

Theories of Uncertainty and Risk across Different Modernities

Edited by
Patrick Brown

Theories of Uncertainty and Risk across Different Modernities

Setting out to challenge various common assumptions in risk research, this collection explores how uncertainty is handled in a range of social contexts across the globe. Social science research often emphasises the salience of risk and uncertainty for grasping the dynamics of late-modern societies, with theoretical frameworks tending to associate the emergence of risk with particular, fairly homogenous, European or 'North-Western' paths of modernisation. These theoretical narratives can be seen as shaping various assumptions regarding 'risk cultures', not least associations with post-traditional, largely secular and liberal characteristics. Risk is therefore analysed in terms of modern, active, 'rational' citizens, meanwhile faith, hope or magic are implicitly relegated to the past, the oriental, the passive and/or the irrational.

Central to the book is the consideration of risk across a range of different modernities. While the precise meaning and organisational processes of risk vary, we see the common combining of risk, faith, magic and hope as people go forward amid uncertain circumstances. Whether seeking health amid illness, survival amid flooding, or safety amid migration, we explore the pertinence of risk around the globe. We also stress the ubiquity of faith and the magical in various modern settings.

This book was originally published as a special issue of *Health, Risk & Society*.

Patrick Brown is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. He is Deputy Editor of *Health, Risk & Society* and has published widely on topics of trust, hope, risk and related ways in which organisations, groups and individuals handle uncertainty.

This page intentionally left blank

Theories of Uncertainty and Risk across Different Modernities

Edited by
Patrick Brown

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN, UK

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2018 Taylor & Francis

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-08058-4

Typeset in Times New Roman
by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

Publisher's Note

The publisher accepts responsibility for any inconsistencies that may have arisen during the conversion of this book from journal articles to book chapters, namely the possible inclusion of journal terminology.

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders for their permission to reprint material in this book. The publishers would be grateful to hear from any copyright holder who is not here acknowledged and will undertake to rectify any errors or omissions in future editions of this book.

Contents

<i>Citation Information</i>	vii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
1. Theorising uncertainty and risk across different modernities: considering insights from ‘non-North-Western’ studies <i>Patrick Brown</i>	1
2. Engaging with risk in non-Western settings: an editorial <i>Nicola Desmond</i>	12
3. Anthropology and risk: insights into uncertainty, danger and blame from other cultures: a review essay <i>Andy Alaszewski</i>	21
4. Faith and uncertainty: migrants’ journeys between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore <i>Loïs Bastide</i>	42
5. Applying the risk society thesis within the context of flood risk and poverty in Jakarta, Indonesia <i>Roanne van Voorst</i>	62
6. Coping with health-related uncertainties and risks in Rakhine (Myanmar) <i>Celine Coderey</i>	79
7. Performing prevention: risk, responsibility, and reorganising the future in Japan during the H1N1 pandemic <i>Mari J. Armstrong-Hough</i>	101
8. Purity and danger: shamans, diviners and the control of danger in premodern Japan as evidenced by the healing rites of the Aogashima islanders <i>Jane Alaszewska and Andy Alaszewski</i>	118
<i>Index</i>	143

This page intentionally left blank

Citation Information

The chapters in this book were originally published in *Health, Risk & Society*, volume 17, issue 3–4 (April–June 2015). When citing this material, please use the original page numbering for each article, as follows:

Chapter 1

Theorising uncertainty and risk across different modernities: considering insights from 'non-North-Western' studies

Patrick Brown

Health, Risk & Society, volume 17, issue 3–4 (April–June 2015), pp. 185–195

Chapter 2

Engaging with risk in non-Western settings: an editorial

Nicola Desmond

Health, Risk & Society, volume 17, issue 3–4 (April–June 2015), pp. 196–204

Chapter 3

Anthropology and risk: insights into uncertainty, danger and blame from other cultures – A review essay

Andy Alaszewski

Health, Risk & Society, volume 17, issue 3–4 (April–June 2015), pp. 205–225

Chapter 4

Faith and uncertainty: migrants' journeys between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore

Loïs Bastide

Health, Risk & Society, volume 17, issue 3–4 (April–June 2015), pp. 226–245

Chapter 5

Applying the risk society thesis within the context of flood risk and poverty in Jakarta, Indonesia

Roanne van Voorst

Health, Risk & Society, volume 17, issue 3–4 (April–June 2015), pp. 246–262

Chapter 6

Coping with health-related uncertainties and risks in Rakhine (Myanmar)

Celine Coderey

Health, Risk & Society, volume 17, issue 3–4 (April–June 2015), pp. 263–284

Chapter 7

Performing prevention: risk, responsibility, and reorganising the future in Japan during the H1N1 pandemic

Mari J. Armstrong-Hough

Health, Risk & Society, volume 17, issue 3–4 (April–June 2015), pp. 285–301

Chapter 8

Purity and danger: shamans, diviners and the control of danger in premodern Japan as evidenced by the healing rites of the Aogashima islanders

Jane Alaszewska and Andy Alaszewski

Health, Risk & Society, volume 17, issue 3–4 (April–June 2015), pp. 302–325

For any permission-related enquiries please visit:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/page/help/permissions>

Notes on Contributors

Jane Alaszewska is based at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, UK.

Andy Alaszewski is Emeritus Professor of Health Studies at the Centre for Health Services Studies, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK.

Mari J. Armstrong-Hough is Associate Research Scientist in Epidemiology at the School of Public Health, Yale University, New Haven, USA.

Loïs Bastide is a Faculty Member at the Department of Sociology, University of Geneva, Switzerland.

Patrick Brown is Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology, the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Celine Coderey is a Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, STS Cluster, National University of Singapore.

Nicola Desmond heads the Malawi-Liverpool-Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Programme in Malawi and is a Senior Lecturer at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Liverpool, UK.

Roanne van Voorst is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgements

As editor of this volume, and on behalf of the other authors, I express a great deal of gratitude to Andy Alaszewski whose input was vital to this collection. It was Andy who founded the journal and moreover the annual theory-focused special issues of which this edited volume forms a part. Alongside two valuable articles in this collection, Andy also devoted a lot of time and energy when providing very thorough comments on various manuscripts, especially regarding structure and prose. The collection as a whole is a lot stronger as a result of this.

Patrick Brown, Amsterdam, 2015.

This page intentionally left blank

Theorising uncertainty and risk across different modernities: considering insights from ‘non-North-Western’ studies

Patrick Brown

In this editorial I introduce a range of articles which constitute the second annual special issue of this journal focusing on social theories of risk and uncertainty. I explain and explore the underlying logic and theoretical location of the issue in terms of various tensions within the common association of risk with a very specific process of post-Enlightenment modernisation. I then explore a number of these concerns further in relation to and by way of introducing the guest editorial, a review article and five original research articles of the special issue. A few of the most pertinent and recurring themes across these articles – such as the combining of rational-technical approaches to uncertainty with traditional-magical ones, the salience of faith-based approaches and their agentic qualities, and the logic by which different strategies are combined, ‘bricolaged’ or syncretised – are denoted as especially salient for researching risk and uncertainty within northern European contexts, where the roles of faith, tradition and magic in dealing with uncertainty remain neglected topics. I conclude by linking these reflections to an introduction of the central topics for the 2016 theory special issue and point potential authors towards our call for papers.

Introduction: locating risk within one distinct reflexive modernisation process?

The origins of this 2015 special issue on social theories of risk and uncertainty can be found in the last issue of this journal published in 2014. The insightful study of Mieulet and Claeys (2014) into public health risk policies, their implementation and reception within Martinique and French Guyana raised a whole host of interesting theoretical and conceptual conundrums – especially when an earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2013 European Sociological Association conference in Torino. That these overseas departments are legally and organisationally speaking part of the French state and the European Union, yet characterised by quite distinct (post-colonial) historico-cultural structures, indicates various interesting analytical questions regarding practices of risk, governmentality and resistance within contrasting (non-)Western contexts (compare with Foucault, 1974/1994).

That these two components of France lie several thousand miles west of the French mainland underlines an awkwardness in employing a ‘non-Western’ epithet for denoting societal contexts which might better be described as developing through alternative

or different modernities (see also Desmond, 2015). Foucauldian thought has been highly influential within critical sociologies and anthropologies of risk, especially in relation to public health, and has guided an emphasis upon the salience of a rather specific trajectory of scientific knowledge and statecraft transformation, as has emerged within north-western Europe. More recent tendencies within these evolving configurations of welfare state apparatus and their related subjectivities have been characterised in terms of risk. Whereas Foucault himself denoted important nuances and variations in the timing of developments across France, Germany and Britain (for example, Foucault, 1974/1994, p. 137), connotations of a more or less common north-west-European development in knowledge formats, institutions and the various ways by which these ‘make’ modern subjects would seem to underlie many recent studies offering critical governmentality accounts of risk.

Although Beck’s work (for example, 1992) on reflexive modernisation is a rather different breed of theoretical project, his thesis also suggests a quite specific historical trajectory. Beck was importantly influenced by Habermasian thinking (van Loon, 2013), which in turn involves a particular Frankfurt School orientation towards tensions in Marxist theory of advanced capitalist societal development (Outhwaite, 2009) and the legitimisation problems which appear within a very specific set of circumstances faced by a small number of late-modern welfare states at a particular moment in their development (Habermas, 1976). This intellectual background, as well as the more current circumstances which featured within Beck’s (1992) earlier analyses, led him similarly towards a distinctively northern European and (at times) decidedly German-centric analysis of risk politics (see van Voorst, 2015).

Many of these analytical concerns can be traced further back to Weberian understandings of modern societies, the dysfunctional propensities of their organisations and various related problems which continued to define a number of the main debates of sociological theory in the later twentieth century. At the heart of these was the attempt to explain the development of a peculiar format of ‘rationalism’ (Brubaker, 1984, p. 8) which came to characterise those societies which can be loosely bracketed as modern, ‘Western’ and advanced capitalist. This same rationalisation process has often been considered essential to the proliferation of risk as a way of handling uncertain futures, as well as making sense of that which has already gone wrong (Alaszewski & Burgess, 2007; Rothstein, 2006), which for some has been primarily bound up with processes of ‘disenchantment’ in the face of suffering (Wilkinson, 2010).

More or less implicit within these theoretical traditions for analysing risk, its institutional and identity-related challenges (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Rothstein, 2006; Wilkinson, 2010) are assumptions which locate risk within a certain type of post-industrial society seen as possessing a combination of post-traditional, largely secular and liberal characteristics – where these have regularly come to be viewed as intrinsic to risk. For while Douglas (for example, 1992) has drawn attention to varying concerns with differing ‘risks’ across many contrasting forms of societal formation, it is often implied that living with ‘dangers’ or misfortune in central Africa, for example, entails a quite different set of subjectivities than those generated through living with ‘risks’ in northern Europe (see Desmond, 2015 for a more nuanced view) – primarily because of different cosmologies, civil society formations and political relationships between subjects and states.

In these senses more critical studies of risk have usually been focused upon social contexts in the global north which are assumed to be distinguished through their predominantly secular world views. After all, where more positive or problematic futures are

understood by social actors as resting ‘in God’s hands’, or as a function of ‘God’s will’, then risk – and the qualities of control, agency and scientific knowledge with which it is connected – might be seen as less relevant and ‘accidents’ (and the many uncertainties these give rise to) would be impossible (Green in Heyman & Brown, 2013). The emergence of an increasing contestation of notions of divine providence through, for example, Spinoza’s conceptualisation of the *remoteness* of God from the causality of things (Watt, 1972, p. 174), is typically seen as unique to and defining of a European Enlightenment path in at least two fundamental ways:

First, the dissemination of such understandings and a related growing disenchantment with religious cosmologies are often implied to be fairly complete within northern Europe, less fundamental in the case of the (southern) United States, for example, and much more partial or non-existent across the global south. Theories of risk as a product of post-Enlightenment development would, on the one hand, seem to suggest that risk-related rationalities and reflexivity would only be found in the most ‘modern’ of contexts (in a very narrow sense), yet, on the other hand, associate risk with globalising processes of mediated social change across a much broader array of global contexts (see Mythen, 2007, p. 793; van Voorst, 2015).

Second, the work of Spinoza, alongside later Enlightenment scholars, emphasised the salience of doubt and the contestation of traditional fundamentals of knowledge to the extent that an intensification of uncertainty was held to be defining of what it was to live in modernity. A similar claim has been made by various influential sociologists (for example, Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) when placing the problem of uncertainty at the heart of late-modern lived experiences, following what could be described as a reflexivity or disenchantment towards science and various modern-progressive narratives (Wilkinson, 2010). Yet these understandings of the unusual and distinctive qualities of uncertainty and doubt faced by (late-)moderns typically make little effort to compare these lived experiences with those of other actors in other social settings across space and time. When such a comparison is made, manifold and intense experiences of uncertainty seem to be far more common across a diverse range of social settings. That is not to say that exactly the same types of uncertainties and doubts are grappled with. But acute and enduring forms of living amidst uncertainty are in no way limited to northern European (late-)modernity (see for example Coderey, 2015).

Drawing on the collection of original research articles, a review article and a guest editorial which make up this special issue, I will consider some of these tensions and problematise some of the assumptions linking risk to one particular modernity. In the next section, through an overview of the contents of the issue, I emphasise the enduring presence and combining of more rational-technical approaches to future dangers within more traditional societies and different modernities. In the latter section and conclusion I then move to reflect on the continuing presence of religious and magical approaches to uncertainty within northern European societal contexts and how the analytical frameworks presented in this issue may be highly instructive to analyses of risk as a tool of handling uncertainty within northern European settings. Following on from this, and echoing some of the analyses brought together in this issue, I will then introduce a consideration of the syncretic or ‘bricolaging’ (Horlick-Jones, Walls, & Kitlinger, 2007) approaches to uncertainty which will form a central focus of investigation within the next theory special issue to be published in 2016.

Themes arising within the special issue: multiple rationalities across many different modernities

As Alaszewski (2015) emphasises within his review article in this issue, crude Whig-historical narratives assuming a progressive shift from approaches to danger based on magic to approaches based on the systematic refinement of knowledge and its technical application ('rationality' in its narrow sense) became increasingly untenable following Malinowski's (1999) classic study of Trobriand Islanders who had long combined both magic *and* technical rationality when managing risks related to long sea journeys. Important to this review of a number of classic anthropological studies, focusing on their analyses of approaches to uncertainty, is a paradigmatic shift in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century away from a standpoint of cultural superiority towards one of greater respect and attempts to learn from other cultures. This turn later facilitated the comparison of cultures of risk across societal contexts (Douglas, 1992; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983) although, as Alaszewski (2015) observes, Douglas remains an under-used theoretical basis of empirical exploration. The related dearth of historical-comparative studies which explore the evolving nature of different modernisation processes and the power dynamics through which these are driven leads to an impoverished grasp of risk and its cultural underpinnings.

Desmond's (2015) guest editorial, informed by fieldwork experiences in sub-Saharan African contexts over a number of years, provides much food for thought on this latter topic, considering as she does the complex ways in which etic social-scientific notions of 'risk' are more or less closely reflected within local practices and emic (Swahili) terms regarding experiences of uncertainty. In many sub-Saharan contexts, ostensibly traditional and magical understandings and practices, such as sorcery or witchcraft, have not so much been replaced by colonial and post-colonial processes of 'development' as reworked and 'reinvented' within such contexts. Part of the enduring demand for witch-doctor practices is seemingly related to the uncertainty created amidst the social, cultural and economic upheavals brought about by development pressures and the continuing need to make 'meaning' amidst experiences of social change (Desmond, 2015). The analysis developed within Desmond's editorial draws special attention to interwovenness of conceptions of *misfortune* in relation to the past and conceptions of *risk* in relation to the future, as reflected in emic accounts. These hybrid understandings emerge within cultural contexts of risk which are 'situated between the two worlds of tradition and modernity' (Desmond, 2015, pp. 196–204). Desmond's arguments, drawing on African studies literatures to emphasise 'continuity' rather than a break with the past, have important implications for the study of risk in sub-Saharan Africa but furthermore in northern European and North American contexts where the enduring nature of the traditional and magical, as apparent within language, practices and cultural frames, has tended to be overlooked (Bastide, 2015).

Following this line of exploration, Japan represents a fascinating example of an advanced capitalist society in the global north where, at least to a European gaze, the enduring legacy of traditional culture is more palpably co-present *alongside* the late-modern. Once again the interwovenness of the traditional and modern is made visible within the analysis developed by Armstrong-Hough (2015) when considering various accounts of 'gargling' in response to the risk posed by the H1N1 virus pandemic. On the one hand gargling resonates with a long tradition of health-seeking approaches in Japanese culture which may be understood in relation to a particularly characteristic Japanese cultural concern with boundary spaces between the inside and outside