords Insecurities • Uncertainty • Risk • Safety • Trust • Southeast Asia

2.1 Introduction

This chapter emerged out of an introductory address prepared for a seminar on “Human Insecurities in Southeast Asia” organized at Universiti Brunei Darussalam. A disparate range of examples of human insecurities was indicated in preparation for the seminar and some of the causes of these insecurities were identified for discussion, especially in the context of processes of regionalization, globalization,

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urbanization, and commercialization. The potential problem in the seminar was that “insecurities” would be conceptualized not so much in human terms but in terms of international relations and politics at the national and regional level, in other words security and insecurity would be seen as a preoccupation of national governments, and regional and international organizations and not in terms of local level, community, and individual insecurities. Furthermore, the use of the plural “insecurities” is important, in that it was decided that there should be engagement with different levels and kinds of insecurity, and not simply a preoccupation with the concerns of political elites to devise policies and seek institutional and other arrangements in order to overcome perceived problems of national and international insecurity. It seemed to me therefore that our seminar should not be confined to “security and strategic studies,” and run the danger of being overtaken by the political, practical, and mundane concerns of policy-makers, strategists, and international relations commentators.

Yet there seemed to me to be a range of sociological concepts that needed to be considered in relation to the main theme of “insecurities”; hence the substance of this chapter comprises what we might call a “collage” of concepts relevant to our main focus, but which by no means constitutes a coherent theory of human insecurities. It also draws on my encounters and experiences in the higher education sector in Yorkshire, and that important theoretical and empirical developments in our understanding of insecurities were generated by such authors as Zygmunt Bauman, Anthony Giddens and Edward Thompson, all of whom spent formative periods in their career in the north of England, one of the heartlands of industrial capitalism.

As Lonergan, Gustavson, and Carter have also argued “Traditional perspectives on security have been conceived of primarily in terms of neutralizing military threats to the territorial integrity and political independence of the state. However, in recent years, there has been increased emphasis placed on expanding the traditional conception of security to include so-called nonconventional threats. These include: resource scarcity, rapid population growth, human rights abuses, outbreaks of infectious disease, environmental degradation caused by toxic contamination, ozone depletion, global warming, water pollution, soil degradation and the loss of biodiversity.” (n.d., p. 1) This demonstrates my point. It is impossible to encapsulate this range of issues within a neat conceptual framework of “human insecurities.” What we can do is identify specific concepts which can be deployed in developing our understanding of those uncertainties, insecurities and risks which are currently exercising us.

2.2 Insecurities: At What Level?

Therefore one of the central problems in examining issues of multiple insecurities is the difficult question of at what level we address them? And when we decide on this, we find that the different levels or spaces of insecurities 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. In other words, regionalization may create insecurities at the local level. 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 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 safe 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 of society. And these actions are clearly identifiable for me at least in the United Kingdom: 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 citizens' pockets which might have been used to ensure that the populace is 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 sustainability) and so on.

An interesting recent debate in the university sector in the United Kingdom is the effect of creating "safe spaces" for students who are those young people who have been brought up in a health and safety regime. They have been shielded and protected so much so that it has been argued that the current generation is unable to cope with risk and challenge. The observation of Jenny Brown, the head teacher of St Albans High School for Girls in a recent newspaper article goes to the heart of what we are debating, and that is the relationship between security and safety on the one hand and risk and danger on the other. Once, we embark on a safety and security regime which then becomes embodied in the rights to feel and be safe and secure which individuals expect to be honored and delivered then we enter uncharted waters. An appropriate quotation from Jenny Brown captures the dilemma: "The state and the education system have fetishised protection, parents have cosseted their children, even our decades of prosperity and peace time have skewed things for middle class kids, who have no experiences of the privations and dangers that their grandparents endured. But the safer their world appears, the less they can tolerate risk. An epidemic of protectiveness has created a monstrous inability to cope with difficulty." (Griffiths 2016, p. 15)

Now I recognize that these are somewhat trivial examples of perceptions of security/safety and insecurity/risk in a wealthy country. Therefore, the question has to be posed in comparative terms: "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?" It is my view that at least 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. Yet in the privileged West we have gone in the opposite direction. We protect and shield but in that process we reduce resilience and independence. We render our young citizens to be wary of risk; individuals who see danger and uncertainty in so many areas of their lives and who cannot cope with insecurities. There is no easy solution to these comparative dilemmas. Some Southeast Asian nation-states, more than others, live with risk and insecurity and in the process create a populace that sees itself as independent of the state: to survive they have to make their own way and develop their own creative solutions to address insecurities. The state does not support them and indeed may exploit them in various ways through corrupt practices.

2.3 Some Conceptual Issues

At this point in global comparisons a few remarks need to be made about the conceptual foundations of human insecurities and the ways in which concepts in the social sciences and particularly in my field of sociology and anthropology intertwine with considerations of security and insecurity. What comes to mind immediately when someone refers to issues of insecurity? Straightaway we conceive 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, political, economic, 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 marginalization.

What do these issues raise immediately in the mind of the sociologist? 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 labor power and their whole self to others; they become an instrument of others and can no longer realize themselves as social beings; their lives are fragmented and mediated through money relationships or capital; they feel themselves separated from their human nature (Marx 1959/1968).

A related concept is that of Emile Durkheim's "anomie," a sense of disconnection with the social world as a result of urbanization and individualization; a

breakdown of the social bonds between an individual and his or her society or a mismatch between individual expectations, desires, and behavior 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,” which is the term that Marx associated with alienation (German: *Entfremdung*) or a lack of identification with the dominant values and ideals of the society within which one lives (Durkheim 1893/1997). *In extremis*, of course, this could lead, and Durkheim devoted a detailed study to it, to the taking of one’s own life—*Suicide: a Study in Sociology* (1897/1951).

The World Health Organization (WHO 2015) provides figures of over 800,000 suicides globally in 2012, and estimated that it is the 13th leading cause of death and the National Safety Council rates it sixth in the United States. It is a leading cause of death. For 2012 it was the second leading cause of death among 15–29 year-olds. 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 nonfatal attempted suicides every year across the globe. Presumably, we would conclude from this that males experience greater insecurities than females, and that as part of our attention to human insecurities we should not overlook the gender dimension of these phenomena. But certainly the WHO identifies vulnerable groups in low and middle income countries as especially prone to suicide: those experiencing conflict, disaster, violence, abuse, loss, discrimination, and a sense of isolation, in other words insecurities (WHO, www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs398/en/).

2.4 Development Studies and Human Security Institutions

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 globalization, 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 those 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 disciplines of sociology and 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. 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 London School of Economics (LSE) is promoting the study of a range of security issues under Professor Mary Kaldor (www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/CSHS/Home.aspx). It emphasizes 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 disconnections between institutions and everyday life. Perhaps the most high profile organization is the Human Security Research Group, an independent research center, funded by public and private sponsorship, and affiliated with the School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, Canada (www.hsrgroup.org/about-hsrp/about-us.aspx). It maintains an online database of resources on human security issues; produces an annual Human Security Report, the Human Security Brief series, a mini-Atlas of Human Security, an e-Newsletter, and security statistics which include the incidence of organized 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 Programme (UNDP) in its *Human Development Report* of 1994 (UNDP 1994). This focuses on the well-being or quality of life of the individual and not global or nation-state vulnerabilities; it emphasizes the importance of securing freedom from want and fear, and it categorizes security into seven types: economic, food, health, environment, personal (in relation to crime and violence), community (particularly in relation to interethnic issues and minority group rights), and political (with reference to basic human rights).

The Simon Fraser Human Security Research Group 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 flavor 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 decentralization process in Indonesia, and disregard for the central judicial authorities, and 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 (see, Human Security Research Group (HSRG) 2014). A book which attempted to capture this relationship between uncertainty, insecurity, and violence was that by David Roberts (2007).

2.5 Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens

The increase in uncertainty in our globalizing world has been documented tirelessly by many writers in the age of late modernity. But 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 1971 as

Professor of Sociology. In contemplating insecurities he deserves our attention. He remained in Leeds during his long and distinguished career in the United Kingdom. He was given Emeritus status in 1990, and The Bauman Institute was established in his honor in Leeds in September 2010 when he came to deliver a public lecture to mark its foundation. He has just turned 90 years of age (in November 2015). 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 (Forgacs 1988). A one-time Communist himself, he never entirely left the Marxist fold.

He has argued that the major task of modernity (which he refers to as “solid”), emphasizing 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 rationalize, bureaucratize, categorize, and address personal insecurities. He has suggested 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, and his own experience of the anti-Semitic campaign in communist Poland, 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 “postmodernity” 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 one of my former universities, the University of Hull tucked away in the north of England, which I also attended to read sociology and geography some 8 years after Giddens left), like Bauman also sees postmodernity which, he calls “late modernity” or “developed modernity” as an extension of the same forces which shaped modernization (Giddens 1991). It is a “reflexive modernization” in which people are less concerned with the precedents that were set by the generations that went before them; I will qualify this statement in 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 (still enormously prolific, he has written some 60 books) starting with *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love: on the Frailty of Human Bonds* (2003), *Liquid Life* (2005), *Liquid Fear* (2006), *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (2006), and most recently *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (2011). 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 (King 2016).

2.6 Olivia Harris

I should also note an important paper by Olivia Harris which connects with these concerns from an anthropological perspective (1996, pp. 1–16), where she advises the anthropological community that processes of globalization require us to “re-think” our “founding categories” and “redefine” our “projects” (1996, 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 (1963) 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 postmodern moment of fluidity and indeterminacy, where, rather than linear or systematic contrast, we find a constant process of recreation; of impermanence, where we privilege the marginal, and the significance of individual agency. But Harris also makes the important point that in this postmodern world, and in response to uncertainty, social groups “defend continuity, and their rights to claim and express particular links with the past” (1996, 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 (see, for example, Kahn 1998); 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 his *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (1984). What is of increasing interest to me, which bears on our theme of insecurities, 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 interethnic relations, which, as we know, in the case of Indonesia, have frequently resulted in violence.

2.7 Mary Douglas

Although the concepts of the “solid” and the “liquid” have been popularized 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”; these comprise different permutations of social organization 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 (Douglas 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). 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 organize 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 behavior. 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). Asa Boholm explores these dimensions in two excellent papers which locate risk and uncertainty within an anthropological context and perspective (1996, 2003).

And then, what is it that is intimately related to issues of uncertainty and risk—I think it is safety and trust, which are also social constructs. To handle uncertainty and risk we must strive for trust in our relationships and the establishment of an environment of safety. 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. And the notion of being safe and secure is then challenged.

2.8 James C. Scott

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). The central idea, though probably not expressed in quite this way is "trust" and one might add "respect," and from these considerations flow safety and livelihood security. Peasant values and the ways in which they evaluate the behavior 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's thesis was persuasive and bold in its comparative perspective, but it was certainly not without problems (and see King 1978, 1981; Popkin 1979). 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 (1977; and see King 1980). 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, safety, and security.

2.9 E.P. Thompson

We should, however, take note of the pivotal work in social history, specifically labour history, on which Scott and Kerkvliet drew, but then placed it in a Southeast Asian context. Scott's thesis depended significantly on the enormously influential

study of E(dward). P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, during the period 1780–1832 (1963, London, revised in 1968) and his major paper “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century” (1971), published in *Past and Present*, a journal which he founded with Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill and others of the New Left in the UK in the 1950s. Their mission was not simply to rewrite history from the perspective of the downtrodden [in other words history from below, which was a theme developed by those promoting a domestic history approach in Southeast Asia (see, for example, Smail 1961; Benda 1962)], 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 cropper, the “obsolete” hand-loom weaver, the “Utopian” artisan, and even the deluded follower of 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” (1963, pp. 12–13). What is more, as he says, “This book was written in Yorkshire,” not the cradle of the industrial revolution, but an important region in the development of global industrial capitalism, and his major treatise on the trials and tribulations of the English working class “is colored at times by West Riding sources” (1963, pp. 13–14).

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, Edward 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 of the English Working Class* (then subsequently republished in the Penguin Modern Classics series 2013) 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 commercialization and business orientation of that university.

So, I think there are areas of our work in human insecurities 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, to the central philosophies of the social sciences, to their concerns about the effects on the human condition of the processes of industrialization and modernization, and on those who have made a lasting impression on our thinking about the tumultuous and increasingly fragile, uncertain, insecure times of postwar modernity and late modernity. In my terms and as I use and interpret them in this chapter: “uncertainty, risk, safety and trust.” These are the central concepts which underpin this volume and provide a direction for future research.

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