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telefon/fax (telephone/fax): +381 11 3282 391
e-mail: **socjour@f.bg.ac.rs** ili **socjourserbia@gmail.com**

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SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL

SOCIETY AS A PROCESS: CONTEMPORARY READINGS OF NORBERT ELIAS

Norbert Elias belongs to a group of sociologists whose work cannot easily be situated within the context of theoretical schools, paradigms, and sociological conceptual language. His sociology is based on a synthesis of German, American, French, and British scholarship of the twentieth century, and is primarily a historical sociology that integrates different disciplinary perspectives with the aim of creating a coherent science.

Elias's relevance lies not only in the fact that *The Civilizing Process* has become a classic of sociological theory, nor in the breadth of the areas in which his work has left its mark: from the history of emotions, identity, family, culture, violence, and sport to the study of the body, state formation, knowledge, as well as the relations between the established and the outsiders. Above all, it stems from his attempt to redefine the question of what society is and to develop a kind of "science of mankind" (*Menschenwissenschaft*).

He did not view society as a relatively stable structure composed of individuals, institutions, and groups, but insisted on the social as a process: on changing networks of interdependence, power relations, long-term transformations of behavior and emotions, as well as on the mutual shaping of social structures and personality structures. Hence, processuality for him was more than the study of social change. It represented an attempt to overcome the dichotomies between the individual and society, micro- and macro-levels of analysis, idealism and materialism, nature and culture, form and content, subject and object, consciousness and being. Elias's body of work therefore has more the character of an open theoretical perspective than that of a closed system of concepts.

Throughout his life, he developed the concepts of figurational (or process) sociology, testing and adapting them, often in response to criticism and discussions with other authors. Nevertheless, he sometimes used certain concepts without sufficiently explicitly addressing changes in their meanings. Accordingly, his theories are often characterized by tensions and contradictions, and it is precisely the exploration and negotiation of these tensions that makes Elias's work interesting and important, and particularly stimulating for contemporary sociology.

His analytical framework makes it possible to view changes in societies not as isolated phenomena, but as integral parts of long-term processes in which social figurations and the ways in which people regulate their own behavior and emotions change simultaneously. Although his name is now inextricably linked

to *The Civilizing Process*, his sociological career spans almost the entire twentieth century, from his early works and research during the Weimar Republic, through decades of emigration and work in Great Britain and Ghana, to his late international recognition and intensive work during the final decades of his life. In other words, Elias's theoretical perspective emerged and changed in response to a social world that was itself changing before his eyes.

For this reason, contemporary readings of Elias are not simply a derivative of his central theses. Their scope and limits are reassessed through empirical testing and theoretical development. If process is the subject of Elias's sociology, then its contemporary readings must also remain processual.

The concept of informalization is one of the most significant examples of a new reading of figurational sociology. It demonstrates how Elias's theory continued to develop through the work of sociologists who adopted, questioned, and extended it. When Cas Wouters began analyzing changes in social norms, behavior, and emotional codes in Western societies in the mid-1970s, he tried to explain why the rules of conduct in many areas of life were becoming less strict, less formal, and less determined by status. Did this mean that the civilizing process had changed direction, or was a different form of self-control concealed behind the apparent relaxation of norms?

Wouters's answer was theoretically important precisely because he rejected the equation of greater informality with a lack of self-control. The process of informalization denotes the expansion of the repertoire of acceptable behaviors and emotions, greater flexibility in social relations, and the weakening of certain traditional formal rules, but at the same time also growing demands for self-regulation. A society in which people are allowed to behave in a more "relaxed" manner does not therefore have to be a society with less control; it may be a society in which control has become more flexible, less visible, and more internalized. Wouters later developed this perspective through research on changing patterns of behavior and emotions, including relations between the sexes and generations, changes in class relations, as well as specific changes in attitudes toward sexuality and death.

Wouters should therefore be viewed neither as a mere follower nor as an author who simply "applied" Elias's theory. His contribution is important precisely because he showed that figurational sociology can be used to analyze changes that Elias himself had not systematically addressed. This opened up the possibility of extending the processual perspective to later stages of social development and raising the question of how, after a long historical period of the formalization of behavior, the very forms of self-control change.

For this reason, at the beginning of this special issue, we are publishing, in Serbian translation, Wouters's 1977 text on informalization. The significance of this work lies not only in the fact that it represents one of the early formulations of a concept that Wouters would later develop into an extensive research program. The text also occupies a special place in the intellectual history of the Elisian circle, as it emerged in direct dialogue with Elias. This circumstance deserves a somewhat more precise explanation. According to Wouters's account, Elias was involved in

shaping the English version of the paper and accepted the basic idea that changes in the social codes of the twentieth century could be understood as a distinct phase of the long-term civilizing process. More importantly, Elias later himself referred to Wouters as the author who introduced the concept of informalization. Informalization should therefore not be understood merely as a reinterpretation of Elias's work developed by his followers, but also as a concept that emerged in direct dialogue with Elias and with his approval of its central argument.

This translation therefore has a twofold significance. On the one hand, it is an important document in the history of the development of Eliasian sociology; on the other, it is a paradigmatic example of how the figurational theoretical perspective can be reread and reinterpreted. Publishing the text in Serbian thus represents both a contribution to making an important work from the history of contemporary sociological theory more accessible and an attempt to make one part of the development of Eliasian sociology directly available to readers. Although Elias's sociology is present in the Serbian sociological milieu, the theory of informalization and its relationship to Elias's work have so far not received adequate attention in Serbian.

With this in mind, Adrian Jitschin's commentary on Wouters's work, which we are publishing and which was written specifically for this issue, should also be read. Jitschin offers a broader intellectual and biographical context, tracing the relationship between Wouters and Elias, as well as Wouters's intellectual trajectory and the circumstances in which the idea of informalization emerged. In this way, we are also offered an insight into how sociological concepts come into being: certainly not outside history and relationships between people, but within concrete intellectual communities, through conversations and mutual influences.

Jitschin is particularly well positioned for such an undertaking. A sociologist and social historian by training, a member of the board of the Norbert Elias Foundation, and the author of the biography *Das Leben des jungen Norbert Elias*, he brings together Elias's life, historical context, intellectual trajectories, and the emergence of sociological ideas, drawing also on archival materials. His book, published in 2021, reconstructs Elias's life and intellectual development up to 1940 and shows how his work can be understood when theoretical ideas are placed back within the concrete historical, social, and biographical circumstances from which they emerged. The commentary published in this issue is part of Jitschin's broader effort to examine Elias's life and work in their historical and intellectual entirety. We look forward with great interest to the future results of this undertaking.

Finally, it is worth noting that the texts opening this issue are also connected by a particular approach to the writing of sociology. Elias's sociology was not directed at a narrow circle of professional sociologists: he sought to make large-scale social processes intelligible through historical materials, empirical examples, and the analysis of concrete relationships between people. We find a similar approach in Wouters, who develops theoretical arguments through examples from everyday life, and in Jitschin, who, through biographical and archival sources, places sociological insights back within their concrete historical

and social circumstances. In this sense, their work confirms one of the key characteristics of Elias's sociology – the attempt to understand the social world through processes and interrelations, and to view people as *homines aperti*.

These introductory texts also bring together different generations of Eliasian sociology. Wouters's work takes us back to the moment when one of the important reinterpretations of the civilizing process was only beginning to take shape, while Jitschin's commentary allows us to view that moment from today's perspective, as well as through the relationships and intellectual circumstances in which the idea of informalization emerged. Together, they, to paraphrase Jitschin's comment on Wouters, "in many respects embody the spirit of what an Eliasian sociological inquiry ought to look like more faithfully than Elias himself".

The articles collected in this special issue differ in their subjects, approaches, and research problems, but share an interest in Elias's legacy as an open theoretical space. Their aim is not to further consolidate Elias's work within the canon of the history of sociology, but to highlight its theoretical productivity and the possibilities that his concepts and perspectives open up when confronting various contemporary empirical and theoretical problems.

Some of them engage directly with the conceptual foundations of figurational sociology, revisiting its understanding of power, state formation, communication, the forming of generations and the nature of figurations. Stefan Mandić reconstructs and critically examines Elias's approach to power and state formation, while also proposing a hierarchical classification of figurations and introducing the concept of "fundamental figurations" to designate relations of interdependence that decisively shape the basic characteristics of a society and the trajectories of historical change.

Along similar lines, Miloš Jovanović's article brings Elias's figurational sociology into dialogue with communicative constructivism, examining both the ways in which the latter builds upon the figurational paradigm and the theoretical differences between the two. In doing so, the article shows how communicative constructivism further develops the relational and processual character of figurational sociology and extends its analytical scope to late modernity.

Milica Vlajić highlights Norbert Elias's significant contribution to the development of the sociology of generations. Her paper focuses on how Elias builds on Mannheim's approach to generations and how he further develops the generational perspective by analysing the historical process of generational formation.

Other contributions take Elias's theoretical perspective into specific substantive fields. Aleksej Kišjuhas traces classical and contemporary contributions to the history and sociology of emotions, from the pioneers of the field, Johan Huizinga and Lucien Febvre, to contemporary theoretical frameworks such as emotionology and the theory of emotional communities. Particular attention is devoted to the role of Norbert Elias and his concept of the civilizing process in the development of the historical sociology of emotions.

Milena Kojić and Pavle Milenković turn to the problem of time, comparing the understandings of Norbert Elias and Fernand Braudel. They argue that

Braudel's conception of multiple historical rhythms and Elias's concept of processual figurations represent complementary attempts to overcome the epistemological limitations of presentism. Their discussion of the history of mentalities, imagination, and utopian thought also highlights the significance of Elias's psychohistorical perspective for understanding post-Braudelian developments within the Annales School and contemporary debates on social temporality.

The figurational perspective is also brought to bear on questions of stigma, exclusion, and power. Andrej Kubiček draws on the theoretical framework of Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson to examine deeply rooted prejudices directed against Roma communities. Using concepts such as the "established" and the "outsiders," he traces the genesis of stereotypes about Roma and interprets their stigmatization not merely as a psychological process, but also as a consequence of situational microsociological relations and a long-term macrosociological process grounded in relations of power.

A different extension of figurational sociology is offered by Stefan Janković, bringing Elias's process sociology into connection with the problem of the nuclear bomb and considers the ecological implications of figurational sociology. By placing figurational sociology in dialogue with the multiple temporalities of the Earth, the article problematizes Elias's theory of levels and questions its implicit anthropocentrism. The nuclear bomb serves here as an example through which to consider whether technological objects, as constituents of figurations, can influence relations within networks of interdependence.

Taken together, these contributions do more than demonstrate the variety of fields in which Elias's figurational sociology can be applied. They show that the concepts and theories underlying figurational sociology remain flexible, open to revision, and in constant development, and that processuality is not merely a subject of figurational sociology but also a characteristic of its own theoretical evolution. By expanding and developing its conceptual vocabulary, this theoretical perspective retains considerable analytical potential for understanding complex, long-term, and changing social processes.

We would like to express our special thanks to the members of the Board of the Norbert Elias Foundation for their support in publishing Cas Wouters's seminal paper on informalization in *Sociologija* and for their contribution to continuing Elias's legacy in Serbian sociology.

Special Issue Editors

Milena Kojić
University of Novi Sad, Faculty of
Philosophy

Stefan Mandić
University of Belgrade, Faculty of
Philosophy

INFORMALIZACIJA I PROCES CIVILIZACIJE*¹

Norbert Elias je razvio teoriju koja pokazuje kako su se standardi ponašanja, posebno među višim klasama, u širem smislu, od kraja srednjeg veka do početka devetnaestog veka, menjali u određenom smeru. Koristi primere različitih aspekata društvenog ponašanja kao dokaz. Reč je uglavnom o najosnovnijim funkcijama ljudskog života, kao što su jelo, piće, spavanje, itd. Na taj način, pošto su te funkcije zajedničke za sve ljude, postaje moguće uporediti promene u standardima ponašanja u različitim vekovima. Tako, Elias pokazuje da je tokom pomenutog perioda smer promene u standardima koji upravljaju svim ovim različitim aktivnostima, u širem smislu, isti. Ovo je jedan od načina na koji to opisuje:

Ma kako da ove razlike nastaju, opšte usmerenje promena ponašanja, 'trend' procesa civilizacije, posvuda je isti. Promena uvek ide ka manje-više spontanoj samokontroli, podređivanju trenutnih poriva u skladu s dugoročnijim sagledavanjem, te stvaranju složenijeg i čvršćeg superega (Elias 1939/2001: 508).²

* Wouters, C. (1977). Informalisation and the civilising process. In: P. R. Gleichmann, J. Goudsblom, & H. Korte (Eds.), *Human figurations: Essays for/Aufsätze für Norbert Elias* (pp. 437–456). Stichting Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift.

Prevod objavljujemo uz ljubazno odobrenje upravnog odbora Fondacije Norberta Elijasa. Fusnote su prilagođene sistemu citiranja u časopisu Sociologija, tako da ima određenih odstupanja od originala (prim. prev.).

1 Napisao sam ovaj članak uz pomoć Norberta Elijasa.

2 Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*, Bern und München, 2nd. print. 1969, p. 338, part II: „... aber wie immer diese Unterschiede im Einzelnen zustande kommen, die ganze Richtung der Verhaltensänderung, der 'Trend' der Zivilisationsbewegung ist überall der gleiche. Immer drängt die Veränderung zu einer mehr oder weniger automatischen Selbstüberwachung, zur Unterordnung kurzfristiger Regungen unter das Gebot einer gewohnheitsmäßigen Langsicht, zur Ausbildung einer differenzierteren und festeren „Über-ich“-Apparatur.“

[Svi citati preuzeti su iz dostupnog prevoda sa nemačkog na srpski jezik: Elias, N. (2001). *Proces civilizacije* (S. Đorđević, Prev.). Sremski Karlovci, Novi Sad: Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovića (originalno delo objavljeno 1939). Voters navodi ove citate na engleskom jeziku, a zatim citira i drugo izdanje na nemačkom jeziku: „... aber wie immer diese Unterschiede im Einzelnen zustande kommen, die ganze Richtung der Verhaltensänderung, der 'Trend' der Zivilisationsbewegung ist überall der gleiche. Immer drängt die Veränderung zu einer mehr oder weniger automatischen Selbstüberwachung, zur Unterordnung kurzfristiger Regungen unter das Gebot einer gewohnheitsmäßigen Langsicht, zur Ausbildung einer differenzierteren und festeren „Über-ich“-Apparatur.“ (Elias 1939/1969: 338) (prim. prev.)]

Na jednom mestu u svojoj knjizi, Elias koristi citat iz Kakstonove (William Caxton) *Book of Curteseye* kao opšti pokazatelj ovog smera: „Ono što je nekad bilo dopušteno, danas nije”³ (Elijas 1939/2001: 130). Otkako je Elias izneo svoju teoriju, iskusili smo promenu u standardima ponašanja koja bi se gotovo mogla opisati preokretanjem Kakstonovog citata. Moglo bi se reći: Ono što je nekad bilo zabranjeno, sada je dopušteno. Te promene su postale poznate kao „permisivnost”. U ovom radu ću govoriti o ovoj promeni standarda ponašanja, koja se označava pojmom *informalizacija*.⁴ Problem sa kojim se suočavamo kada ispitujemo ovaj proces jeste koliko ovaj trend potvrđuje ili protivreči Eliasovoj teoriji.⁵ Čak i ne pozivajući se na ovu teoriju, neki autori tvrde da ova permisivnost, ovaj proces informalizacije, nagoveštava slom civilizacije, dok drugi u njoj, naprotiv, vide napredak u standardima civilizacije.

Nekoliko primera može da posluži kao preliminarna ilustracija koncepta informalizacije. Uzmimo, na primer, način na koji se ljudi međusobno oslovljavaju u komunikaciji. Bilo je u ranijim vremenima, naravno, klasno-specifičnih razlika, ali je barem u srednjoj klasi upotreba ličnih imena označavala prilično visok stepen intimnosti ili bliskosti. To je bilo ograničeno na krugove bliskih rođaka ili veoma dobrih prijatelja. Danas je krug ljudi koji se međusobno oslovljavaju ličnim imenima postao mnogo širi. Tako se u ranijim vremenima podrazumevalo da će deca biti učena da se obraćaju svojim roditeljima sa „oče” i „majko” (ili, manje formalno, „tata” i „mama”). Generacije rođene tokom ili posle rata, 1940–1945, bile su znatno neformalnije u tom smislu. Te generacije lagodnije koriste lična imena među sobom. Mnogi više ne prekorevaju svoju decu kada im se ona obraćaju ličnim imenima (iako je još uvek neobično da se ta deca obraćaju svojim bakama i dekama ličnim imenima, jer ne čuju svoje

3 Prozeß, p. 107, part I („repreuid“ would now be written „reproved“).

[Autor navodi formulaciju na engleskom jeziku: *Things sometime allowed is now repreuid*; te naglašava da bi se umesto termina *repreuid* korišćenog u 15. veku, danas koristio termin *reproved* (odbačen, osuđen, prekoravan). U tekstu je preuzet citat iz preвода na srpski jezik (Elijas 1939/2001) (prim. prev.)]

4 U ranijoj verziji, u jednom drugom radu nisam koristio termin „informalizacija”, već izraz *tutoyering* (ovaj holandski ekvivalent francuskog glagola *tutoyer* i nemačkog *duzen* doslovno se odnosi na upotrebu ličnih imena i zamenice za priso obraćanje u komunikaciji). Oni koji su pročitali tu verziju rada nezavisno jedni od drugih savetovali su mi da umesto tog izraza upotrebim termin „informalizacija”. I sam sam razmatrao tu mogućnost, ali sam je u početku odbacio, budući da sam izraz *tutoyering* već koristio u svojim ranijim radovima i želeo sam da zadržim terminološku doslednost. Ovo predstavlja primer kako su određene ideje i koncepti „u optičaju” unutar pojedinih intelektualnih krugova, kao i koliko je često neopravdano pripisivati njihovo autorstvo prvoj osobi koja ih je upotrebila u nekoj publikaciji. Zašto je termin „informalizacija” prikladniji, postaće jasnije u nastavku ovog rada.

Ne koristim termin „permisivnost”, već pojam „informalizacija”, zato što kolokvijalni izraz „permisivnost” skreće pažnju isključivo na ublažavanje normi ponašanja, dok su promene o kojima je ovde reč u stvarnosti znatno složenije, što nastojim da pokažem u ovom radu.

5 Rasprava o ovom problemu može se pronaći i u časopisu *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift*, tom 3, br. 1 i 3. U broju 1, Kristijen Brinkreve (Christien Brinkgreve) i Mišel Korzec (Michel Korzec) razmatraju ovaj problem upoređujući norme ponašanja iz 1954. i 1974. godine, na osnovu analize rubrika sa savetima čitaocima („agony columns”) u jednom holandskom časopisu iz navedenih godina. U broju 3 nalazi se i moj članak koji se bavi istim problemom. Isti primeri i argumenti izneti u tom radu korišćeni su i u ovom tekstu.

roditelje da to čine). Ovo je vrlo značajan pomak, jer neposredno ukazuje na barem jednu od pokretačkih snaga pomenutog procesa informalizacije: ove ratne i posleratne generacije su stajale u izvesnoj opoziciji prema formalizmu svojih roditelja, a time i prema starom načinu oslovljavanja, koji su smatrali simptomom nejednakosti i autoritarnosti. Stoga su nastojali da prema svojoj deci postupaju, koliko god je to bilo moguće, manje autoritarno nego što su osećali da su njihovi roditelji postupali prema njima. To osećanje se izražava tako što dozvoljavaju ili čak podstiču svoju decu da ih oslovljavaju na isti način na koji su njih oslovljavali njihovi roditelji, odnosno ličnim imenima. Ovo je jedan aspekt promene u ravnoteži moći između roditelja i dece u korist potonjih, koji se može primetiti u društvu u celini.

U kancelarijama se takođe može primetiti promena u istom smeru. Teško je zamisliti da su pre rata, 1940-1945, sekretarice ili članovi osoblja oslovljavali svog šefa ličnim imenom, kao što se dešava danas. Isto važi i za članove osoblja univerzitetskog departmana prema svojim profesorima. U većini zemalja, uz izuzetak Engleske, standardi za korišćenje formalnih i neformalnih oblika za 'ti' (ti i Vi/ *thou* i *you*) su veoma jasno definisani. U skoro svim evropskim zemljama, upotreba neformalnog 'ti' (*tutoyer* ili *duzen*) postala je mnogo raširenija. Među mlađom generacijom, posebno među studentima iste generacije, postalo je podrazumevano da čak i ljudi koji se ne poznaju koriste neformalnije 'ti' umesto formalnijeg 'Vi'. Između ljudi različitih generacija takođe je upotreba neformalnog 'ti' (*thou*) češća nego ranije. Još jedan primer informalizacije može se pronaći u promenama u započinjanju i završavanju pisama. Umesto formalnijeg „S poštovanjem” ili „Iskreno Vaš”, češće se piše „Srdačan pozdrav”. Kratkim pregledom telefonskog imenika u Amsterdamu može se primetiti da neki profesori i drugi sa akademskim titulama više ne štampaju svoje titule.

Veoma upečatljiv primer informalizacije je smanjenje društvenih ograničenja, posebno u srednjoj klasi, nametnutih seksualnom i drugim povezanim oblicima ponašanja. Veoma formalni načini na koje je, prema ranijim standardima ponašanja, seksualnost bila društveno regulisana, očigledno su postali neformalniji. Opseg seksualnih iskustava dozvoljenih standardom koji upravlja tim iskustvima znatno se proširio. Tako je, na primer, postalo prihvatljivo u većoj meri otkriti žensko i muško telo, a da se pritom ne pređu granice „dobrog ukusa”. Takođe, danas mnogi ljudi imaju seksualna iskustva i govore o njima otvorenije nego što bi to ranije bilo moguće. Isto važi i za menstruaciju i druge telesne funkcije, bilo da su one povezane sa seksom ili ne. Ovo se više ne smatra tako velikim prestupima protiv važećeg standarda ponašanja kao što je to ranije bio slučaj.

Intenzitet ovih promena može se ilustrovati istraživanjem Šarlote Biler (Ch. Bühler), u kojem je analizirala dnevnik dečaka i devojčica iz srednje klase, napisanih u prvim decenijama ovog veka (Bühler 1925; 1927; 1934). U svom istraživanju ovih veoma ličnih zapisa, otkrila je da mlade devojke nikada nisu pominjale bilo kakvo ponašanje, osećanja ili misli u vezi sa seksom. U dnevnicima dečaka pronašla je samo jednu takvu opasku koja ukazuje na to koliko je jedan dečak bio ogorčen zbog standarda seksualnog ponašanja koji je sadržao pravilo

da se mora uzdržavati od svih seksualnih iskustava pre braka (Bühler 1925: 94-95). Ovo pravilo je danas u velikoj meri nestalo. Od adolescenata od 17 ili 18 godina danas se više ne očekuje da se potpuno uzdrže od tih iskustava pre braka. Oni sve češće mogu da slede svoje seksualne porive. Ova promena je posebno izražena za devojke, na čiju reputaciju su prestupi mnogo više uticali nego na reputaciju momaka. Reputacija momka nikada nije bila toliko pogođena istom vrstom prestupa. Njegova reputacija bi relativno manje patila, na primer, od kratke avanture sa „devojkom niskog morala”. Ovaj diskriminatorni dvostruki standard je oslabio do određene mere.

Postoji mnogo drugih dobro poznatih primera informalizacije i svi ukazuju na to da je standard društvenog ponašanja, posebno među srednjom klasom, postao labaviji. To implicira, kao što se sada može videti, da su mnogi načini ponašanja koji su bili zabranjeni postali dozvoljeni, u ovom ili onom obliku i da se u oblastima društvenog života kao što su pisani i govorni jezik, odevanje, muzika, ples i frizure, ponašanje i emocije regulišu manje formalno nego što je to nekada bio slučaj. Posmatrač koji uporedi sliku društvenog života prethodnih generacija sa današnjom videće da je potonja u mnogim aspektima šarenija, bukvalno i figurativno.

Na prvi pogled, ovi primeri informalizacije označavaju popuštanje standarda i popuštanje samokontrole i zaista, tako generacije o kojima sam govorio često razumeju tu promenu, razliku između sopstvenog načina ponašanja i ponašanja svojih roditelja. Često vidimo da oni ne odbacuju jednostavno društveni kodeks ponašanja svojih roditelja; oni tvrde da ne slede nikakav društveni kodeks i štaviše, da ljudi ne treba da slede bilo kakav kodeks koji nameće društvo. Trebalo bi da se ponašaju u skladu sa sopstvenom individualnošću i sa onim što smatraju da je drugima, kao pojedincima, želja ili potreba. Kao što se može videti, ovo označava veoma specifičan osećaj individualne slobode u poređenju sa društvom koje se, kao takvo, doživljava kao opresivno, kao oličenje poricanja slobode pojedinca.

Mnogi od veoma različitih, pa čak i suprotstavljenih pokreta, koji se primećuju u ovim generacijama, ne mogu se razumeti bez osvrta na ovakva osećanja. Bilo da nalaze izraz u privrženosti marksističkim pokretima koji se bore protiv ugnjetavanja od strane buržoasko-kapitalističkog društva, u pridruživanju hipi ili pokretima „susreta”, koji artikulišu ta osećanja u terminima ličnog rasta, samoispunjenja ili samoaktualizacije i uzimaju za uzor ljude kao što su Keruak (J. Kerouac), Maslov (A. Maslow) i Rodžers (C. Rogers), ili na druge načine, oni ukazuju na dalekosežnost i rasprostranjenost nemira i nezadovoljstva, posebno izazvanih kod mlađih generacija životom u naprednijim industrijskim društvima našeg vremena. Oni pokazuju snagu pobune protiv prinude i potčinjavanja za koje mnogi ljudi osećaju da su im izloženi u postojećem društvu, kao i protiv poricanja ličnog ispunjenja koje ide uz to. Ovde se nalaze neki, ali ne svi, koreni borbe protiv starijih ograničenja i tabua koji se doživljavaju kao simboli ugnjetavačkih sila ove ili one vrste, čiji autoritet i legitimitet više nisu priznati. Pokušaću da ilustrujem ovaj trend kratkim primerom koji na prvi pogled može da deluje trivijalno, ali koji ukazuje na snažne procese promene.

U 12. izdanju najpopularnijeg holandskog priručnika o bontonu, objavljenom tokom pedesetih godina, mogu se pročitati sledeće rečenice:

Dečje proslave mogu biti uspešne samo kada su čak i najmanji detalji unapred isplanirani i kada postoji odrasla osoba koja upravlja, koja se stara da se program pravilno prati. To važi i za većinu proslava za odrasle. Jedina razlika je u tome što upravljanje ne bi trebalo da bude primetno i potrebno je održavati pretvaranje da svako može da radi šta želi (Groskamp-ten Have 1957: 190).

Za mnoge iz mlađih i pojedine iz starijih generacija, uglavnom ali nikako isključivo iz srednje klase, ova vrsta propisa bi izgledala kao primer pomalo besmislenog formalističkog poricanja individualne spontanosti.⁶ Mnogi bi takođe odbacili ovakvo pravilo jer bi ga smatrali pokušajem da se održi način života koji ima karakter statusnog simbola. Osetili bi da je planiranje proslave po minutima samo simbol dostojanstvene regulacije celokupnog života uglednih pripadnika srednje klase, odnosno generacije njihovih roditelja, koju oni pokušavaju da održe nasuprot onome što smatraju manje regulisanim i neformalnijim životom nižih klasa. Kada mlađi pripadnici srednje klase priređuju proslave, pokušavaju to da učine na mnogo neformalniji način, ostavljajući mnogo veći prostor ljudima da uživaju kako žele. To ne znači da bi pristojnost ili norme uljudnosti bile potpuno odbačene (iako bi se mogli odbaciti ovi termini koji zvuče staromodno), već da je pristojnost potrebno osloboditi njene veze sa statusnim pitanjem i da je potrebno da ona dođe u potpunosti „iznutra”. Pitanje njihovih roditelja „Šta će komšije misliti?” se odbacuje kao neprihvatljivo jer statusna pitanja u organizovanju proslava kao i u drugim stvarima, prema ovom shvatanju, ometaju rast individualnosti i sposobnosti da se oseti šta je drugima pojedinačno želja ili potreba.

Godine 1939, Elias je prepoznao trendove ka informalizaciji. Video je da se neka od ograničenja koja su starijoj generaciji izgledala „prirodno” popuštaju, da standardi njihovih roditelja postaju problematični za decu:

„Sama društvena situacija”, napisao je, „stvara od ‘ponašanja’ akutan problem. U takvim razdobljima – a možda samo u njima – otvara se čovekovom pogledu vidik za mnoge stvari koje su prethodne generacije

6 Dok ovo pišem, u potpunosti sam svestan značajnih razlika koje u tom smislu postoje u različitim zemljama. Da ovaj tekst pišem isključivo za holandsku publiku, svakako bih mogao da se pozovem ne samo na pojedine pripadnike starije generacije, već bih s punim pravom mogao da napišem „mnogi pripadnici starije generacije”. Međutim, budući da je ovaj tekst namenjen široj međunarodnoj publici, moramo imati u vidu da bi se navedeni citat o priređivanju proslava u višim srednjim i višim društvenim slojevima američkog, britanskog i nemačkog društva, a verovatno i u nizu drugih društava, mogao razumeti kao sasvim savremena preporuka za ponašanje.

Stoga je neophodno naglasiti da tok procesa informalizacije nije istovetan u svim savremenim društvima, kao i da se u mnogima od njih mogu uočiti prilično snažni kontra trendovi, o kojima ću nešto više reći kasnije. Sasvim je moguće da je proces informalizacije u Holandiji izraženiji nego u pojedinim drugim evropskim zemljama, ali se, koliko je moguće proceniti, tendencija u tom pravcu jasno uočava u većini razvijenih industrijskih društava.

u svom ponašanju smatrale samorazumljivim. Sinovi nastavljaju da razmišljaju tamo gde su njihovi očevi stali; pitaju se za razloge tamo gde njihovim očevima to nije bilo ni na kraj pameti: zašto se u toj i toj situaciji ponašati tako i tako? Zašto je nešto dopušteno, a nešto zabranjeno? Kakav je smisao određenih moralnih propisa i pravila ponašanja? Konvencije koje su se bespogovorno prihvatale iz jedne u drugu generaciju, sada postaju problem. Osim toga, kao rezultat veće mobilnosti ljudi i sve češćeg susretanja s ljudima drugačije psihičke strukture, ljudi počinju sami sebe da gledaju s veće distance⁷ (Elijas 1939/2001: 569).

I na drugom mestu:

Izgleda nam da razdoblje posle Prvog svetskog rata, u poređenju s predratnim vremenom, obeležava 'labavljenje običaja'. Mnoge prinude u ponašanju, koje su postojale pre rata, oslabile su ili potpuno iščezle. Mnoge stvari, nekada zabranjene, sada su dopuštene. Kratkoročno posmatrano, izgleda da se proces odvija upravo suprotnim smerom nego što je onaj koji ovde prikazujemo; kao da dolazi do popuštanja prinuda koje društveni život nameće pojedincu. Ali ako pogledamo izblize, lako uočavamo da se radi samo o laganom 'povlačenju', zapravo, o jednom od onih kolebanja do kojih uvek dolazi usled složenosti istorijskog kretanja u okviru svake faze obuhvatnog procesa⁸ (Elijas 1939/2001: 248-249).

Uglavnom, može se uočiti – a pokazaću kasnije – da Eliasova teorija o procesu civilizacije, iako zahteva proširenje, pomaže da se osvetli struktura procesa informalizacije na koji se odnose primeri posleratnih generacija. Međutim, primenjujući objašnjenje na drugi posleratni period dvadesetog veka, moraju se uzeti u obzir određene promene perspektive. Elias je jasno prepoznao da uočljivo labavljenje ograničenja ne poništava njegovu teoriju, ali morao je da

7 „Die gesellschaftliche Situation selbst macht das 'Verhalten' zu einem akuten Problem. In solchen Phasen – und vielleicht nur in solchen Phasen – öffnet sich der Blick der Menschen für? Vieles, was den vorangehenden Generationen an ihrem Verhalten selbstverständlich erschien. Die Söhne beginnen an Stellen weiterzudenken, wo die Väter mit ihrem Nachdenken Halt machten; sie beginnen nach Gründen zu fragen, wo die Väter keinen Grund zu fragen fanden: Weshalb muss man sich hier so und dort so verhalten? Warum ist dieses erlaubt und jenes verboten? Was ist der Sinn dieser Manieren und jener Moralvorschrift? Konventionen, die lange ungeprüft von Generation zu Generation weitergegeben wurden, werden zum Problem. Und überdies lernt man zugleich Kraft der stärkeren Mobilität, durch die häufigere Begegnung mit Menschen anderen Gepräges, sich selbst distanzierter zu sehen ...“ (Elias 1939/1969: 443).

8 „... man hat den Eindruck, daß in der Zeit, die dem Kriege folgte, verglichen mit der Vorkriegszeit, das eingetreten ist, was man eine 'Lockerung der Sitten' nennt. Eine Reihe von Bindungen, die dem Verhalten vor dem Kriege auferlegt waren, sind schwächer geworden oder ganz verschwunden. Manche Dinge, die ehemals verboten waren, sind nun erlaubt. Und die Bewegung scheint so, von nahem betrachtet, eher in der umgekehrten Richtung weiterzugehen, als es hier gezeigt wurde; sie scheint zu einem Nachlassen der Zwänge zu führen, die dem Einzelnen durch das gesellschaftliche Leben auferlegt werden. Aber wenn man genauer zusieht, erkennt man unschwer, daß es sich nur um ein ganz leichtes Zurückfluten, um eine jener kleineren Bewegungen handelt, wie sie aus der Vielschichtigkeit der geschichtlichen Bewegungen innerhalb jeder Stufe des umfassenderen Prozesses immer von Neuem entstehen“ (Elias 1939/1969: 257).

se bori, u mnogo većoj meri nego što se to danas čini, protiv snažnih tendencija da se „permisivnost“, labavljenje ili nestanak ranijih tabua, smatra krajem civilizacije. Stoga je morao da naglasi da to nije slučaj, da su protivstruje koje se mogu primetiti relativno slabe i ni na koji način ne ukazuju na činjenicu da je proces civilizacije došao do kraja. Smatrao je, drugim rečima, da je izuzetno snažna opozicija labavljenju ograničenja bila karakteristična za postojeći ili establišment u usponu (nacisti, reakcionarni establišmenti), kao što je zaista i bila. Sasvim očigledno, establišmenti koje je Elias iskusi u tri godine između 1936. i 1939. – kada je pisao svoju knjigu – bili su relativno moćniji i konkretno, samouvereniji. Stoga je morao da naglasi činjenicu da prividno preokretanje civilizacijskog smera kretanja ne utiče na njegovu suštinu.

Način na koji je to naglasio može se pogrešno protumačiti, jer je formulisao svoj argument na takav način da sadrži sugestiju da su promene ka „labavljenju običaja“ ne samo relativno male već i privremene („jedno od onih kolebanja“). To očigledno nije slučaj jer se ovaj trend zadržao, pa čak i snažnijim tempom i intenzitetom tokom 1960-ih. Elias je napisao da „labavljenje običaja“ ostaje u potpunosti u okviru određenog „civilizovanog“ standarda ponašanja⁹, ali nakon ove rezerve, izjavio je: „U naše vreme, međutim, moguće je otkriti i predznake pojavljivanja novih i strožih prinuda¹⁰.“ (Elias 1939/2001: 249)

Formulacije poput ovih ne naglašavaju dovoljno činjenicu da je labavljenje ograničenja i kodeksa ponašanja – rečju, proces informalizacije – usko povezano sa, i istovremeno sadrži „strožije prinude“, kao što će biti pokazano kasnije. Očigledno, Elias nije analizirao ovu povezanost. Takva analiza bi pokazala da, u mnogim slučajevima, labavljenje kodeksa ponašanja ide ruku pod ruku ne samo sa labavljenjem ograničenja već i sa daljim pooštavanjem ograničenja, i da ovo drugo igra važniju ulogu, indukujući drugačiji obrazac ograničenja.

U odlomku o „labavljenju običaja“ u prvom posleratnom periodu, postoji sugestija da labavljenje kodeksa ponašanja ide ruku pod ruku samo sa labavljenjem samoograničenja. Ova jednostrana formulacija možda nije samo zbog činjenice da je Elias ovo napisao 1930-ih, sa svim gorepomenutim implikacijama, već i zbog toga što je njegovo istraživanje procesa kroz nekoliko vekova pokazalo, između ostalog, da su na duge staze, artikulisaniji, sveobuhvatniji i formalniji kodeksi ponašanja koincidirali sa povećanom samokontrolom. Kakstonov citat (stvari koje su ranije bile dozvoljene sada su zabranjene) Elias uzdiže u moto celokupnog smera kretanja. Dok raspravlja o „labavljenju običaja“, poziva se na ovaj moto kada kaže, „Mnoge stvari koje su ranije bile zabranjene sada su dozvoljene.“ Kako je ovo uzdigao kao moto istraživanih promena, implicira da smanjenje „permisivnosti“ odgovara povećanju samokontrole, što mu je možda otežalo da pronađe diferenciraniju i manje jednostranu formulaciju u preispitivanju povećane „permisivnosti“ (informalizacije) u sopstvenom

9 „Es ist eine Lockerung, die sich vollkommen im Rahmen eines bestimmten „zivilisierten“ Standard-Verhaltens hält, d. h. im Rahmen einer automatischen, als Gewohnheit angezüchteten Bindung und Umformung der Affekte sehr hohen Grades.“ (Elias 1939/1969: 257)

10 „Zugleich aber zeigen sich, ebenfalls in unserer eigenen Zeit, die Vorboten eines Schubes zur Züchtung neuer und strafferer Triebbindungen ...“ (ibid).

vremenu. Stoga je informalizacija, kao aspekt procesa civilizacije, nepotpuno integrisana u njegovu teoriju ovih procesa. Ovaj rad ima za cilj potpuniju integraciju.

Veoma je očigledno da razlika između generacija srednje klase u pravcu informalizacije nije nepovezana sa promenom ravnoteže moći kako između srednje i radničke klase, tako i između generacija unutar same srednje klase. Promena ravnoteže moći između srednje klase i radničke klase jedna je od najjačih pokretačkih snaga aspekta informalizacije u procesu civilizacije. Iako, gledano iz kratkoročne perspektive, ovo pomeranje u ravnoteži moći i pojačane tenzije koje ono stvara mogu otvoriti put eksplicitnijem izražavanju strasti, a time i odbacivanju ograničenja. Gledano iz dugoročne perspektive, to sasvim jasno pokazuje da zahtevi za samoograničenjem na obe strane postaju jači. Neki aspekti ovih problema biće razmotreni kasnije, ali pre toga, možda bi bilo korisno da ukratko istražim da li su predstave o sebi u mlađim generacijama o kojima sam govorio, realistične i u kojoj meri one predstavljaju želje i ideale.

Svakako nije nerealno misliti da visokoindustrijalizovana društva sa, kako bi Eljas rekao, veoma dugim i diferenciranim lancima međuzavisnosti, vrše veoma značajne pritiske na sve svoje pripadnike. To se može reći i za kapitalističke i za komunističke zemlje, koje jesu ili postaju visokoindustrijalizovane. Štaviše, pritisak na pojedince povećan je zahvaljujući činjenici da se ti lanci međuzavisnosti više ne zaustavljaju ni na jednoj državnoj granici, već gotovo bukvalno povezuju ljude širom sveta, jedne više, druge manje, na takav način da, drugim rečima, sukobi izazvani ovim međuzavisnostima nisu ograničeni na klasne sukobe unutar istog društva, već istovremeno izazivaju globalne međudržavne tenzije i sukobe. Zapravo, verovatno nije preterano reći da su dva velika rata dvadesetog veka bila ključne poluge kako promene ravnoteže moći između srednje i radničke klase unutar razvijenijih industrijskih nacionalnih država, tako i procesa informalizacije.

Ali ako je to slučaj, onda se može pomisliti da je predstava mlađe generacije o sebi barem delimično iluzorna. Iako je očigledno veoma složen problem, vredno je skrenuti pažnju na dva delimično kontradiktorna aspekta ovog preplitanja realističnih i imaginarnih aspekata ovih samo-ideala i ove slike o sebi. S jedne strane, u procesu informalizacije, određena ograničenja su nesumnjivo oslabila ili čak nestala. S druge strane, eksplicitna ili prikrivena želja da se individualna ličnost potpuno oslobodi društvenih ograničenja nosi sa sobom mnoštvo iluzija. Postoji veća tendencija među ovim emancipatorskim generacijama da traže individualno samoispunjenje i samorealizaciju u grupama ili društvenim pokretima. U tom smislu, snažne individualističke tendencije koje se ovde susreću imaju veoma drugačiji karakter od onih koje predstavlja politički ili kulturni liberalizam. Upravo zato što želja za individualnim samoispunjenjem nalazi svoj izraz u sve većoj meri u životu sa drugima, ograničenja koja život u grupama ili pokretima neminovno nameće pojedincu sklona su da iznova i iznova osujete imaginarne nade u individualnu slobodu, implicitne u većini pokreta o kojima je ovde bilo reči.

Nijedan od ovih ideala jasno i nedvosmisleno ne prepoznaje da život sa drugima nužno i neizbežno nameće ograničenja svakom ljudskom biću. To važi za male grupe kao što su hipi-zajednice ili, češće, porodice, koje često propadaju jer njihovi članovi očekuju vrstu i stepen individualne slobode koje nijedan zajednički ili porodični život ne može ponuditi, posebno kada je ravnoteža moći unutar ovih porodica ili zajednica prilično ujednačena, ili drugim rečima, kada su društvena i ljudska jednakost približno jednako visoko vrednovane kao i individualna sloboda. To važi i za veće grupe, emancipatorske pokrete političke prirode. To konačno važi za sve ljude koji žive unutar globalne mreže lanaca međuzavisnosti o kojoj sam govorio. Sve dok čovek u svom životu i idealima ne prepozna osnovnu činjenicu da zajednički život znači zavisiti od drugog, te da zahteva ograničenja, on će neminovno doživeti razočaranje – i zaista se nemali broj pripadnika emancipatorskog pokreta na kraju razočara i postaje frustriran.

Upravo u tom smislu, Eliasova teorija o procesu civilizacije, koja je fundamentalno sociološka teorija međuzavisnosti, suprotstavlja se još uvek rasprostranjenim teorijama akcije ili interakcije; ona može da bude od velike pomoći ne samo kao teorijski konstrukt, već i kao vodič u samopreispitivanju i svakodnevnom ponašanju. Problem očigledno nije samo u pitanju kako svaka osoba može pojedinačno da postigne samoispunjenje; problem je kako usaditi ograničenja na takav način da budu delotvornija i manje restriktivna u odnosu na instinktivne i emocionalne impulse, kao i da su kompatibilna sa potrebom za samoispunjenjem. Problem je dalje kako urediti društva na takav način da lična ograničenja nemaju štetni i neurotični karakter koji imaju danas, te da se povećaju mogućnosti za samoispunjenje i „smisao” kod pojedinačnih pripadnika društva.

Na primer, moguće je recimo, u grupi „susreta”, terapijskoj grupi ili kao pomoć prijateljima, ukazati na to da su ciljevi koje su pojedinci zacrtali diktirani statusnim pitanjima, i to na takav način da se zanemaruju važni lični potencijali, čije bi ostvarenje doprinelo samoispunjenju. Ukoliko ti pojedinci žive u društvu u kojem, zapravo statusne i razlike u moći igraju dominantnu ulogu, pokušaj da im se pomogne u razvijanju ličnih talenata može lako da propadne, jer je neposredna ambicija da se kroz bogatstvo stekne viši status, možda zbog činjenice da potiču iz osnažene porodice srednje klase, postala najvažnija pokretačka snaga u njihovom životu. Postoji na desetine drugih primera koji se mogu navesti i koji pokazuju da se smer u kojem ljudi traže individualno ispunjenje i smisao u životu ne može razmatrati – ili promeniti – bez razmatranja strukture društva, a posebno razlika u odnosima moći čiji su sastavni deo. Teško je emancipovati sebe – ili druge – iz statusnih pitanja u društvu u kojem su razlike u statusu i moći tako izražene kao u našem.¹¹

11 Međutim, uprkos tome, ove razlike su se tokom prethodnih decenija donekle smanjile, barem u pojedinim evropskim zemljama. Uporedo sa smanjenjem razlika u statusu i moći, generacije o kojima ovde prvenstveno govorim pridaju manji značaj statusnim kriterijumima kao što su zanimanje i prihod. Društvena vrednost pojedinca postala je u izvesnoj meri manje u vezi sa odgovorima na pitanja poput: „Čime se bavi Vaš otac?”, „Koje je Vaše zanimanje i kolika su Vam primanja?”, a u većoj meri od individualne sposobnosti da prepozna šta drugi ljudi, kao pojedinačne ličnosti, žele ili

Razmatranja poput ovih olakšavaju diskusiju o tome šta se može smatrati jednim od ključnih problema koncepta informalizacije: Da li trend ka informalizaciji podrazumeva preokretanje procesa civilizacije, u Elijasovom smislu tog pojma? Direktnan odgovor na ovo pitanje je – Ne, uz napomenu da je neophodan dalji razvoj njegove teorije da bi se razjasnio ovaj problem. Opet, može biti korisno početi jednostavnim primerom. Čak i površno poređenje između predratnih i posleratnih generacija srednje klase bi verovatno pokazalo da je odnos između roditelja i dece postao neformalniji ili, drugim rečima, roditelji teže da se prema svojoj deci ophode manje kao društveno superiorni prema društveno inferiornima (*de haut en bas*) i u izvesnoj meri više kao prema ravnopravnim ljudskim bićima. To implicira da im nameću manje eksplicitnih i formalnih ograničenja, ili makar nameravaju to da čine. Tako, pružajući svojoj deci širi okvir za život u skladu sa emocionalnim i seksualnim porivima datog trenutka, oni sami su prinuđeni da se podvrgnu strožijim, striktnije artikulisanim samoograničenjima nego njihovi vlastiti roditelji. Oni, na primer, moraju da planiraju svoje aktivnosti u mnogo većoj meri u skladu sa potrebama svoje dece.

Da navedem još jedan primer, veća tolerancija za otvoreno manifestovanje dečjih seksualnih poriva, kao u slučaju ranog praktikovanja masturbacije, zahteva od roditelja prilično snažnu i stabilnu kontrolu sopstvenih seksualnih poriva. Ali to nije sve. Veća samoograničenja koja se zahtevaju od roditelja u manje autoritarnom odnosu roditelj-dete, na duge staze, takođe rezultiraju većim zahtevima za samoograničenjem dece. S obzirom na to da živimo u eksperimentalnom dobu, u praksi možemo da naidemo na mnoge slučajeve u kojima roditelji nisu sposobni da ispolje kontinuirano i stabilno samoograničenje koje im nameće njihov vlastiti ideal manje autoritarnog postupanja prema svojoj deci. Shodno tome, može se uvideti da često nepotpuna i nestabilna sposobnost roditelja da žive u skladu sa sopstvenim idealima i posledične nedoslednosti u njihovom ponašanju prema deci, mogu rezultirati veoma neravnomernom i nestabilnom strukturom samokontrole kod dece.

Koliko god kontradiktorni i raznoliki bili rezultati ovog procesa informalizacije u praksi, čak i te nedoslednosti ne mogu se razumeti dokle god se ne uzme u obzir činjenica da je manje imperativna upotreba *Fremdwänge* (ograničenja koja sprovode drugi), u odnosu između društveno superiornih i inferiornih, pogodna za jači razvoj *Selbstwänge* (ograničenja koja sprovodi sam

im je potrebno, u skladu sa onim što se smatra potpuno razvijenom individualnošću. Pokušao sam da razmotrim problem promena u statusnoj hijerarhiji i promena u društvenom značaju koji se pridaje različitim statusnim kriterijumima u radu pod naslovom *On Youth and Student Protest*, objavljenom u zborniku *Transactions of the Seventh World Congress of Sociology*, tom III, Sofija, 1972.

Radi potpunijeg razumevanja povezanosti između razvoja predstava o sebi (*self-images*), ideala o sebi (*self-ideals*) i osećaja ličnog samoostvarenja pojedinca, s jedne strane, i razvoja predstava o kolektivu (*we-images*), kolektivnih ideala (*we-ideals*) i društvene vrednosti, odnosno statusa pojedinca, s druge strane, u okviru razvoja društvenih figuracija, videti: N. Elias i J. L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders*, London, 1965. Čitaocima koji poznaju holandski jezik posebno preporučujem novi teorijski esej Norberta Elijasa, koji je dodat holandskom prevodu ove knjige (*De gevestigden en de buitenstaanders*, Utrecht, 1977, Spectrum, Aula).

čovjek) kod potonjih. Ovo je jedna od ključnih ideja Eliasove teorije procesa civilizacije i primenjuje se na odnose između roditelja i dece unutar porodice, koliko i na odnose između onih koji vladaju i onih kojima se vlada unutar države. Moguće je reći da rastuća informalizacija odnosa između roditelja i deteta, koja na prvi pogled može da izgleda kao kretanje ka varvarizaciji – deca su razuzdana, možda otvorenije nasilna i izražavaju seksualno ponašanje – istovremeno može, dugoročno gledano, da proizvede dublje i čvršće ugrađenu strukturu samokontrole nego autoritarniji i formalniji tip odnosa između roditelja i deteta. Relativno je jednostavno razumeti ovaj teorijski uvid pozivajući se na ekstremne primere.

Ukoliko roditelji tuku svoju decu prutom za svaki prestup, deca će izbegavati presteupe sve dok ih nije moguće sakriti od roditelja, ali neće sama naučiti da kontrolišu impulse koji dovode do prestupa. Njima će više upravljati strah nego osećanje krivice i stoga neće biti sposobna da se kontrolišu u odsustvu spoljašnjih autoriteta kojih se plaše. Ako, s druge strane, roditelji pokušaju da obuzdaju sopstvenu frustraciju ili bes zbog dečjeg ponašanja koje smatraju štetnim i pokušaju da navedu dete – možda kroz umereno emocionalno distanciranje – da samo kontroliše ovu vrstu ponašanja, ili drugim rečima, da se civilizuje, ono će razviti stabilniju i dublje ukorenjenu samokontrolu u odnosu na dete čijim ponašanjem se upravlja štapom.

Mogu da ponudim primere i iz ličnog iskustva koji ilustruju ovu ideju. Oni istovremeno pokazuju složenost ovih problema, što vrlo očigledno odgovara složenosti društava u kojima živimo. Prema mojim iskustvima u određenim četvrtima Amsterdama, trenutno¹² u radničkoj i nižoj srednjoj klasi roditelji imaju tendenciju da se prema deci ophode na autoritarniji način, nego, na primer, u slučaju dece mladih profesionalaca (kao što je to slučaj i sa mnom). Moja starija ćerka ima prijatelje iz radničkih i domaćinstava niže srednje klase. Kada ih dovede kući u posetu, primećujemo da postoje dva obrasca ponašanja u toj situaciji. Ili se prema mojoj supruzi i meni ponašaju prilično formalno sa dozom strahopoštovanja kao prema nadređenima, kojih se očigledno pomalo plaše, ili osećaju da u našem domaćinstvu ne važe stroga pravila na koja su navikli u svojoj porodici te, kako bi se reklo, podivljaju. S druge strane, deca iz egalitarnijeg doma se, prema mojim zapažanjima, bolje snalaze u najrazličitijim situacijama. Nakon određenih godina, sposobna su da se kontrolišu, čak i u okruženjima koja su očigledno drugačija od njihovog doma. Međutim, dublje ukorenjene i neizbežne strukture samokontrole (ili strukture super-ega) u mnogim slučajevima takođe idu ruku pod ruku sa neurozama različitog stepena ozbiljnosti.

U teorijskim terminima, smanjenje nejednakosti u odnosima moći dovodi do više neformalnosti. Suprotno površnom čitanju, više neformalnosti u odnosima međuzavisnih ljudi izaziva i zahteva dublje ukorenjena samoograničenja nego odnosi formalnije prirode, karakteristični za veće i otvorenije razlike u statusu i moći i autoritarnije ponašanje društveno superiornih.

12 Videti napomenu br. 6. Može se dodati da, kada je reč o procesu informalizacije, Amsterdam verovatno zauzima vodeći položaj u odnosu na ostatak Holandije.

Još jedna povezana teorijska implikacija jeste da nije opravdano govoriti samo o drugačijem obrascu samokontrole ili drugačijoj strukturi samokontrole, već je o ovim promenama potrebno govoriti kao o promeni u nivou samokontrole. Ukoliko pomislimo na gotovo „prirodan” način na koji su, posebno mlade devojke iz srednje klasne, ali nikako samo one, potiskivale sve misli i ponašanja u vezi sa seksom, moglo bi se reći da su u mnogim aspektima prethodne generacije (srednje klase) morale da obuzdavaju svoje seksualne – i možda druge – porive i sklonosti, jer su ove kontrole funkcionisale prilično slepo, izvan svesne kontrole dotičnih pojedinaca. Određeni porivi i sklonosti su bili potisnuti na takav način da se više nisu mogli izraziti, osim u snovima i drugim „ogoljenim” trenucima.

U poređenju sa tim, danas su mnogi ljudi u daleko većoj meri naučili da izraze te porive i emocije na kontrolisan, društveno prihvatljiv način. Savremeni standard seksualnog ponašanja ne dozvoljava mladim ljudima da imaju potpuno neobuzdana seksualna iskustva, ali se od njih očekuje da se prepuste nagonima i emocijama samo na one načine i u onim situacijama koji ne krše ublaženiji i diferenciraniji društveni standard današnjice. Dakle, samokontrola ovih mladih ljudi, makar što se tiče seksualnosti, toliko se povećala da su oni danas u većoj meri sposobni da razmišljaju o izražavanju ili potiskivanju seksualnih nagona i emocija. Postali su svesniji društvenih i individualnih mogućnosti i ograničenja – barem u ovom pogledu, ali verovatno ne samo u ovom – i ova povećana svest im omogućava više nego njihovim roditeljima i bakama i dekama da obuzdavaju i izražavaju svoje nagone i emocije. Ovo bi moglo ukazivati na viši nivo svesti i možda veću samokontrolu.

Sve što je do sada rečeno može ostaviti utisak da je razvoj posleratnog perioda, posebno promene u ravnoteži moći između radničke i srednje klase, pravolinijsko napredovanje u jednom specifičnom smeru. Međutim, u skladu sa jednim od Elijasovih teorijskih modela (koji mi je usmeno saopšten), dugoročni procesi u jednom specifičnom smeru, koji se mogu uočiti, gotovo bez izuzetka idu ruku pod ruku sa kontraprocesima u suprotnom smeru. Pitanje je koji od njih jeste ili postaje dominantan u određenom periodu. Taj model je od pomoći u ovom kontekstu: iako se u oba posleratna perioda može primetiti rastući trend ka informalizaciji, kada periodi mira postaju duži, javlja se kretanje u suprotnom smeru, odnosno trend ka povećanoj formalizaciji među etabliranim klasama, kako u zapadnim tako i u istočnim industrijskim društvima, postaje izraženiji. To je simptomatično za stalne promene u ravnoteži moći između vladinih i drugih establišmenta s jedne strane, i mnoštva autsajderskih grupa u društvu s druge strane¹³. Novi trend ka formalizaciji danas je karakterističan za tendenciju ka većoj stabilizaciji i samouverenosti privilegovanih etabliranih grupa, bilo starih ili novih, u dugim periodima mira. U tom smislu, koliko se može videti, nema velike razlike između razvoja u kapitalističkim i komunističkim zemljama.

Čak ni Mao Ce Tung (Mao Zedong) ili njegova supruga očigledno nisu uspjeli da spreče nastajanje novog establišmenta unutar njihovog društva. Prinudna sila društvene dinamike u tom pravcu je impresivnija u tom slučaju,

13 Za detaljniju razradu figuracija etabliranih i autsajdera (*established-outsider figurations*), videti: N. Elias i J. L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders*, London, 1965.

jer je ideološki establišment Kine posvećen obnovi društva u obliku u kojem nejednakosti između etabliranih i autsajderskih grupa, u ovom slučaju između hijerarhije vladajuće klase i ostatka stanovništva, opadaju ili nestaju. Stoga ne čudi što se u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama, dakle u društvu ideološki usmerenom ka održavanju nejednakosti, primećuje mnogo izraženija tendencija etabliranih elita da održe svoju distinktivnu solidarnost u odnosu na autsajdere i da očuvaju snagu svog utvrđenja, uprkos povremenim katastrofama – poput afere Nikson (R. M. Nixon) – ili pokušajima relativnih autsajdera – poput Kartera (J. E. Carter) – da otvore vrata utvrđenja ili poruše neke od zidova.

Koristim ove primere iz dva društva, jednog komunističkog i jednog kapitalističkog, u kojima su nejednakosti između državnog establišmenta (u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama sa njihovim ekonomskim saradnicima) i autsajderskih grupa veoma velike, kako bih u fokus stavio fluidniju situaciju ravnoteže moći u razvijenijim evropskim državama blagostanja. U ovim manjim društvima, nejednakosti u ravnoteži moći između srednje i radničke klase s jedne strane i između državnog establišmenta i mase onih kojima se vlada s druge strane, znatno su manje nego, na primer, u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama. Proces informalizacije, stoga, kao i njegov kontratrend – pokušaj etabliranih grupa da potvrde svoju moć i svoju različitost kroz povratak većoj formalnosti – pod snažnim je uticajem tendencije da standardi ponašanja srednje i radničke klase utiču jedni na druge. Stoga se u odnosima srednje i radničke klase ovih evropskih društava susreću problemi koji nisu različiti od onih kojima se Elias bavio kada je istraživao odnos između monarhijskih i aristokratskih establišmenta i rastuće industrijske i trgovačke srednje klase. Da citiram:

I u porođajnim mukama ostalih pokreta nagore, standard ponašanja gornjih slojeva, koji je vladao ranije, na kraju labavi u većoj ili manjoj meri. Učvršćivanju novog standarda prethodi razdoblje potresa. Oblici ponašanja ne prenose se samo odozgo ka dole već, u skladu s premeštanjem društvenog težišta, i odozdo nagore. Tako je u toku uspona građanstva dvorsko-aristokratski kodeks ponašanja izgubio nešto od svoje snage. Oblici ophođenja i društvenosti postali su labaviji i delimično grublji. Stroži tabui kojima su srednji slojevi okruživali izvesne oblasti, posebno odnos prema seksualnosti i prema novcu, proširili su se u različitoj meri kroz šire slojeve da bi se konačno, kada je ova specifična ravnoteža napetosti nestala u naizmeničnim talasima popuštanja i obnavljanja strogosti, elementi ponašanja oba sloja stopili u novi, stabilniji kodeks ponašanja¹⁴ (Elias 1939/2001: 568-569).

14 „Auch in den Wehen anderer Aufstiegsschübe wurde der zuvor herrschende Verhaltensstandard der Oberschichten am Ende mehr oder weniger aufgelockert. Der Festigung eines neuen Standards ging eine Zeit der Erschütterung voraus. Verhaltensweisen übertrugen sich nicht nur von oben nach unten, sondern entsprechend der Verlagerung der sozialen Gewichte auch von unten nach oben. So verlor etwa auch in den Aufstiegsbewegungen des Bürgertums der höfisch-aristokratische Verhaltenscode manches an seiner bindenden Kraft. Die Umgangs- und Geselligkeitsformen wurden lockerer und vergrößerten sich zum Teil. Die strenger Tabus, mit denen in mittelständischen Kreisen bestimmte Verhaltenssphären belegt waren, vor allem das Verhalten zum Geld und zur Geschlechtlichkeit, setzten sich, mannigfach abgestuft, in weiteren

Ne može se sasvim razumeti proces informalizacije u evropskim zemljama ako se ne uzme u obzir da se i ovde mogu приметiti uspon tradicija radničke klase i opadanje tradicija ponašanja srednje klase¹⁵, iako nije moguće govoriti o pojavi novog, čvršće uspostavljenog kodeksa ponašanja. Upravo zato što takav kodeks ne postoji, mi živimo u periodu neizvesnosti i eksperimentisanja, sa svim njegovim opasnostima i rizicima kao i prilikama za avanturizam i uživanje.

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Kreisen durch, bis schließlich mit dem Verschwinden dieser Spannungsbalance, im Hin und Her von Auflockerung und Straffung und je nach der Geschichte dieses Ringens in der einen oder der anderen Fassung, Elemente des Verhaltensschemas beider Schichten von neuem zu einem festeren Verhaltenscode zusammenschmolze“ (Elias 1939/1969: 442).

Veoma plodonosan misaoni eksperiment sastoji se u tome da se, tokom čitanja dela *Proces civilizacije* (*Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*), razmotri u kojoj meri iskazi o ravnoteži moći i napetosti između monarhijskog i aristokratskog establišmenta, s jedne strane, i profesionalnih i trgovačkih srednjih slojeva u usponu, s druge, mogu doprineti boljem razumevanju ravnoteže moći i napetosti između srednjih i radničkih slojeva, kao i između državnog establišmenta i mase onih kojima se vlada u našem vremenu.

- 15 Ova dva kretanja zajedno ukazuju na smanjenje razlika u obrascima ponašanja između srednjih i radničkih slojeva; krajnosti u ponašanju i emocionalnom doživljavanju pripadnika ovih društvenih slojeva u izvesnoj meri približile su se jedna drugoj. Elias je ovaj aspekt procesa civilizacije označio kao „smanjivanje kontrasta“ (*diminution of contrasts*). Smanjenje kontrasta u obrascima ponašanja odvija se uporedo sa sve većom diferencijacijom, odnosno raznovrsnošću tih obrazaca. To podrazumeva rast sposobnosti da se u ponašanju svih aktera uoče i dožive suptilne razlike i nijanse. Elias je ovaj proces označio kao „uvećanje posebnosti“ (*increase of varieties*), smatrajući da su smanjivanje kontrasta i uvećanje posebnosti komplementarni aspekti jednog te istog procesa civilizacije: „Kontrasti između ponašanja gornjih i ponašanja donjih grupa smanjuju se u skladu sa širenjem civilizacije; pri tom specifičnosti i nijanse civilizovanog ponašanja postaju izraženije.“ (Elias 1939/2001: 513). U sažetku i razradi teorije procesa civilizacije, odeljak pod naslovom „Smanjivanje kontrasta, uvećanje posebnosti“ (Proces civilizacije 2001: 510; *Verringerung der Kontraste, Vergrößerung der Spielarten*, Prozeß, deo II, str. 342) u potpunosti je posvećen prvom aspektu, dok se drugi samo usputno pominje, bez dalje teorijske razrade.
- Smatram da bi ispitivanje povezanosti između ovih procesa i procesa informalizacije u velikoj meri predstavljalo dalju razradu i integraciju pojma „povećanje posebnosti“ u celokupnu teoriju procesa civilizacije. Budući da su te veze izuzetno složene, njihovo adekvatno objašnjenje zahteva poseban rad.

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Prevela
Milena Kojić

INFORMALIZACIJA KAO BIOGRAFSKI I DRUŠTVENO-ANALITIČKI KONCEPT*

Prikazani tekst predstavlja ključni doprinos iz kruga Norberta Elijasa. Prvi put je objavljen 1977. godine, a sada je ponovo, uz neznatne izmene, izdat gotovo pola veka kasnije. Iako je prošlo mnogo vremena, tekst je zadržao naučnu relevantnost i ostao je izuzetno ubedljiv zahvaljujući originalnosti argumentacije i analitičkoj rigoroznosti.

Radi dubljeg razumevanja i temeljnijeg bavljenja ovom temom, potrebno je izneti nekoliko napomena koje se odnose na autora i predmet njegovog istraživanja. Originalna publikacija pojavila se povodom osamdesetog rođendana Norberta Elijasa, kada je tridesetdvogodišnji Kas Voters (Cas Wouters) predstavio preciznu sociološku analizu svog savremenog društva – Holandije – analizu koja je proistekla iz intenzivne intelektualne razmene sa Norbertom Elijasom.

Tokom narednih decenija izuzetno plodne naučne delatnosti, Voters je ovaj koncept sistematski produbljivao, proširivao i teorijski kontekstualizovao. Među njegovim brojnim bibliografskim jedinicama¹ posebno se izdvajaju dva dela: *Informalization: Manners and Emotions since 1890* (Wouters 2007) i *Civilisation and Informalisation: Connecting Long-Term Social and Psychic Processes* (Wouters and Dunning 2019).

Ipak, uprkos kasnijem razvoju koncepta, ovaj rani doprinos sačuvao je intelektualnu vitalnost svoje prvobitne formulacije, ambicioznost teorijskog poduhvata i – što nije manje važno – naučni značaj koji mu je lično priznao Norbert Elijas. Upravo iz tih razloga tekst se ovde ponovo objavljuje uz manje pravopisne izmene.

Kako bismo odgovarajuće kontekstualizovali kasniji naučni razvoj i recepciju ovog teksta nakon njegovog prvobitnog objavljivanja, neophodno je izneti nekoliko zapažanja o njegovom kritičkom prijemu. Poseban značaj ima uticaj kasnijih publikacija samog Norberta Elijasa. Među njima se naročito izdvaja delo *The Germans*, koje je Elijas završio 1989. godine i koje je nakon njegove

* Komentar je autorski prilog Adrijana Jičina (Adrian Jitschin), pisan na engleskom jeziku za potrebe ovog tematskog broja časopisa Sociologija. Uz ljubaznu saglasnost autora, objavljujemo prevod na srpski jezik.

1 Za sveobuhvatan pregled njegovog izuzetnog doprinosa ovoj oblasti, bibliografija koja obuhvata sve Votersove publikacije dostupna je na njegovoj internet stranici: <https://www.caswouters.nl/>

smrti prevedeno na engleski jezik 1996. godine.* Na uvodnim stranicama (Elias 1989/2013: 18), Elias se direktno poziva na Votera uz napomenu – gotovo sa dozom žaljenja – da se njegov esej bavi samo Holandijom, dok su se promene koje je moguće uporediti u standardima ponašanja odvijale u znatno većem obimu širom evropskih društava dvadesetog veka. Elias dalje proširuje Voteraov analitički okvir koji se odnosi na transformaciju načina obraćanja na nemačkom govornom području, koristeći lik Leopolda Mocarta kao primer složenih ceremonijalnih pravila salcburškog dvorskog društva (ibid: 5) – referencu koju kasnije dodatno razvija u delu *The Loneliness of the Dying* (Elias 1985/2010: 31).

Štaviše, nesporno je da Norbert Elias, u odlomcima koji se odnose na nemački kodeks časti i njegov strogo uređeni sistem zadovoljenja za povredu časti, neposredno koristi konceptualni okvir koji je razvio u dijalogu sa Voteraom. Njegov prikaz se stoga metodološki može okarakterisati kao „gusti opis” (*thick description*), u kojoj rekonstruiše znatno rigidniji obrazac ponašanja Nemačkog carstva – oslanjajući se delimično na književne izvore, ali u velikoj meri i na autobiografske materijale. Takođe, nema sumnje da su se i Elias i Votera saglasili da je ovaj oblik rigidne psihološke prinude predstavljao jedan od ključnih društveno-psiholoških preduslova za nastanak katastrofe fašizma. Zatim, može se tvrditi da je upravo fašistička okupacija Holandije – kao i spremnost značajnog dela holandskog stanovništva na saradnju sa okupatorom – doprinela nastanku etosa slobode i neformalnosti koji je tako snažno obeležio formativno razdoblje Votera i njegove generacije. Oni koji su preživeli nemačku okupaciju postali su još svesniji da manje strogo uređeni i više neformalni oblik društvenog života pruža značajne mogućnosti za emancipaciju.

Ostaje otvoreno naučno pitanje u kojoj meri se Voteraov konceptualni okvir može primeniti – kao što je kasnije pokušao i sam Elias – na evropska društva u širem smislu, odnosno da li se on prvenstveno odnosi na Zapadna društva kao što su Holandija, Nemačka i Velika Britanija, u kojima je Elias živeo. Pokazuje se da su društva koja nisu prošla kroz uporedive posleratne transformacije – bilo zbog vojne okupacije, kao na Iberijskom poluostrvu, bilo zbog režima koji su se pozivali na komunističku ideologiju – u slične faze informalizacije ušla znatno kasnije; faze koje su u pojedinim nacionalnim kontekstima već na izmaku. Pitanje da li takve promene normi ponašanja slede ciklične, oscilatorne ili linearne putanje ostaje nerešeno; stanovište koje se ovde zastupa jeste da one nisu ni jednoobrazne ni neizbežne, već predstavljaju posebne društveno-istorijske faze oblikovane sukcesivnim generacijskim sukobima između novih društvenih grupa u nastajanju i ukorenjenih formacija koje poseduju moć.

* Kako bi se izbegla konfuzija u vezi sa naslovima, važno je napomenuti da je ovo delo prvenstveno objavljeno na nemačkom jeziku (*Studien über die Deutschen*, 1989), zatim se prvi prevod na engleski jezik može naći pod naslovom *The Germans* (1996), dok izdanje koje autor citira (*Studies on the Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 2013), predstavlja revidiranu verziju teksta, sa novim uredničkim napomenama, drugačijom organizacijom pojedinih eseja i značajnim intervencijama u tekstu (prim. prev.).*

U tom smislu, iako Votersov tekst identifikuje fenomen od izuzetnog sociološkog značaja, on ne raspolaže dovoljno širokom uporednom empirijskom osnovom koja bi bila neophodna za potkrepljivanje tvrdnji o njegovoj primenljivosti na različite nacionalne ili društvene okvire.

Originalna posveta teksta koji je ovde predstavljen, iz 1977. godine, glasi: „Ovaj članak sam napisao uz pomoć Norberta Elijasa.” To svakako nije bilo preuveličavanje, budući da je Norbert Elijas zaista učestvovao u nastanku i oblikovanju ovog rada. Svako ko je poznao Kasa Votersa znao je da je on bio sociolog izuzetne sposobnosti zapažanja, koji je, međutim, tokom čitavog života zahtevao stalnu intelektualnu podršku kako bi taj izvanredni dar pretočio u akademsko pisanje. Tokom godina našeg prijateljstva nikada nisam imao s njim nijedan sasvim običan, jednostavan razgovor, a ipak sam se osećao izuzetno privilegovano što sam ga poznao.

Kas nije bio samo osoba nadahnjujuće sposobnosti zapažanja, već i čovek koji je bio duboko ukorenjen u duh sopstvenog vremena. Kada u ovom tekstu piše o „generacijama rođenim tokom ili nakon rata 1940–1945.” govorio je o sebi i svojim savremenici. Posleratne godine je doživeo kao dete, u periodu kada je teško pogođena zemlja, okupirana od strane Nemačke, morala da pronađe svoje mesto unutar nove panevropske vizije koja se tek oblikovala. Pripadao je generaciji mladih Holanđana koji su slavili promene 1968. godine, kao i brojne kontrakulturne pokrete tog perioda.² Njegova generacija doživela je izuzetan uspon, globalno otvaranje koje je, nakon epohe totalitarizma u prvoj polovini dvadesetog veka, dovelo do transformacije Amsterdama iz tradicionalnog trgovačkog grada u kosmopolitski kulturni centar. Kas se nalazio upravo u središtu tog sveta kada je Norbert Elijas 1969. godine pozvan kao gostujući profesor u Amsterdam, gde su se njih dvojica upoznali.

Kao student koji je živeo na brodu (splavu), Kas je pozivao Elijasa na društvena okupljanja tog vremena, kojima je Elijas očigledno sa velikim entuzijazmom prisustvovao. U tom neformalnom svetu Elijas je pronašao vitalnost kakvu nije osetio još od tridesetih godina, pre perioda svog izgnanstva, i upravo je, između ostalog, prijateljstvo sa Kasom doprinelo njegovoj odluci da Amsterdam izabere za mesto penzionisanja. Ovo delo je, u mnogim aspektima, autobiografski sociološki dokument – zapis o nastanku međugeneracijske neformalnosti u Holandiji. Kako Voters navodi:

...ove ratne i posleratne generacije su stajale u izvesnoj opoziciji prema formalizmu svojih roditelja, a time i prema starom načinu oslovljavanja, koji su smatrali simptomom nejednakosti i autoritarnosti. Stoga su nastojali da prema svojoj deci postupaju, koliko god je to bilo moguće, manje autoritarno (Wouters 1977: 438).

2 Ovde vredi pomenuti i izuzetne uspehe *totalnog fudbala* pod vodstvom Johana Krojfa (Johan Cruyff) i Rinusa Mihelsa (Rinus Michels) - Ajaks iz Amsterdama osvojio je Kup evropskih šampiona tri puta, dok je holandska reprezentacija dva puta stigla do finala Svetskog prvenstva, 1974. i 1978. godine.

Ova formulacija, međutim, značajno umanjuje intenzitet generacijskih sukoba u kojima su Voters i njegovi savremenici učestvovali. Tokom većeg dela moderne istorije, Holandija je bila konfesionalno podeljeno društvo, obeleženo kalvinističkim urbanim establišmentom i pretežno katoličkim seoskim stanovništvom. Calvinistička buržoazija, sa svojim karakterističnim formalizmom, dominirala je institucionalnim životom Amsterdama – trgovačkog grada u koji je Kas stigao kao autsajder. Međutim, čak i u takvom okruženju, religijska disciplina i poštovanje autoriteta ostajali su duboko ukorenjeni.

Kas, nazvan po svom dedi Kasperu Votersu, trebalo je da, u porodičnoj tradiciji, preuzme vođenje molerske firme kao treći naslednik. Njegovi roditelji, u želji da društveno napreduje, upisali su ga u katolički internat – instituciju koja će se pokazati presudnom za oblikovanje njegovog intelektualnog i ličnog razvoja. Strogi disciplinski režim i seksualno zlostavljanje koje je tamo pretrpeo razvili su u njemu duboku sklonost ka otporu. Nakon što je dva puta pobeo iz te ustanove i potom protiv svoje volje smešten u vaspitno-popravnici dom, pružio je otpor svakom pokušaju pokoravanja. Ova iskustva iz ranog života uticala su na njegov izbor poziva – postao je socijalni radnik posvećen zaštiti drugih od prinudnih institucionalnih struktura. Marginalizovani i obespravljeni stanovnici Amsterdama postali su osnovni predmet njegovog naučnog interesovanja; bavio se njima i praktično i analitički i nastojao je da razume njihov društveni položaj. Zahvaljujući susretu sa Norbertom Eliasom, Kas je stekao konceptualne i metodološke alate pomoću kojih je ovu duboko ličnu sklonost ka otporu mogao da prevede u rigorozan sociološki okvir.

Mnogo toga što Norbert Elias nije pokušavao da zapiše – materijal koji je smatrao nedovršenim ili nedovoljno formalnim – Voters je iznosio otvoreno i neposredno. U tom smislu, postoji značajna razlika između Votersove i Eliasove sociološke prakse. Međutim, ta razlika ne predstavlja nekompatibilnost; naprotiv, Votersov rad u mnogim aspektima verodostojnije od samog Eliasova predstavlja ono kako bi jedna elijasovska sociološka analiza trebalo da izgleda – imajući pritom na umu da je Elias, na mnogo načina, ostao mislilac duboko ukorenjen u devetnaestom veku.

Kada sam Kasu predstavio biografsku studiju o Norbertu Elias, primio ju je sa velikim oduševljenjem i pohvalio je rad u celini. Njegova jedina primedba bila je: „**Opisuješ ga previše hladno, ne pleše dovoljno.**” Za Kasa je intelektualni život bio neraskidivo povezan sa muzikom i telesnim izražavanjem. Odbrana njegove doktorske disertacije predstavljala je svojevrsni događaj: Kas je stigao u kožnoj jakni, a nakon odbrane usledio je muzički nastup sa izvođenjem pesama Džimija Hendriksa (Jimi Hendrix). Sličan duh obeležio je i sahranu njegove supruge, na kojoj se čula Dženis Džoplin (Janis Joplin), osećao se etos Vudstoka i održano je neformalno okupljanje uz džez i pivo. Kas je svesno i istrajno nastojao da oslabi ukorenjene društvene norme i proširi domet neformalnosti, jer je u neformalnim društvenim odnosima prepoznavao uslove u kojima pojedinci mogu da ostvare stvarnu autonomiju i iskuse autentičnu životnu vitalnost. Za one koji su mu pristupali na specifičan način, bio je velikodušan i sjajan intelektualni sagovornik. Međutim, istovremeno je bio i beskompromisan kritičar formalnosti

u svim njenim oblicima; unapređivanje informalizacije za Kasa je predstavljalo istovremeno naučni i lični poziv.

Godine 2025. Kas Voters je preminuo. Oduzeo je sebi život, čini se, nakon pažljivog promišljanja. Tokom dugotrajnog putovanja iz Južne Amerike 2018. godine razgovarali smo o jednom Tolstojevom zapažanju o fenomenu zamora životom u starosti – odlomku koji je tada snažno odjeknuo u Kasu. Izgleda da je do 2025. godine došao do uverenja da je iscrpeo svu svoju sposobnost za dalji doprinos. Nakon smrti supruge Trus (Truus) – ljubavi njegovog života – osećao je da je izgubio radost koja mu je svakodnevno davala snagu. Govorio je da je osamdeset dve godine prikladna starost, ona sa koje se život može sagledati kao zaokružena celina. Kas i ja smo se poslednji put sreli tokom jednog dana u Amsterdamu: zajedno smo ručali, razgovarali o formulaciji njegove čitulje, razmišljali o temeljnim pitanjima sociologije i razmatrali savremeno stanje društva. Kas je još jednom preispitao sopstveni životni rad i njegovo značenje. A onda smo se oprostili, zagrlili i ja sam otišao prema železničkoj stanici, potpuno svestan da svog prijatelja više neću videti.

Kas Voters bio je osoba retke intelektualne dubine i izuzetne posvećenosti svojim uverenjima, i od njega se moglo mnogo naučiti – o tome za šta se zaista vredi zalagati, o tome kako život treba živeti i o spoznaji da se društva ne oblikuju prvenstveno ekonomskim pokazateljima, već kvalitetom slobode i uzajamnog poštovanja u kojem njihovi članovi žive jedni sa drugima. To je poruka koja zaslužuje najširu moguću vidljivost.

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Prevela
Milena Kojić

Stefan Mandić¹
University of Belgrade
Faculty of Philosophy

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POWER AND THE STATE AS PROCESS: ELIAS'S FIGURATIONAL ANALYSIS OF STATE FORMATION AND ITS LIMITS

Moć i država kao proces: Elijasova figuracijska analiza nastanka države i njena ograničenja

ABSTRACT: *This paper analyses Norbert Elias's understanding of the role of relational power within figurations and of the formation of the modern state. It compares classical sociological theories in which the basis of power is the possession of resources or institutional positions with Elias's relational model, in which power is based on uneven distribution of dependence among figurational actors. Subsequently, the article examines Elias's conception of the state as a processual outcome of long-term changes in the balance of power and the extension of chains of interdependence. Special attention is paid to Elias's account of state formation as a transition from feudal fragmentation to modern centralisation. The article also addresses the role which monopolisation of physical coercion and taxation, as well as the demographic, economic and political changes played in this process. Finally, the paper considers the limitations of Elias's model, particularly with regard to the absence of comparative analysis, the partial neglect of capitalism as a cause of social change and the lack of a hierarchy of figurations. It proposes the concept of fundamental figurations as a possible basis for further development of Elias's figurational sociology. In conclusion, the paper indicates the value of Elias's figurational sociology for a better understanding of the present and the future and refers to Elias as one of the most significant historical sociologists.*

KEYWORDS: Norbert Elias, figuration, power, state, historical sociology

APSTRAKT: *Rad analizira Elijasovo razumevanje uloge relacione moći u figuracijama i shvatanje nastanka moderne države. Polazi se od poređenja teorija moći u klasičnoj sociologiji, u kojima se moć izvodi iz posedovanja resursa ili institucionalnog položaja, sa Elijasovim relacijskim modelom moći, u kojem moć proizilazi iz neravnomerne zavisnosti figuracijskih aktera. Potom*

1 stefan.mandic@f.bg.ac.rs; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4531-4436>

se prikazuje Eliasovo shvatanje države koja se razume kao procesualni ishod dugoročnih promena u balansu moći i produžavanja lanaca međuzavisnosti. Posebna pažnja je posvećena Eliasovom objašnjenju procesa nastanka države, shvaćenog kao tranzicije od feudalne fragmentacije do savremene centralizacije. Analizira se i uloga koju su u tom procesu imali monopol nad fizičkom prinudom i oporezivanjem, te demografske, ekonomske i političke promene. Na kraju rada se razmatraju granice Eliasovog modela, posebno u pogledu nepostojanja uporedne analize, delimičnog zanemarivanja kapitalizma kao uzroka promene i nedostatka hijerarhizacije figuracija. Rad predlaže uvođenje koncepta fundamentalnih figuracija kao osnove za potencijalno unapređenje Eliasove figuracione sociologije. U zaključku, rad ukazuje na vrednost Eliasove figuracione sociologije za bolje razumevanje sadašnjosti i budućnosti i ističe Eliasja kao jednog od najznačajnijih istorijskih sociologa.

KLJUČNE REČI: Norbert Elias, figuracija, moć, država, istorijska sociologija

Introduction

Most sociologists have understood power as a condition of an individual or group that primarily derives from the possession of a property, object or position. Vilfredo Pareto (1916/1935: 1421–1425), a classical theorist of elites, argues that certain individuals occupy elite positions because they possess particular psychological and functional qualities. For Marx (1859/1904: 11–14), the power of a given class is indicated by the ownership of the means of production. According to Weber (1922/1978: 926), power, understood as the probability of imposing one's will despite resistance, is a relational phenomenon that depends on the possession of goods and positions. Economic power emerges from control over goods and opportunities for income (Weber, 1922/1978: 53; 926), while political power is sourced from parties' capacity for political control (Weber, 1922/1978: 938–939). Michael Mann (1986: 6–7) defines power as the position of a given individual within networks of power. Departing from the approaches of most of these authors, Elias formulates power through further articulation of Weber's relational definition.

For Elias, power is a characteristic of relations between interdependent actors, whereas the main source of power imbalance is the uneven distribution of dependence. In other words, power does not only depend on the possession of a property, object or position, but on involvement in a relation of interdependence as well. Simply put, the party in a relationship that is less dependent has more power, while the more dependent party has less power. Power is therefore not the property of an individual, but is always manifested within networks of interdependence (Elias, 1970/1978: 74; Elias and Scotson, 1965/1994: xviii). This definition of power allowed Elias to review power-related phenomena, such as the state, differently. Elias (1939/2000: xiii) agrees with Weber (1922/1978: 54) in the most general definition of the state as a monopoly over physical coercion. Nevertheless, Elias does not refer to the state as a given condition or

a static entity, but as a figuration whose full historical manifestation depends on long-term processes of increasing/decreasing interdependence. Where chains of interdependence are short, the state is weak or non-existent, while the long chains of interdependence enable the emergence of the centralized modern state (Elias, 1939/2000: 236; 344).

This paper aims to present in detail how power and the state are understood in Elias's figurational sociology and how the historical process of state formation is interpreted in relation to it. The systematic reconstruction of Elias's thought is not only expository as its goal is to highlight the limits of his model by exploring the internal logic of his conceptualisation of figuration, power and state. At the end of the paper, it is suggested that figurational sociology would be strengthened by the concept of fundamental figurations (fundamental relations of interdependence), understood as empirical phenomena that structure power relations in society over the long-term and crucially shape the character of other figurations. While Elias does not explicitly distinguish fundamental figurations from 'ordinary' figurations, this paper argues that hierarchisation of figurations, in which economic, political and military relations are treated as more influential, would increase the explanatory capacity of figurational sociology, without completely negating its processual and relational foundations. Methodologically, this paper combines reconstructive analysis of Elias's theory and a conceptual synthesis that may create a basis for further comparative and historical research.

Conception of Power in Elias's Figurational Sociology

One of the oldest debates in sociology is the dispute between realism and nominalism. According to realists, phenomena such as the state, class or social formation exist as an independent reality separate from individuals, or, as Durkheim (1895/1982: 50–60) writes, as independent "social facts." Nominalists, by contrast, are of the opinion that society represents a collection of individuals and that the state, class and similar concepts are abstract entities through which the actions of a multitude of individuals are explained (Weber, 1922/1978: 89–90). Elias identifies the dispute between nominalists and realists as a false dilemma, which he avoids by introducing the concept of figuration (Van Krieken, 2005: 5; Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 54–56). A figuration is a relation of interdependence between individuals structured by power balances (Elias, 1939/2000: 482). Multiple figurations form a chain of figurations or a network of figurations. Society could, therefore, be understood as a branching network of figurations (not as the sum of individuals or social facts). Figurations may refer to relations at the micro level: for example, an individual family constitutes a figuration, since it represents a relation of interdependence among its members. They may also refer to higher levels: the state, for instance, also constitutes a complex figuration of interdependence among a multitude of individuals.

An important aspect of every figuration is power, due to the fact that power balances are inherent to every relation of interdependence. Since Elias does not

regard power as a substance which one can possess, he argues that it exists only within relations of interdependence, in which power ratios are continuously shifting (Van Krieken, 2005: 6). Thus, Elias understands power as a level of dependence within a relation:

From the day of his birth, a baby has power over its parents, not just the parents over the baby. At least, the baby has power over them as long as they attach any kind of value to it...Equally bi-polar is the balance of power between a slave and his master. The master has power over his slave, but the slave also has power over his master, in proportion to his function for his master – his master's dependence on him. In relationships between parents and infants, master and slave, power chances are distributed very unevenly. But whether the power differentials are large or small, balances of power are always present wherever there is functional interdependence between people. In this respect, simply to use the word 'power' is likely to mislead. We say that a person possesses great power, as if power were a thing he carried about in his pocket... Power is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another; it is a structural characteristic of human relationships – of all human relationships (Elias, 1970/1978: 74).

Power relations do not arise only from economic interdependence, such as the division of labour or political interdependence, such as relations of coercion, but from every possible form of interdependence, which may be psychological, emotional or symbolic in character:

We depend on others; others depend on us. In so far as we are more dependent on others than they are on us, more reliant on others than they are on us, they have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them by their use of naked force, or by our need to be loved, our need for money, healing, status, a career or simply for excitement (Elias, 1970/1978: 93).

To offer an implicit critique of Marx's position that the power of a given group depends predominantly on the possession of the means of production, Elias, together with John Scotson, conducted research in 1965 that resulted in the study *The Established and the Outsiders*. The study aimed to examine power relations between established residents and newcomers in a suburb of Leicester (referred to in the study by the pseudonym Winston Parva). Although both the established residents and the newcomers belonged to the same class² and ethnic group, a power imbalance formed between them, with the established residents

2 According to Loyal (2004: 132–137), Elias's understanding of class bears affinities with the approaches of Weber, Marx and Thompson, while at the same time remaining highly distinctive. For Elias class is "at once historical, concrete, reflexive, relational and processual. This is achieved in part by his use of a deceptively simple figurational model to understand class processes. This allows him to see the two-way pressures on individuals from both above and below, but also horizontally, in relation to intra-class relations and power ratios. On this basis, intra and interclass dynamics are theorized from both a 'we' and 'they' perspective. Here boundaries between groups are fluid and shift as the overall nexus of interactions and interdependencies within a figuration changes" (Loyal, 2004: 137).

becoming dominant in relation to the newcomers. The power of the established residents was manifested through the stigmatisation and exclusion of newcomers (via gossip) and granted easier access to local political offices to the established group. This power was not based on the possession of economic resources, but on longer settlement and the social cohesion that was drawn from it. (Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 63–64; Malešević and Ryan, 2013: 168). As Elias states:

One could see here the limitations of any theory which explains power differentials only in terms of a monopolistic possession of non-human objects such as weapons or means of production and disregards the figurational aspects of power differentials due purely to differences in the degree of organisation of the human beings concerned ... As one came to gradually recognize in Winston Parva, the latter, especially differences in the degree of internal cohesion and communal control, can play a decisive part in the greater power ratio of one group in relation to that of another (Elias and Scotson, 1965/1994: xviii).

Elias acknowledges that, in certain historical situations, the possession of non-human economic objects may lead to greater disparities in power. This is particularly the case in situations where social inequalities are so pronounced that the subordinate group has difficulty reproducing itself biologically and economically. However, in situations where economic differences between the dominant and subordinate groups are small or non-existent, power disparities are mainly produced by non-economic factors (Elias and Scotson, 1965/1994: xxxii; Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 65–66). Although Elias insists that the power of a given individual or group always derives from the degree of their dependence within a figuration, he is also aware that the possession of particular attributes and resources can significantly shape the extent to which a group or individual is dependent. Therefore, in *The Civilizing Process*, Elias emphasizes that the possession of qualities such as aggressiveness greatly increased one's chances of becoming a feudal lord. He also stresses that the power of an individual feudal lord depended on the possession of armies and wealth (Elias, 1939/2000: 234). It can be argued that Elias's definition of power is a further articulation of Weber's relational conception³ in which power derives both from one's position within interdependence and from the possession of particular attributes and resources.

The principal weakness of Elias's conception of power is the absence of a precise analytical framework that could clearly determine the extent to which the possession of a particular resource or attribute shapes the power of an individual or group within a figuration. Elias does not explicitly establish a clear hierarchy that would make it possible to determine which type of resource (economic, political, military, ideological, etc.) is most important in enabling a particular group or individual to attain a dominant position within figurations and affect

3 "In general, we understand by 'power' the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Weber, 1922/1978: 926). "Power means any chance within a social relationship to realise one's own will, even in the face of resistance, regardless of the basis on which this chance rests" (Weber in Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 66).

power distribution in wider society. In other words, a key limitation of Elias's approach is the lack of a systematic differentiation of figurations according to the type of resources or properties on which they are based. This paper seeks to address this by introducing the concept of fundamental figurations, which will be discussed in detail later.

Elias's Conception of the State

Elias's basic definition of the state does not differ greatly from the classical definition. He identifies two basic features of the modern state: the monopoly over the means of physical coercion and the monopoly over taxation (Hadas, 2017: 41). What is specific to Elias's understanding of the state is his argument that the fully developed modern state is not a fixed institutional entity, but the consequence of a long-term process. The state emerges as a result of a process of monopolisation, an elimination contest among various competing political entities (centripetal forces) (Elias, 1939/2000: 344). The process of monopolisation itself is not a historical inevitability, but the unintended result of competition between different political entities. This process is based on the following logic:

If in a major social unit, a large number of smaller social units, which, through their interdependence, constitute the larger one, are of roughly equal social power and are therefore able to compete freely, unhampered by pre-existing monopolies, for the means of social power (primarily the means of subsistence and production), the probability is high that some will be victorious and others vanquished. As a result, fewer and fewer groups will gradually control more and more opportunities, while more and more units will be eliminated from the competition, becoming directly or indirectly dependent on an ever-decreasing number of dominant groups (Elias, 1939/2000: 269).

If the process of monopolisation leads to the centralized state, the process of feudalization (centrifugal forces) leads in the opposite direction: towards the disintegration of the state and the transfer of state-like attributes to the feudal estate as a kind of "mini-state" (Elias, 1939/2000: 236). Just as the process of monopolisation is connected with the growth of social interdependence, the process of feudalisation goes together with the decline in social interdependence. The state can be classified within a broader set of similar processes that Elias calls the "survival unit" or the "attack-and-defence unit" (Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 61–62). Elias describes the basic historical function of these units as follows:

These units all seem to have exercised comparatively strict control over the use of physical violence in relationships between their members. At the same time, they have allowed, and often encouraged, their members to use physical violence against non-members. To date, sociology has lacked any clear conception of the common features of this type of solidaristic

grouping at different levels of social development. Its function is obvious: it knits people together for common purposes – the common defence of their lives, the survival of their group in the face of attacks by other groups and, for a variety of reasons, attacks in common on other groups (Elias, 1970/1978: 138).

If Elias's understanding of the development of the state is carefully reconstructed, the subsequent conclusion could be reached. Under conditions of a gradual increase in interdependence and the unfolding of the process of monopolisation, the development of survival units proceeds in the following direction: tribe > city-state/feudal estate > absolutist state > modern state. According to Elias, although the monopolisation process is not a necessary phenomenon, once it begins to occur it unfolds in a structured manner (Elias, 1939/2000: 367). It may be concluded that the dynamics of the monopolization process arise from the probabilistic mechanism governing the outcomes of conflicts between units of approximately equal strength. The multitude of actions by individual survival units leads to the elimination of most of the units, an increase in interdependence and an unintended transformation of the social order and the emergence of the modern state (Elias, 1939/2000: 366; 369). Through this explanation, Elias attempts to reconcile determinism and voluntarism by emphasising that the direction of historical movement is often accidental (Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 46–47). Elias assumes that the conflict between modern nation-states will lead to the further development and enlargement of survival units, until the whole of humanity becomes connected in one large unit (Elias, 1970/1978: 139). Nevertheless, he underlines that the development of figurations is not necessarily one-directional (the process can always revert to feudalisation), and that, in addition to the level of interdependence and the monopolisation process, it depends on the preservation and transmission of the fund of human knowledge which could always be lost (Elias, 1969/1983). Although Elias's theory may superficially appear close to theories of modernisation, it is, for all the reasons mentioned above, very different from them. Elias emphasizes that progress is not a social inevitability and does not specify the increase of civilisation as normatively positive, but retains value-neutrality on this question (Elias, 1939/2000: 1–5). When focusing on the development of survival units, Elias illuminates another important aspect of figurational sociology. Networks of interdependence do not presuppose only cooperation and may also be based on war and violence. In other words, war and violence are also networks of interdependence:

Fierce antagonists (...) perform a function for each other, because the interdependence of human beings due to their hostility is no less a functional relationship than that due to their position as friends, allies, and specialists bonded to each other through the division of labour... The internal arrangements in each group are determined to a greater or lesser extent by what each group thinks the other might do next (Elias, 1970/1978: 76–77).

Elias's Account of the Formation of the Modern State in the Second Volume of *The Civilizing Process*

Elias's most important study, *The Civilizing Process*, examines how the extension of chains of interdependence led to the process of "civilising" and to the emergence of the modern state. In this study, he offered one of the most comprehensive and elegant historical analyses of European society. At first glance, it may seem surprising that his work was overlooked by later historical sociologists and social historians, such as Charles Tilly, Barrington Moore Jr., Michael Mann and Perry Anderson, etc. This could partly be explained by the fact that his main works, written in German in the 1930s, appeared in English much later, and were, therefore, not available to authors in the English-speaking world (Mennell, 2015; Kojić, 2023: 1). The delayed English translation of Elias's work revealed an interesting fact: the substantial elements of his analysis converged with those of later historical sociologists who had no access to his works or didn't draw from them. This convergence highlights the originality of Elias's theory and its pioneering importance for historical sociology. It is worth mentioning that, when *The Civilizing Process* is discussed, greater attention is usually paid to the first volume, which examines the civilising process at the micro level by focusing on psychogenetic processes. By contrast, the second volume, which focuses on more fundamental sociogenetic processes, on how monopolisation and the formation of the modern state led to psychogenesis, has been somewhat overlooked. This is the reason why this chapter will focus primarily on the second volume of *The Civilizing Process* (and only partially on the first volume).

In the second volume, Elias analyses the impact of processes of monopolisation and feudalisation, on the development of the modern state in Europe. Elias argues that centrifugal tendencies predominated in Europe after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, from the fifth to the eleventh century (Lau, 2022: 44). Feudalisation weakened central authorities and transferred economic and political functions to the level of the autarkic feudal estate based on natural production. The independence of the feudal estate also implied an underdeveloped network of interdependence (Elias, 1939/2000: 197–208; 370). Men with physical strength and a disposition towards violence became feudal lords. Since their position did not depend on relations with many people, feudal lords behaved in an unrestrained manner, were prone to extreme violence towards women, subjects and defeated enemies, while also lacking regulation of instinctual impulses in eating, drinking and sexual life (Elias, 1939/2000: 162–168; 370–372).⁴ Because of their intense emotional outbursts and sudden changes of mood (from brutality to generosity, from repentance to surrender to pleasure), Dunning and Hughes (2013: 88–89) argue that their behaviour resembled what contemporary psychology calls manic depression or bipolar disorder.

4 Because of Elias' attitude that violence is a core part of human behaviour, Malešević and Ryan (2013: 170–171) criticize him for a Hobbesian understanding of violence as a naturalistic quality of the human race. According to them (2013: 171; 175) organised violence and mass murders are products of modernity and civilisation rather than "animalistic" layers of human nature. It can be argued that this position overemphasizes Elias's "Hobbesianism" by overseeing his emphasis on short chains of interdependence, not biology, as the main cause of a more violent society.

From the eleventh century onwards, centripetal forces or the process of monopolisation, gradually gained strength (Lau, 2022: 45). One of the driving forces of the process of monopolisation was the growth of population in medieval Europe. Population growth led to greater population density and, therefore, to increased complexity in social relations (Elias, 1939/2000: 211). It encouraged the settlement in the European hinterland and the development of a land-based network of roads (Elias, 1939/2000: 225). Unlike Rome, whose main urban centres were located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, medieval Europe developed urban centres and trade routes deep in the continental interior (Elias, 1939/2000: 228). Population growth also brought about an increase in agricultural production and a more developed division of labour which in turn led to the development of the merchant stratum, the movement of surplus agricultural labour into towns, increased exchange and the monetisation of the economy (Elias, 1939/2000: 222–223).

These changes affected the behaviour of both major and minor feudal lords (large and small feudal landowners), but also of landless knights.⁵ Filling space simply by expanding existing or founding new feudal estates through clearing of uncultivated land became increasingly difficult. Under these conditions, acquiring and enlarging a feudal estate was possible only through internal military conquest in wars against other feudal lords or through external conquest, as in the conquest of foreign territories, for example, during the Crusades (Elias, 1939/2000: 215–221). Monetisation of the economy enabled major feudal lords to collect taxes more efficiently and thereby finance military forces. Continuous military conflicts transformed taxes from temporary contributions into permanent sources of state revenue (Elias, 1939/2000: 350). Minor feudal lords, oriented towards natural production and small autarkic estates, were neither interested in nor capable of successfully taxing monetary flows and instead relied on the sporadic plundering of merchant caravans and on kidnappings (Elias, 1939/2000: 239). Moreover, minor feudal lords depended on fixed incomes, natural dues converted into money and were, therefore, more adversely affected by rising prices of goods, caused by the increased amount of money in circulation (Elias, 1939/2000: 191). A change in military technology began during this period as well. Major feudal lords, due to their greater fiscal power, became less dependent on heavy cavalry composed of members of the feudal stratum and started to hire professional heavy infantry (Elias, 1939/2000: 193). Under ever-increasing competition pressure, greater fiscal power and a stronger monopoly over violence enabled major feudal lords to weaken minor ones. In the struggle among numerous feudal estates (survival units) the major feudal lords succeeded in defeating the smaller ones (degrading many of them

5 According to Elias the classes were divided not only vertically but also horizontally. Stanley Loyal (2004) points out that according to Elias “on the one hand ... stood land-monopolizing warrior families, noble houses and landowners, but also peasants, bondsmen, serfs and hospites who occupied a piece of land that supported them. On the other hand, we see individuals from both classes deprived of land. Thus both the knightly and the labouring classes became increasingly divided in their relationship to ownership of and access to land. Vis-à-vis the former, Elias identifies a tripartite distinction between those knights who ruled over one or more small estates, a smaller number who ruled large estates, and those without land, who placed themselves in the service of greater knights” (Loyal, 2004: 125).

to the status of landless knights), similar to the way in which, in capitalist competition within the economic sphere, large enterprises gradually take over small ones (Elias, 1939/2000: 260; Bakić, 2011: 15).

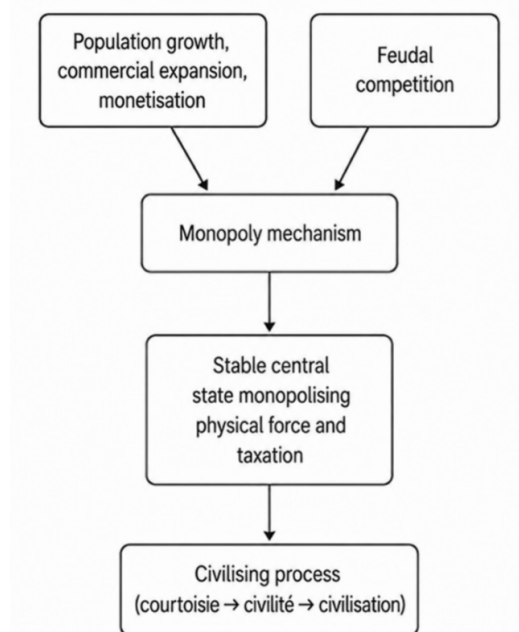
Population growth, the strengthening of trade, the rise of the bourgeois stratum and the intensification of monopolisation together contributed to the extension and increasing complexity of chains of interdependence. Minor feudal lords no longer depended only on their autarkic estates. Many of them lost landholdings and became propertyless knights. Their life chances now relied on the kings and great nobles (Elias, 1939/2000: 238–240). For that reason, they had to change their patterns of behaviour and pursue their interests not only through violence, but also through indirect methods such as intrigue and diplomacy.⁶ These behavioural changes required greater self-control and restraint (Elias, 1939/2000: 190). In the Late Middle Ages, the castles of great feudal lords and kings were transformed into courts, which became the main political arena for the pursuit of the interests of different factions of the feudal class. *Courtesie* emerged at the courts of magnates as a set of rules governing conduct and the regulation of impulses (Elias, 1939/2000: 252). It was the earliest layer in the civilising process, limited only to aristocratic groups, within which belonging to the court meant belonging to a code of conduct (Elias, 1939/2000: 52). Progressive growth of fiscal power between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries enabled rulers to gradually completely replace the feudal warrior stratum with a standing army and a permanent bureaucracy thus halting the effects of centrifugal forces (Elias, 1939/2000: 343). In addition to ownership of the state apparatus, the absolute ruler based his power on balancing the power of the different factions of the nobility and the bourgeoisie (the royal mechanism) (Elias, 1939/2000: 320–321). *Courtesie*, in the form of *civilité*, spread from the court and was no longer a matter only of the aristocracy, but of a broader stratum of the elite, especially the bourgeoisie. Among members of the elite, behavioural self-regulation became internalized (the development of the superego), as the norms defining “good behaviour” expanded significantly (Elias, 1939/2000: 88; 386–387).

In absolutism, the state was the property of the ruler, an extension of the ruler’s household (Elias, 1939/2000: 343). However, for a complex society to function, the ruler required a significant network of people whom he employed as professional members of the bureaucracy and the army. Monopolisation made rulers increasingly dependent on other people. As administration professionalised, the state ceased to be the ruler’s private possession and transformed into the nexus of chains of interdependence. The state became an instrument for satisfying the interests of different classes and the monopoly over coercion and taxation became socialized (Elias, 1939/2000: 372–374). The process of the emergence of the modern market and the “general state”

6 Alongside Europe, Japan was one of the few premodern societies in which feudalism was the dominant form of social and political organisation. As in Europe, in Japan a highly developed warrior aristocracy was present, composed of the daimyo, the upper stratum of the nobility, and the samurai, the lower stratum. With the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in the seventeenth century, the Japanese feudal polity underwent a process of centralisation. Eiko Ikegami argues (1995: 10–12) that this process led to the taming and civilising of the samurai in a manner comparable to the process Elias identifies in Europe. The taming of noble classes in both cases was necessary for effective state creation (Górnicka and Mennell, 2020: 280).

raised *civilité* to the level of *civilisation*. Civilised behaviour, first required of the aristocracy and then of the broader elite, now became established as a firm norm of conduct for the middle and upper strata and as a demand addressed to society as a whole. Forms of behaviour became uniform and were assumed to be universal (Elias, 1939/2000: 88–89; 427–428). As the interdependence of different groups increased, so did the power of each individual group in relation to other groups. Consequently, “functional democratisation” emerged, establishing a balance of power between rulers and the ruled and between the upper and lower classes (Elias, 1939/2000: 117; 433). The formation of European “civilisation” as a subjective perception of one’s own superiority in relation to “savage” ancestors and poorer countries (Elias, 1939/2000: 5) is the consequence of long-term sociogenetic processes. The psychogenesis of civilised behaviour itself, and the psychological manifestations of the development of civilisation as a form of internal control of behaviour, *superego*, that Elias dealt with in the first volume of *The Civilizing Process*, cannot be understood without Elias’s discussion of the fundamental sociogenetic processes examined in the second volume.⁷ All aspects of the civilising process are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Representation of aspects of the civilising process



Note: The initial inspiration for this diagram came from a diagram presented in D. Smith, *Norbert Elias and Modern Social Theory* (2001: 22). The diagram, however, differs substantially from Smith’s original.

⁷ Elias contrasted successful French centralisation with Germany where centrifugal forces were more powerful due to a large size of the Holy Roman Empire. The centralisation of Germany only began in the 19th century and was more militaristic due to the stronger role of martial nobles in contrast to the middle classes. This specific context influenced the course of German politics in the 20th century (Elias, 1989/1996).

Critical Discussion of Elias's Understanding of the Process of the Formation of the Modern State

The reconstruction of Elias's thought displays both the strength and the underlying ambiguities of his model. The understanding of the state as a long-term historical process should be considered as the main strength. The principal limitation of Elias's approach is that the processual and relational openness and Eurocentric approach of his theory sometimes weaken its explanatory precision. This weakness is reflected in three more specific limitations: methodological, structural and theoretical. The basic methodological problem is his focus on the European case. Although in certain passages he sporadically mentions premodern China as another valid example of a separate civilising process⁸ (Kojić, 2023: 1), Elias's analysis is comparative, only within Europe, and not global in scope, which limits the universality of its conclusions. Later authors attempted to apply Elias's figurational approach to analyses of civilising processes in case studies of non-European societies or of humanity as a whole (Goudsblom, Jones and Mennell, 1996; Stebbins, 2009; Lau, 2022). Nevertheless, figurational sociology has not established a developed comparative analysis of civilising processes in different premodern societies.

In the premodern world, political centralisation was the norm rather than the exception. The decentralisation of European feudalism (Antonić, 1995: 129–133; Mandić, 2022: 187–189) is a characteristic that can rarely be found in other premodern societies, perhaps except in premodern Japan (Mandić, 2022: 201–204). Polities such as imperial China, ancient Egypt, ancient Persia, the Inca Empire and colonate Byzantium were all based on the existence of permanent bureaucratic administration and standing armies. In these societies the main ruling class was not the decentralised nobility, but the centrally organised state. Max Weber was aware of this and therefore classified these societies as patrimonial in contrast to European feudal society (Weber, 1922/1978: 1044–1051). Similarly, Karl Marx attempted to encompass these societies through the concept of the Asiatic mode of production (Marx and Engels, 1972: 33–37; Anderson, 1974b: 473–483). If all these societies developed centralised administration the question of why modern rational state did not emerge there before it did in Europe should be raised.

It can be argued that the crucial difference lies in the absence of capitalist relations of production in the mentioned societies. Capitalist development was not possible in traditional patrimonial (centralized) societies where state-imposed restrictions on profit generation disturbed capital accumulation (Weber, 1909/1976: 62–63; Sanderson, 1994: 44). On the other hand, capitalism, as a minor social formation, or as a figuration, structured by the emerging wage

8 "In the political strategies of China, for instance, one can discover a level of self-restraint at least on a par with that of the most highly developed industrial nations. Although in terms of its own economic development China still lags behind, its state formation process in terms of duration and continuity surpasses that of most other existing state societies of our time" (Elias, 1939/2000: 410).

labour/capital relation, originated in the European trading cities as early as the thirteenth century. It was precisely the decentralisation of European feudalism, due to the process Elias refers to as feudalisation and which Perry Anderson (1974a: 150) calls the parcelisation of sovereignty, that enabled the unobstructed development of capitalism.⁹ Without capitalism as a minor formation, the growth of productivity that became the basis of the greater fiscal power of major feudal lords and kings would not have been possible. Capitalism initiated the process of rationalisation of production and the rationalisation that arose in production later became the basis for the rationalisation of the state apparatus. Thus, for example, a social historian Henri Pirenne (1925/2014: 146–147) notes that one of the sources of modern bureaucratic administration was precisely the institution of the bailiff, which was recruited from the urban stratum. Early capitalism therefore made the European central state more productive, more instrumentally rational and more economically sustainable, enabling the emergence of absolutism as a more rational form of centralised state (as neo-patrimonialism or post-patrimonialism).¹⁰ According to Kapteyn (2004: 178) the monopolisation process which takes place under favourable natural condition can be used to explain the formation of the premodern centralized states (China, Korea, Japan, Turkey, Iran, England, France). Still, this cannot explain why the modern central state emerged only in the European case, without taking capitalism into consideration.

Elias emphasises the importance of the development of the merchant stratum for the process of monopolisation, but it remains secondary in relation to the population increase, the growth of interdependence and the monopolisation process. In other words, Elias treats proto-capitalism as one of the driving forces, but not as the most important underlying cause.¹¹ From the methodological weakness of the absence of a comparative method follows the structural problem of neglecting the significant role of capitalism. Without capitalist development, the process of monopolisation would have led to the gradual evolution of

9 The political and economic decentralisation of European feudalism enabled the merchant stratum to accumulate monetary wealth with relatively limited interference. From the thirteenth century onward, this accumulated wealth increasingly began to function as capital in European urban centres. Merchants employed wage labour in the production of woollen textiles, glassware, metal goods and other commodities (in Flanders and the cities of northern Italy). With the establishment of continuous commodity production based on wage labour, capitalism emerged in Europe as a minor economic figuration embedded in feudalism as a dominant economic figuration. For more on this see Mandić (2022).

10 The inspiration for connecting rationalization with capitalism is partly derived from Weber. However, in contrast to Weber, the argument advanced here is not that modern rationality (shaped by Protestantism, the emergence of the modern state, etc.) made capitalism possible (Mandić, 2022: 123). Rather, capitalism is understood as the source of modern rationality, (in its accounting, administrative and economic forms) which then expanded into the sphere of the state.

11 Nathalie Heinich (2013: 38) notes that Elias avoided causalism, and therefore didn't want to "provide every phenomenon one single cause" instead focusing on "close description on interdependencies". In this paper a somewhat different position is held. Elias was, to some extent, theoretically against causalism, but in the empirical explanation of the emergence of modern state he uses a multicausal approach.

feudalism into traditional patrimonialism, which was a frequent occurrence throughout history. In China, the unified central state disintegrated on several occasions, leading to phases of partial feudalization (quasi-feudalism) (Deng, 2002: 50; 54; 77). Yet, with the growth of monopolising processes, the traditional central state was re-established.

Methodological and structural problems also illuminate the main theoretical shortcoming of Elias's model. Elias makes no explicit attempt to establish a hierarchy of figurations according to the significance of the type of resource control on which they are based. This creates an analytical limitation because, at the explicit level, there is no intention to determine which figurations are most important for long-term organisation and transformation of the society. The argument proposed in this article is that the most consequential social changes and most important social structuring are generated by fundamental figurations. Power in these figurations derives from position within relations of interdependence, but also from the possession of material and social resources. The 'fundamentality' of these figurations is determined by the social importance of the resources on which they are based (that is, by the importance of these resources for social reproduction). Fundamental figurations could be defined as long-lasting and structurally stable empirical relations of interdependence between dominant and subordinate groups that are organized around control over socially significant resources and that exert disproportionate and long-term influence on the distribution of power in the society and on the configuration of other figurations. Criteria for differentiating fundamental figurations from 'ordinary' figurations are therefore the following:

1. fundamental figurations are based on the control of the resources that are crucial for social reproduction;
2. fundamental figurations significantly influence the character of other figurations and societal power distribution;
3. fundamental figurations' reconfigurations cause long-term societal consequences.

Three proposed fundamental figurations are economic (control over the means of production),¹² military (control over the means of coercion),¹³ and political (control over the means of administration) (ideological and religious figurations could potentially also be defined as fundamental, but this question

12 Economic figuration is identical to Marx's understanding of production class relations. It can be concluded that both Elias and Marx were highly interested in the analysis of processual aspects of human relations. Christopher Powell (2013: 92) argues that "Marx and Elias both theorize society in relational and processual terms" and "explain social life in terms of embodied social practices". However, their theoretical approaches were at the same time vastly different: "For Marx, one type of social relation—relations of production—inform and constrain all other relations. Elias makes no comparable assumption and explicitly treats relations of force as having their own irreducible dynamics."

13 The concept of means of coercion can be found in Tilly's (1990) analysis of the interaction between capital and state in premodern times.

lies beyond the scope of the present paper).¹⁴ The influence of the fundamental figurations is intertwined, thus, no complex historical process can be explained without an analysis of their interaction. Which of the fundamental figurations is hierarchically most important depends on the historical situation. However, this paper assumes that the economic figuration provides stronger long-term constraints on other fundamental figurations. The proposed supremacy of economic figuration is not a return to base-superstructure model or economic determinism and should be considered as historically contingent rather than universally applicable. The economic, military and political figurations should be understood as co-constitutive and co-causal. For example, military defeat can destroy economic figuration of a given society, just as economic decline can cripple military and political might. However, economic figuration is regarded as imposing more long-term constraints, because the mode of surplus product extraction often establishes a long-term framework within which military and political figuration can typically operate (for example, without sufficient level of surplus product a standing army and a permanent bureaucracy are not possible; without the economic autarky of feudal estate there is no political and military independence of the feudal lord etc.).

In analysing concrete historical instances of fundamental figurations and their interrelations, it is essential to establish whether they are undergoing a process of increasing or decreasing centralization and monopolisation. This distinction provides a basis for two types of fundamental figurations:

1. Decentralized fundamental figurations – In this historical type control over the means of production, coercion, and administration is dispersed among numerous actors or units, resulting in the existence of a larger number of individual figurations.
2. Centralized fundamental figurations – In this historical type, control over the means of production, coercion, and administration is concentrated in the hands of a small number of actors or units, resulting in the existence of a smaller number of individual figurations.

In accordance with the earlier definition and elaboration of the fundamental figuration, this concept can be operationalised through the following dimensions:

1. the object of control (what resource constitutes the source of dominant power within the figuration);
2. the type of interdependence (what fundamental groups are constitutive elements of the figuration);
3. the degree of centralization or decentralization;
4. the long-term structural impact (how a fundamental figuration influences long-term social change and other figurations).

14 While the concept of fundamental figurations might appear similar to Mann's (1986) concept of networks of power, the former focuses more on the relational dynamics of the underlying constitutive groups, whereas the latter conceptualizes power simply as a position within the network.

It is worth noting that the fundamental figurations are presented as a heuristic outline, with the intention of more precise future development of the concept. The goal of the four dimensions of fundamental figuration is to provide basic elements for future research. The paper does not provide more detailed operationalization (precise indicators for dimensions) because it is not empirical and thus, does not have a goal of testing concrete hypotheses. A more detailed overview of fundamental figurations is given in Table 1.

Table 1. *Types of fundamental figurations and their basic characteristics*

Fundamental figuration	The object of control	The type of interdependence	The degree of decentralisation/centralisation	The long-term structural impact
Economic	Means of production, surplus product, money, trade flows	Relation between fundamental classes (main exploiting and main exploited class)	Decentralised – large number of autarkic economic units or interconnected economic actors (feudalism and liberal capitalism); Centralised – few large capitalist units (monopoly capitalism); state as only or dominant economic unit (patrimonialism, real socialism)	Expands chains of interdependence, weakens feudalization, creates basis for monopolisation
Military	Means of coercion (arms and military technology)	Relation between survival units	Decentralised – large number of independent survival units (warring bands, feudal armies, citizen militias); Centralised – one dominant survival unit based on standing professional army	Reduces number of competing units, drives territorial consolidation, increases monopolisation
Political	Means of administration (bureaucracy, tax system, law)	Relation between ruler and the ruled within the survival unit	Decentralised – many independent and semi-independent administrative and legal centres within the larger survival unit; Centralised – one political centre with control over administration and legislature in the survival unit	Transforms tribute into regular tax, military victory into durable rule, royal retinue into professional administration, solidifies monopolisation

Source: Author

To demonstrate the potential heuristic value of the framework, a brief comparative illustration of premodern China and Europe will be given.¹⁵ The comparison is schematic on purpose rather than exhaustive. It does not aim to account for the full complexity and diversity of Chinese and European history (characteristics of different Chinese dynasties, different regional sub-forms of European feudalism, etc.) but to identify the long-term interaction between fundamental figurations. In premodern China, due to the process of monopolisation and irrigation-based agriculture, the political and economic figurations appeared in a centralised form very early on. The centralisation of the political and economic figurations led to the existence of a unified imperial bureaucracy and a standing army. The process of monopolisation conditioned the early initiation of the civilising process and the creation of a specific form of the Chinese understanding of civility. The centralised economic figuration manifested in the form of state monopolies over taxation and trade, which prevented the development of capitalist economic relations. In Europe, on the other hand, the decentralisation of the political and economic figuration enabled the development of capitalism. The strengthening of capitalism led to the centralisation of the political figuration. Dialectically, the initial political and economic decentralisation led to latter unintended political centralisation. However, while the centralisation in China was based on traditional relations, the European centralisation, driven by capitalist development, was by its character more rational because it adopted rational patterns of organisation from capitalism. The comparison of the European and Chinese examples shows that, although the economic figuration often imposes more long-term constraints, it can fully manifest itself only when in synergetic interaction with other fundamental figurations.

Unlike Marx, who emphasises the primacy of a single figuration (productive/class relations) (Powell, 2013: 92), and unlike Elias, who manifestly offers no hierarchy of figurations and assigns equal analytical value to a plurality of them (Powell, 2013: 99), the structural figurationism proposed in this paper would occupy an intermediate position. This approach ascribes explicit importance to the economy, but also the military and politics and treats resources and interdependent relations as equally important aspects of the figurations. Structural figurationism is as relational as classical figurationist sociology, insofar as power can manifest itself only through relations of interdependence. It is, however, somewhat less processual because the direction of change is not entirely open-ended but is in every historical case significantly conditioned by the characteristics of the fundamental figurations.

Despite our criticism of Elias's approach, it should be noted that Elias was a pioneer of historical sociology and that in the 1930s he conceptualised certain fully developed positions and/or proto-arguments that other authors would reach or further develop only several decades later:

15 This brief comparative illustration is largely based on detailed empirical analysis given in Mandić's doctoral dissertation *The Influence of European and Japanese Feudalism on the Emergence of Capitalism* (2022).

1. centralisation as the unintended outcome of class and elite struggle – a thesis defended from the 1970s onwards by representatives of historical institutionalism such as Theda Skocpol (1979) and Charles Tilly (1990);
2. the importance of population growth for changes in social relations – from the 1970s onwards, a central thesis among social historians of neo-Malthusian orientation (Aston and Philpin, 1985);
3. the importance of the merchant stratum for the emergence of the modern state – a thesis defended by Charles Tilly (1990) and Perry Anderson (1974a, 1974b);
4. the importance of trade for the dissolution of feudal relations – a thesis present in the works of Paul Sweezy (1978), Perry Anderson (1974a, 1974b), as well as Wallerstein (1974/2011) and Braudel (1977);
5. the importance of studying long-term processes for understanding social relations – the central thesis of Braudel's (1977) social history.

None of the later approaches attempted to connect the historical analysis of social processes with the analysis of the development of psychological consciousness in such detail, which is Elias's distinctive feature and which also indicates the breadth of his work, encompassing diverse influences, from Marx, Weber and Mannheim to Sigmund Freud and the Frankfurt School. Not many sociologists had the capacity to establish themselves as accomplished scholars in related disciplines such as history, economics, psychology and the theory of international relations. Elias may therefore be described as a total social scientist.

Conclusion

The greatest value of Elias's sociological thought lies in its understanding of phenomena such as the state social formation and class as figurational processes of long duration, which can be understood only through thorough socio-historical research. Equally important is his view that power is relational and that it is, to a significant extent, determined within relations of interdependence. Elias's inquiry into how power and the state as process have manifested themselves throughout history has one very important implication. Processes of the present, such as the modern state, cannot be understood without prior investigation of their historical genealogy. Similarly, attempting to predict what forms of sociality may appear in the future is impossible without in-depth historical analysis.

Nevertheless, Elias's position has several limitations, such as the absence of global comparative analysis, the partial relegation of capitalism to the 'background' cause, and the avoidance of a hierarchy of figurations. These limitations could be addressed through the concept of fundamental figurations, which enables analysis of a hierarchy of figurations according to the resources on which they are based and the extent to which they shape broader social relations. The concept of fundamental figurations could potentially improve figurational sociology and contribute to strengthening its analytical apparatus by making it more applicable to comparative research in historical sociology. In that sense,

the concept of fundamental figuration should not be understood as a rejection of Elias's theory, but as an attempt to make it more structured while preserving its relational and processual nature.

The brief comparison of Europe and China illustrates the analytical potential of the framework. Chinese political and economic centralisation provided a basis for traditional patrimonial state and prevented capitalism from emerging. European political and economic decentralisation, on the other, hand allowed the development of capitalism and of a rational modern centralised (post-patrimonial) state. It should be noted that the concept of fundamental figurations proposed in this paper is not a fully developed theory, but a potentially promising heuristic outline. Further theoretical elaboration and empirical research could build on this argument by operationalising the concept of fundamental figurations more precisely and by comparatively examining how variations in these figurations shaped processes of state formation across different premodern societies, thereby contributing to the emergence of different types of states. The above-mentioned may significantly contribute to the further understanding of the historical development of the state and of the dynamics of the current social processes.

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REFIGURING FIGURATIONAL SOCIOLOGY: NORBERT ELIAS AND COMMUNICATIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM

Refigurisanje figuracione sociologije: Norbert Eljas i komunikativni konstruktivizam

ABSTRACT: *This article brings figurational sociology into systematic dialogue with communicative constructivism, most prominently associated with Hubert Knoblauch. While Elias' framework powerfully captures processuality, relationality, and the co-evolution of subjectivity and social structures, it remains comparatively underdetermined regarding the mediational and material conditions of communication in late modernity. A comparison between these theories becomes particularly dynamic at the level of subjectivity and identity formation. While Elias conceives subjectivity through the long-term intertwining of psychogenesis and sociogenesis, emphasising the historical formation of self-restraint, affect control, and reflexive individuality within changing figurations, communicative constructivism reformulates these processes in explicitly communicative and relational terms. Knoblauch argues that the subject should no longer be understood as a substantial or pre-social entity, but rather as an emergent property of communicative action itself. Communicative constructivism radicalises Elias' processual understanding of the self by relocating the formation of subjectivity from processes of habitus formation to communicative, performative, and mediatised practices.*

Further argued here is that Elias' concept of figurations – dynamic networks of interdependence constituted through ongoing processes of sociogenesis and psychogenesis – can be productively re-specified in light of contemporary transformations of societies. Communicative constructivism addresses this gap by foregrounding the embodied, objectified, and technologically mediated character of communication. It demonstrates how processes such as mediatization, translocalization, and polycontexturalization transform the very texture of interdependencies, producing configurations that are no longer territorially bounded or institutionally stabilised in classical ways. In this perspective, figurations are not merely evolving but are refigured through the multiplication and overlap of

communicative contexts, resulting in heightened tensions, asymmetries, and novel forms of power.

KEYWORDS: *figurational sociology, communicative constructivism, subjectivity, refiguration, refigured modernity*

APSTRAKT: U ovom članku figuraciona sociologija razmatra se u sistematskom odnosu sa komunikativnim konstruktivizmom, teorijskim pristupom koji se najčešće povezuje sa Hubertom Knoblauchom. Iako Eliasov teorijski okvir pruža izuzetno snažan oslonac za razumevanje procesualnosti, relacionalnosti i koevolucije subjektivnosti i društvenih struktura, on ostaje relativno nedovoljno razrađen kada je reč o medijskim i materijalnim uslovima komunikacije u poznoj modernosti. Poređenje ovih teorija posebno je plodno na nivou subjektivnosti i formiranja identiteta. Dok Elias subjektivnost razume kroz dugoročno sadejstvo psihogeneze i sociogeneze, naglašavajući istorijsko oblikovanje samokontrole, kontrole afekata i refleksivne individualnosti unutar promenljivih figuracija, komunikativni konstruktivizam ove procese reformuliše u izričito komunikativnim i relacionim pojmovima. Knoblauch tvrdi da subjekt više ne bi trebalo shvatati kao supstancijalni ili pred-društveni entitet, već kao momenat/poziciju koji nastaje u samom komunikativnom delanju. Komunikativni konstruktivizam radikalizuje Eliasovo procesualno razumevanje sopstva time što formiranje subjektivnosti premešta iz procesa oblikovanja habitusa u komunikativne, performativne i medijatizovane prakse.

Dalje se tvrdi da Eliasov pojam figuracija (dinamičnih mreža međuzavisnosti koje se oblikuju kroz trajne procese sociogeneze i psihogeneze) može biti produktivno preformulisan u svetlu savremenih društvenih transformacija. Upravo u tom pogledu komunikativni konstruktivizam nudi teorijsku nadogradnju, stavljajući u prvi plan otelovljeni, objektivizovan i tehnološki posredovani karakter komunikacije. On pokazuje kako procesi poput medijatizacije, translokalizacije i polikonteksturalizacije preobražavaju samu teksturu međuzavisnosti, proizvodeći konfiguracije koje više nisu teritorijalno omeđene niti institucionalno stabilizovane na nekadašnji način. Tako posmatrano, figuracije se ne razvijaju samo evolutivno, već bivaju refigurisane kroz umnožavanje i preklapanje komunikativnih konteksta, što dovodi do izraženijih napetosti, asimetrija i novih oblika moći.

KLJUČNE REČI: *figuraciona sociologija, komunikativni konstruktivizam, subjektivnost, refiguracija, refigurisana modernost*

Introduction

In *Capitalist Revolution*, when acknowledging his intellectual debt to Max Weber, Peter Berger writes: "At least in science, one shows the greatest respect for an author by leaving him behind" (1986: 7). This, however, does not imply that the greatest tribute to a scholar is paid by consigning their work to oblivion. A more plausible interpretation of Berger's remark is that the highest form of recognition a scientist can aspire to is the enduring relevance of the questions

they have posed and the continued acknowledgement of their significance by subsequent generations of scholars.

Few sociologists exemplify this condition more clearly than Norbert Elias. Over the course of the twentieth century, many of the problems that occupied his work gradually became integral to mainstream sociological inquiry. Questions concerning the historical formation of individuality, the relationship between agency and social constraint, the interdependence of actors, the dynamics of power balances, the long-term transformation of social orders, and the co-development of personality structures and societal institutions have become central concerns across a wide range of theoretical traditions. Although Elias himself often occupied a somewhat marginal position within the disciplinary landscape during much of his career, the themes he explored have proven remarkably resilient. Indeed, they continue to influence and even shape contemporary debates about subjectivity, social change, globalisation, mediatization, and the transformation of modern societies.

This intellectual legacy is visible in numerous contemporary research programmes that, whether explicitly or implicitly, build upon Eliasian insights. Among these, communicative constructivism occupies a particularly interesting position. Developed primarily by Hubert Knoblauch and his collaborators, communicative constructivism draws on the sociology of knowledge tradition associated with Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann while also incorporating insights from phenomenology, pragmatism, interactionism, media studies, and contemporary communication research. Despite these different genealogical origins, communicative constructivism shares several fundamental affinities with figurational/process sociology². Both perspectives reject substantialist conceptions of society and conceive social reality as fundamentally processual and relational. Both emphasise the emergence of social order through ongoing practices rather than through the operation of external structures. Both understand human beings not as isolated entities but as socially constituted actors whose identities and capacities arise within networks of interdependence. Moreover, both approaches display a pronounced sensitivity to historical transformation and seek to overcome rigid dichotomies between the individual and society, agency and structure, and the micro and macro levels of analysis.

The present article argues that communicative constructivism can be read as a productive extension of several core Eliasian insights. This argument is developed through two analytical entry points that, broadly speaking, correspond to the levels of subjectivity and social structure. The first concerns the problem

2 “The concept of social process is more fundamental to Elias’s thinking than ‘figuration’, a term that he introduced only in the 1960s. In the last years of his life Elias expressed dissatisfaction with the label ‘figurational sociology’, which had become attached to his work in the late 1970s. Elias came to feel that ‘figurational sociology’ was far from self-explanatory, and tried to introduce the term ‘process sociology’ (...). ‘Process sociology’ has not, however, caught on” (Kilminster & Mennell, 2009, p. x). For a brief and concise discussion of the concept of “social processes”, see Elias (1986/2009b).

of subjectivation.³ Elias' account of psychogenesis and sociogenesis remains one of sociology's most sophisticated attempts to explain how individuals become capable of self-regulation, reflexivity, and identity formation within historically evolving configurations of social relations. The individual, in Elias' framework, is neither a natural given nor an autonomous consciousness but the outcome of long-term civilising processes that shape emotional dispositions and cognitive orientations. Communicative constructivism retains this fundamentally relational and processual understanding of the self while reformulating it. Instead of locating subject formation primarily within processes of habitus⁴ formation and affect regulation, it emphasises the constitutive role of communicative action, embodied performance, and mediated interaction. Subjectivity thus appears less as an internalised social structure than as an ongoing communicative accomplishment that emerges through communicative acts.

The second point of comparison concerns the concept of refiguration. If Elias' notion of figuration(s) provides a powerful framework for understanding networks of interdependence and constitution of social order, contemporary transformations raise the question of whether these figurations themselves are undergoing qualitative change. Processes of mediatization⁵, digitalisation, transnationalization, and increasing communicative connectivity have profoundly altered the conditions under which social relations are organised and reproduced. Communicative constructivism addresses these developments through the concept of refiguration, which seeks to capture the growing plurality, simultaneity, and overlap of communicative spaces and social contexts. From this perspective, contemporary societies are characterised by

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- 3 "This question about the subject is very topical because we encounter more and more 'intelligent' objects and technologies that act 'autonomously'. Of course, the question of the subject of action also arises when dealing with animals: Whether and to what extent animals (and which animals) can act and have an identity. Finally, it should be remembered that the question of the subject of action has always been a religious question as well. In addition to the intervention of spirits or occult forces in our agency, there has always been the question of whether and in what way we ourselves are subject to other subjects in our innermost being" (Knoblauch, 2023b, 38). For a more extensive and fine-grained treatment of subjectivity from the perspective of communicative constructivism, particularly as developed at the intersection of interpretive sociology and discourse analysis, consult the works of the late Saša Bosančić (2019; 2022; 2025).
 - 4 Although the concept of habitus in sociology is most often associated with Pierre Bourdieu, who did more than perhaps any other sociologist to elaborate and popularise it, Elias – like Weber before him – had already used it as a theoretical tool. In the present article, the concept is used in Elias' sense, as a way of referring to the socially formed and historically sedimented dispositions of persons within changing figurations. For a concise reconstruction of the philosophical origins of the concept, its early use in Bourdieu's work, and a clarification of recurrent misunderstandings surrounding it, see Wacquant (2016).
 - 5 "A development that Elias could hardly reflect, though he had some presentiment of it (Elias, 1991: 163), is that today many figurations are made up by the use of media. This is one possible driving force of their transformation: the figurations of individuals, collectivities (families, peer groups, communities, etc.) and organizations (media companies, churches, schools, etc.) change with their media ensembles. In addition, deep mediatization makes new figurations possible, such as online gatherings in chatrooms, on platforms or through apps" (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018: 29).

the reorganisation of the very communicative infrastructures through which figurations are constituted.

The affinities between figurational sociology and communicative constructivism are not exhausted by these two themes. Significant parallels can also be identified in their shared opposition to the reduction of social phenomena to static states or conditions (*Zustandsreduktion*), relational understanding of social order, emphasis on embodiment and practical action, concern with the social production of knowledge, and sensitivity to changing configurations of power. Nevertheless, subjectivation and refiguration appear fruitful as focal points for comparison because together they encompass the two dimensions that have traditionally structured sociological theory: the formation of agents/actors and the constitution of social order.

Before undertaking this comparison, it is necessary to outline the theoretical premises of communicative constructivism. The following section introduces the principal concepts and intellectual foundations of this research programme and situates it within the broader development of the sociology of knowledge in Germany.

Communicative Constructivism in Outline

Over the last two decades, the social centrality of communication has become increasingly difficult to ignore. Everyday life, institutional coordination, political conflict, knowledge circulation, and digitally mediated interaction are now so thoroughly entangled that any social theory treating communication as peripheral appears increasingly outdated. Sociology has not always responded to this transformation with concepts adequate to its scale. Among the more systematic attempts to do so is communicative constructivism, a theoretically ambitious and empirically oriented approach that emerged in German-speaking sociology and that should be situated within what has been called “the new sociology of knowledge” (Schnettler, Knoblauch & Raab, 2017). Its explicit point of departure is the enduring legacy of Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality*, a work whose influence across the social sciences has been both foundational and wide-ranging (Jovanović, 2021: 519–520). Communicative constructivism seeks to revise and extend this heritage under conditions shaped by mediatization⁶, digitisation, visual culture (Couldry & Hepp, 2022), and new forms of material objectification(s).

6 In Habermas’ theory, the *mediatization of the lifeworld* refers to the penetration of symbolically generalised steering media, above all money and power, into domains of social life that depend on communicative reproduction. By contrast, in mediatization research and in communicative constructivism, the concept refers primarily to the historically changing role of media, technologies, signs, objects, and infrastructures in the transformation of social reality: “Mediatization refers to an everyday experience characterized by the saturation by (predominantly digital) media into each and every social domain, which, in the process of doing so, contributes to their transformation. More specifically, it refers to the relationship between the transformation of media and communication on the one hand and culture and society on the other. (...) Hubert Knoblauch, in the social constructivist tradition of

The approach proposes more than a modest adjustment to social-constructivist vocabulary. Its central wager is that sociology should move analytically from “social action” to “communicative action”.⁷ It implies a move from a predominantly subject-centred model of meaning to a relational model in which sociality arises through reciprocal, materially mediated processes among subjects and (their) objectivation(s) (Knoblauch, 2020b; 2023a). Recent English-language formulations present communicative constructivism not simply as a niche of German sociological discourse⁸ but as a general social-theoretical framework capable of integrating interpretive sociological paradigm, media theory, discourse analysis, pragmatist and interactionist insights, and newer debates on materiality and technology. This expansion is especially visible in efforts to make the tradition more accessible beyond German-language scholarship.⁹ In that respect, communicative constructivism is both a theoretical

mediatization, has contributed to the anchoring of mediatization in social phenomenology as well as broadening the current perspective of (deep) mediatization to include references to social science research on space and place. (...) [T]he *social-constructivist* tradition emphasizes the role media play in the communicative construction of social and cultural reality and predominantly explores mediatization from the perspective of everyday actors (...) Researchers in this tradition question how our cultural and societal practices are altered when they are entangled with media” (Hepp, 2019: 301, 303, 304).

- 7 The reference to *communicative action* inevitably recalls Habermas’ theory, and an early formulation of communicative constructivism explicitly acknowledges this connection (Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2004). However, communicative constructivism does not simply reproduce Habermas’ model. Whereas Habermas’ theory is centred on communicative rationality, linguistic understanding, validity claims, and the distinction between communicative and instrumental or strategic action, communicative constructivism broadens communicative action to include embodied, multimodal, material, and technologically mediated forms of action. Its primary aim is therefore less to ground a normative theory of critique than to analyse how social realities are produced in observable communicative processes under historically changing conditions (Knoblauch, 2013a).
- 8 For a comprehensive overview of books and edited volumes in German developed within the framework of communicative constructivism and the contemporary sociology of knowledge, readers may consult the Springer VS book series: *Wissen, Kommunikation und Gesellschaft – Schriften zur Wissenssoziologie* (*Knowledge, Communication and Society – Writings on the Sociology of Knowledge*). The series is dedicated to exploring the interrelations between society, knowledge, and communication, while advancing the sociology of knowledge through conceptual analyses, empirical case studies, historical reconstructions, and investigations of contemporary forms of social construction of reality (see: <https://link.springer.com/series/12130>).
- 9 A concrete step in this direction is the Routledge book series: *Knowledge, Communication and Society: Contributions to the New Sociology of Knowledge* which “seeks to revive the academic collaboration and debates between European and Anglo-Saxon currents of thought in the social sciences that characterised the middle of the last century, and provide a forum for the development of a new sociology of knowledge. A space for transatlantic discussion, it includes original works and translations of central works by contemporary European social scientists and is committed to an empirically grounded programme of developing social theory” (see: <https://www.routledge.com/Knowledge-Communication-and-Society/book-series/KCS>). See also two open-access volumes that are part of another Routledge book series *The Refiguration of Space*: Gabriela B. Christmann, Hubert Knoblauch & Martina Löw (Eds.) *Communicative Constructions and the Refiguration of Spaces: Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Studies* (2022) and Hubert Knoblauch, Vivien Sommer & Barbara Pfetsch (Eds.) *Spatial Conflicts and Conflictual Spaces: The Dynamics of Refiguration* (2025).

reconstruction/rearticulation of an older social constructivist paradigm (Pfadenhauer & Knoblauch, 2019) and an attempt to provide a contemporary language for the empirical study of a communication-saturated society characterised by the “mediated construction of reality” (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Reichertz & Bettmann, 2018).

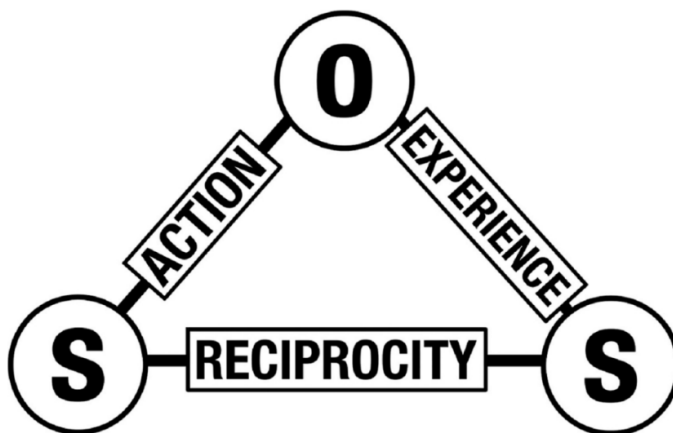
Theoretical roots of communicative constructivism are multiple. A first line of descent runs from Weber’s interpretive sociology through Schütz’s phenomenologically based sociology and on to Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge. A second runs through Thomas Luckmann’s long-standing concern with the communicative construction of reality (Luckmann, 2006), including his insistence that social realities are produced in communicative processes and that the most reliable sociological access to those realities lies in reconstructing such processes in their unfolding sequence (Luckmann, 2013). A third line derives from the empirical “communicative turn” in German sociology, where communication became not just a philosophical theme but an object of systematic qualitative inquiry, aided by the spread of audio and video recording and by the growth of sequential analysis, genre analysis, ethnography, and video-based research (Knoblauch, 2019).

Broadly speaking, one may distinguish three major strands within communicative constructivism: the sociology-of-knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD) associated with Reiner Keller (2024), the theory of the communicative construction of reality developed by Hubert Knoblauch (2020a), and Jo Reichertz’s focus on communicative power (*Kommunikationsmacht*; 2010; 2024). However, given the scope and aims of the present paper, a more detailed examination of the theoretical differences and internal developments of these strands must remain beyond its purview.

The “communicative” in communicative constructivism does not refer only to speech, discourse, or sign exchange in a narrow linguistic sense. Communication is understood as embodied action that becomes accessible to others through objectivations.¹⁰ In this framework, social action is communicative insofar as it enters a shared world of experience and can therefore affect co-actors, observers, and, later, institutions. Objectivations are the empirical forms through which action becomes intersubjectively available, whether as words, gestures, sounds, gazes, documents, interfaces, digital traces, media artefacts, or built arrangements (Pfadenhauer, 2023; Grenz, Pfadenhauer & Kirschner, 2018). The approach therefore develops a triadic social ontology: at a minimum, sociality involves subjects related to one another through objectivations.¹¹

10 A brief comparison with Luhmann is useful here. For Luhmann, *communication* is not grounded in action, intention, or subjective meaning, but in the autopoiesis of communication itself. It is classically defined as the synthesis of three selections: information, utterance/announcement (*Mitteilung*), and understanding (Luhmann, 1997/2012: 36–37, 45–46, 57–58, 113–114). Knoblauch explicitly distances Communicative constructivism from this position. In order to avoid reducing communication to a self-referential sequence of meaning-selections, and in order to retain the role of subjectivity, embodiment, objectivation, and materiality, he proposes the concept of *communicative action* (Knoblauch, 2020a: 54–55, 76, 126, 139–140).

11 “Objectivation is the missing analytical link which allows one to turn social into communicative action” (Knoblauch, 2013b, p. 302). Silke Steets illustrates the triadic structure

Figure 1. *Triadic relation of communicative action*

Source: Christmann, Knoblauch & Löw (2022: 24).

This significantly broadens earlier constructionist emphases on language and meaning by foregrounding materiality, sensuality, corporeality, and affectivity. The communicating body is the site through which the social is enacted and reciprocally shaped (Knoblauch, 2005a; Keller & Meuser, 2011).

Several basic assumptions follow from this move. First, meaning is never merely private if it is to become sociologically relevant; it must be objectified and thus made available within a shared field of experience. Second, subjectivity is not denied but decentered. Communicative constructivism resists both atomistic individualism and anti-subjective reductions of actors to effects of discourse, systems, or networks. Third, materiality is constitutive rather than external. Technologies, media, documents, spaces, and artefacts are not passive containers of communication but operative participants in the construction of reality. Fourth, communicative processes sediment into more durable patterns, such as communicative forms and communicative genres. These are stabilised ways of solving recurrent communicative problems and linking situations to institutions. Fifth, the approach is explicitly open to historical change. It argues that the contemporary expansion of digital media, interfaces, and infrastructures has transformed not just the conditions of communication but the very morphology of society, which Knoblauch diagnoses as a “communication society” (*Kommunikationsgesellschaft*; 2016; 2018; 2020a: 233–267) characterized by “deep mediatization” (Couldry, 2020; Hepp, 2020) and, more specifically, by “communicatization” – a historical process in which communication becomes an increasingly important organizing principle of social life.

of communicative action by analysing the one-two pass in football, while simultaneously connecting this theoretical framework to Elias’s sociology of sport. “While social diagnosis via soccer analysis is already a widely used genre in cultural theory, journalism, and popular culture, the perspective proposed here aims to *ground it in social theory*. Linking communicative constructivism to Elias’ sociology of figuration does just that, and this combination, of course, can be used far beyond soccer analysis” (Steets, 2026: 43).

Communicatization turns technology into a communication technique and any workings of technologies turn into communication. The reason for this is digitalization and the associated coupling of signs, technologies, and things. On the other hand, communicatization is characterized by the interactivity of digitalized technology. For the people involved, it results in a transformation of more and more work into communication work. (Knoblauch, 2020a: 242)

Communicative constructivism is close to classical social constructivism, but it departs from it in at least four respects: it is more relational than subjectivist (Knoblauch 2020b); it greatly expands the concept of objectivation beyond language (Knoblauch, 2013b: 302–303); it foregrounds body, performance, affect, and materiality (Knoblauch, 2020a: 115–122); and it treats empirical research not as illustrative afterthought but as indispensable to theory formation (Knoblauch, 2025a). In short, it seeks to answer not only whether reality is socially constructed, but how such construction proceeds in observable communicative processes. This is one reason why a growing corpus of empirical work has become central to the approach rather than ancillary to it (Reichertz & Tuma, 2017).

These theoretical commitments have direct methodological consequences. If reality is communicatively constructed, then research must attend to the actual forms through which communication unfolds. This shifts emphasis toward methods capable of capturing situated processes, multimodality, temporal sequence, embodiment, and material environments. Accordingly, communicative constructivism has been associated with communicative genre analysis (Günthner & Knoblauch, 1995), videography (Knoblauch, Tuma & Schnettler, 2015), focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005b), life-world ethnography (Honer & Hitzler, 2015), social-scientific hermeneutics (Reichertz, 2009; Hitzler, Reichertz & Schröer, 1999/2017: 17–67), and discourse analysis (Keller, 2024). Video analysis is especially important because it allows researchers to study action as it happens rather than only through retrospective narration (Singh, Meier zu Verl & Tuma, 2025). Reflexive methodology also requires researchers to recognise that data are themselves objectivations produced through communicative processes and that sociological analysis must therefore examine not only its objects but its own modes of construction (Knoblauch, 2021a).

One of the strongest arguments for the usefulness of communicative constructivism is the breadth of empirical domains in which it has proved illuminating. Classical work on PowerPoint presentations treated a ubiquitous presentation technology as a communicative form constitutive of knowledge work rather than as a neutral tool (Knoblauch, 2012). Subsequent and current research extends that sensibility across a wide range of domains: public events and collective affect, chamber music and embodied coordination, religion and spirituality, social movements, the communicative constitution of violence, communication with people diagnosed with dementia, the role of unspoken rules on TikTok and Facebook, public science communication, digital planning and infrastructuring, the communicative role of AI, and the communicative

reconstruction of spaces in urban and translocal settings (see: Knoblauch *et al.*, 2026; Christmann, Knoblauch & Löw, 2022).

Subjectivity, Subjectification and Identity: From Sociogenesis to Communicative Action

Among many possible points of contact between figurational sociology and communicative constructivism, problems of subjectivity and identity occupy a privileged position, although these problems are addressed through different conceptual vocabularies and under different historical conditions.¹² Whereas Elias developed a processual sociology of identity¹³ centred on the intertwined dynamics of psychogenesis and sociogenesis, communicative constructivism reformulates the emergence of subjectivity in terms of communicative action and subjectification.

Brief terminological clarification is necessary before proceeding. In the present argument, the concepts of *subject* and *subjectivity*, *person*, and *identity* should not be used interchangeably. *Subjectivity* may be understood as a condition or property of action, *personhood* as socially and biographically stabilised individuality, and *identity* as reflexive and symbolic self-location. This distinction is close to Knoblauch's own attempt to establish a "division of labour" between the philosophical concept of the subject and the sociological concept of identity. As he argues, even if subjectivity is taken as a basic conceptual category, empirical social life always confronts us with subjects, selves, and identities; these, however, are not prior substances but are derived from communicative action through processes of subjectification (Knoblauch, 2023b: 39–40). In the present analysis, the *subject* should therefore be treated as the most abstract and theoretically problematic category. It refers to the capacity or position from which action, experience, intentionality, and self-relation become possible. The *person*, by contrast, designates a more empirical and biographical category: not the abstract subject of action, nor yet the reflexive answer to the question "who am I?", but the socially recognisable and temporally continuous human being who passes through a life-course.¹⁴ *Identity*, finally, should be reserved for the reflexive and symbolic dimension of self- and other-ascription, that is,

12 Communicative constructivism enjoys the benefits of further historical development of social & sociological theory, and thus encompasses and integrates results of various theoretical "turns" – "spatial", "performative", "body", "sensory" and "affective turn" (Eberle, 2023: 167), and before those: "linguistic", "interpretive", "cultural", "postmodern", "textual", "postcolonial", "reflexive", "discursive", "iconic" or "pictorial", "transnational", and "material turn" (Eberle, 2023: 156).

13 It is important to note that Elias mentions one process "no less important than the others": "process in which each person is entangled with himself or herself and which, ultimately, is that person. That the human being is a process is certainly one of the most fundamental of people's experiences, but is usually suppressed from thinking because of the overwhelming tendency of thought to reduce processes to static conditions" (Elias, 1980/2009d: 41).

14 For an overview of Luckmann's take on the problem of personal identity, see: Jovanović (2019b).

for the ways in which persons become intelligible to themselves and to others as particular kinds of selves.

One of Elias' most important contributions consists in his rejection of the image of the isolated individual. His critique of *homo clausus* challenged the deeply rooted assumption that individuals exist as self-contained entities prior to their social relations.¹⁵ Instead, Elias argued that human beings can only be understood as participants in figurations,¹⁶ that is, dynamic networks of interdependence through which personality structures and social structures are continuously co-constituted (Elias, 1970/2012a: 123–128). Psychogenesis and sociogenesis are therefore not separate processes but two aspects of a single developmental movement: personality structures emerge within historically specific configurations of social relations, while those same relations are reproduced and transformed through the conduct of interdependent actors.

This processual conception also informs Elias' understanding of identity. Identity is neither a fixed possession nor an inner essence hidden beneath social roles. Rather, it represents a historically variable equilibrium between what Elias calls "I-identity" and "We-identity." Individual selfhood develops through participation in collective figurations and through incorporation of the social habitus that characterises particular groups. The individual is therefore never reducible either to a sovereign self or to a passive bearer of social norms. Identity emerges through ongoing negotiations between personal distinctiveness and collective belonging. Because figurations themselves change historically, the balance between "I-" and "We-identities" also shifts, producing different forms of individuality and self-understanding across periods (Elias, 1987/1991: 153–237; see also Mennell, 1994).

What is essential to Elias' concept of identity is its temporal dimension and its character as a historically unfolding process¹⁷; this justifies the inclusion

15 Elias has "always been an opponent of phenomenology" (Kilminster & Mennell, 2009, p. xiv; see also: Elias, 1978/2009c), precisely because he saw it (amongst other traditions of thinking) responsible for the conception of the *homo clausus* ("closed man" or "closed personality"). "It is the conception of the person (in the singular) as the 'subject' of knowledge; a single thinking mind inside a sealed container, from which each one looks out and struggles to fish for knowledge of the 'objects' outside in the 'external world'. Among those 'objects' are *other* minds, equally locked inside their own sealed containers, and one of the most difficult problems epistemologists (and sociologists influenced by them) pose for themselves is the question of how one thinking 'subject' inside its own container can ever know anything of what is being thought and what is known by those 'objects' – those other 'subjects' – thinking away inside their own containers in turn" (Mennell, 1992: 188–189).

16 "The concept of figuration (...) serves as a simple conceptual tool to loosen this social constraint to speak and think as if 'the individual' and 'society' were distinct as well as antagonistic" (Elias, 1970/2012a: 125). For Elias' "most distilled definition of the concept of 'figuration'" (Kilminster & Mennell, 2009: x), see his homonymous entry written for the "German textbook intended to explain basic concepts in sociology to students" (*Grundbegriffe der Soziologie*): Elias (1986/2009a).

17 It would be worthwhile to explore the parallel that may be drawn between Elias' "historically unfolding process" and the concept of "sequentiality" (Knoblauch, 2022) in communicative constructivism. However, the limited scope of the present article does not allow for a systematic consideration of this issue.

of two relatively extended passages in order to preserve the precision of his formulation:

It may be helpful to explain why I am using (...) the term 'continuum of changes'. The reason is, briefly, that in many processes of change the unity of the process is due, not to any substance which remains unchanged throughout the process, but to the continuity with which one change emerges from another in an unbroken sequence. (...) Take a human being: Hume once confessed that he could not understand in what sense the grown-up person he was now was 'the same' as the little child he used to be. (...) There are many other examples. In all these cases it is the continuity of changes which links a later stage to earlier stages. (Elias, 1987/1992: 202)

For the developing individual face of a person plays a central part, perhaps the most central part, in his or her identity as this particular person. (...) And it is the face which shows most clearly to what extent I-identity is bound up with the continuity of development from childhood to extreme old age. Indeed, the development process a person's face undergoes from childhood to old age can serve as a prototypical example of a certain type of this process. It changes, but from a certain age on it takes on peculiarities which make it possible to identify a human face as always the same face, a person as always the same person, despite all the changes of ageing. The old logic possibly gives rise to the expectation that something absolutely immutable forms the hard core of all changes, the unchanging, undeveloping core of all development. The example of the development of a person, particularly the face, may perhaps make it easier to understand the fact that in the course of such a process there need not be anything that stands still and is absolutely unchangeable. The identity of the developing person rests above all on the fact that each later phase emerges in an unbroken sequence from an earlier phase. (Elias, 1987/1991: 189)

Underlying conception of individuality is Elias' notion of habitus, which constitutes the sedimented product of social experience – the fate of a group, over time, "sediments" in the habitus of its members (Jovanović, 2019a: 70). It is socially generated "second nature" through which collective patterns become embodied within individual personalities. Importantly, habitus is neither purely individual nor purely collective. It represents the point at which social history becomes incorporated into the person. Through long-term civilising processes, external constraints are gradually transformed into self-restraint and reflexive self-control. Habitus differs from the ordinary inclination in its stability and permanence. The modern subject emerges as the outcome of historical transformations that increasingly require individuals to monitor and anticipate others' reactions, and regulate their conduct accordingly. Identity is inseparable from the development of specific forms of social interdependence (Elias, 1939/2012b).

Communicative constructivism, however, argues that the problem of subjectivity requires a different conceptual starting point. According to Knoblauch, the classical sociology of knowledge inherited from Berger and Luckmann still contains remnants of a pre-social conception of the subject. Although *The Social Construction of Reality* demonstrates how social worlds emerge through externalisation, objectivation and internalisation, the model begins with an acting consciousness that appears prior to the construction process itself. The result is a circular argument in which the subject simultaneously precedes and emerges from social construction (Knoblauch, 2023b: 40–42).

The theoretical innovation of communicative constructivism consists in abandoning the notion of the subject as an original substance. Instead, Knoblauch proposes a shift from “the subject” to “subjectivity.” Subjectivity is not a thing, an entity or an inner essence. Subjects do not stand behind communicative processes as their autonomous originators; they emerge within and through communicative relations – as a “moment in communicative action” (Knoblauch, 2023b: 43). Consequently, subjectivity should be understood not as a precondition of communication but as one of its constitutive properties. Communication is impossible without subjectivity, yet subjectivity exists only within communicative action.

Knoblauch develops this argument through an analysis of finger pointing (Knoblauch, 2023a). Such elementary communicative act reveals that communication is inherently relational. Pointing does not originate from a self-sufficient subject who simply directs attention toward an object. Rather, it presupposes orientation toward others. The person who points anticipates another participant’s perspective and adjusts their bodily conduct accordingly. Subjectivity emerges through this relational positioning rather than preceding it. What communicative action requires is not an autonomous subject but positionality within a communicative relation – subject is not the source of communication, but an effect of communicative positioning.¹⁸

From an Eliasian perspective, this move can be interpreted as radicalisation of process sociology. Elias had already demonstrated that individuality is socially constituted through networks of interdependence. Communicative

18 “For pointing not only presupposes the ability to anticipate the other’s standpoint; in order to be able to do so, it necessarily implies one’s own standpoint. This is, then, the first trait of subjectivity: *positionality*. (...) The position of the subject, then, is a point of reference, but not the only one. In its orientation toward a third, namely the finger and its reference, pointing has in fact two reference points. In this way we can acknowledge the importance of the relationality of pointing by demonstrating that the interchangeability of standpoints takes into account the other position in a way Mead calls ‘perspectivity’. Being relational, it is not just one ‘perspective’ on something, but rather two perspectives in which one’s own position figures as well. Pointing, thus, takes into account the location of others in the action, by way of the interchangeability of standpoints. It is also necessary that one’s own position is accounted for in order to successfully point: where the subject is posited is relevant for where and how the subject points. This is what we call positionality. It is a feature of subjectivity (...) which remains formal and does not require an ‘inner substance’ a priori” (Knoblauch, 2020a: 80–83).

constructivism extends this insight by asking how these interdependencies are enacted in concrete communicative processes.¹⁹

For Elias, identity formation largely proceeds through the internalisation of socially generated constraints and the gradual development of self-regulation. Identity emerges as individuals acquire dispositions corresponding to the figurations within which they participate. Communicative Constructivism, by contrast, conceptualises subjectification as the outcome of participation in communicative action. Consciousness itself is not treated as an original starting point but as something constituted through communicative relations. “By virtue of subjectivity, a difference in reciprocal perspective is established so that subjects can be formed. We refer to this as subjectification” (Knoblauch, 2023b: 46). Drawing on Mead, Knoblauch argues that thinking, selfhood and reflexivity emerge through internalised forms of communication. What appears as an inner dialogue is in fact the sedimentation of communicative relations within the self. “We can then use the concept of identity to refer to such forms of subjectification that aim to unify the various ‘voices’ or ‘roles’ in communicative action” (Knoblauch, 2023b: 48).

The decisive difference lies in the mechanism through which subject formation is explained. Communicative constructivism foregrounds communicative action as the primary site in which subjectivity is constituted. This reformulation becomes more significant under contemporary conditions of mediatization. Elias developed his theory in relation to face-to-face figurations, state formation and long-term civilising processes. Communicative constructivism addresses a social world increasingly structured by digital communication and mediated interaction. Under such conditions, subjectification becomes inseparable from communicative infrastructures that extend way beyond immediate interaction. The formation of selves increasingly depends upon participation in technologically mediated networks in which reflexive self-presentation acquires unprecedented significance. All this prompts Knoblauch to write of “double subjectification”:

On the one hand, the subject becomes public through communicativization. On the other hand, there is an increased internalization of action in what I will call *Veraktung*²⁰. [The subject] is identified and made

19 “[B]ecause Elias’ approach does not explain what these interdependencies consist of, we want to understand them as communicative actions: they are relations consisting of processes in which affectivity, spatiality, and objects play a much more decisive role than they do in Elias’ concept of ‘interdependencies’” (Knoblauch, 2020a: 274).

20 Although *Veraktung* (Knoblauch, 2017: 377) is translated as “en-actment” (Knoblauch, 2020a: 264), perhaps a more suitable translation would be “actification”, meaning: the turning of action into an internalized act-structure, or the way of relocating communicative action “inward” which, then, becomes part of subjectification: “For although double subjectivization remains attached to the pattern of plurality so typical of postmodernity, it contradicts an open ‘proteic identity’, i.e. a model of a subject that can continually present itself in different ways and exhibits an insubstantial arbitrariness. As opposed to this postmodern concept of unstable identity in a state of flux, the process of communicativization analyzed stabilizes identities, for example by ‘en-actment’, which constantly demands making discreet decisions.

identifiable, because the communicative action is highly oriented towards the individual subject. (...) Subjectification is carried out in publics that do not know a clear boundary to a private sphere in communicative terms. (...) any subject can make himself or herself the central subject of communication through communicativization. (...) The present communicativization leads to a more intense activation of the subjects, which finds its expression in the aforementioned “self-representation”. It is not merely casual and situationally ephemeral, but becomes a media performance. (Knoblauch, 2023b: 49–51; cf. Knoblauch, 2020a: 264–266)

Subjectivity remains relational, as Elias insisted, but the communicative forms through which relationality is organised undergo profound transformation. Communicative constructivism develops one of Elias’ central intuitions under new conditions, those of contemporary, “late”, or refigured modernity.

Refiguration and Refigured Modernity: Conceptual Adjustment to Societal Changes

The present section shifts the comparison of Elias and communicative constructivism to the level of social order. Here the central question is whether Elias’ concept of figuration can be productively respecified in light of the transformations that characterise contemporary societies.

Figuration, as processual and relational, remains indispensable because it offers a way of thinking social order without reifying it, since it conceptualises it as a dynamic set of networks of interdependence constituted by changing power balances, institutional arrangements, embodied dispositions, and processes of sociogenesis and psychogenesis. As such, the concept invites further development. Contemporary societies, whose temporal and spatial order is dramatically changing (Knoblauch & Löw, 2020: 263–264), are increasingly shaped by forms of communication, mediatization, infrastructural connectivity, and dispersion of space that cannot be fully grasped by referring only to territorial, institutional, or national figurations (like Elias did).

Knoblauch and Löw explicitly build on Elias’ concept of figuration, and use it as a starting point for diagnosing qualitative changes in the organisation of social relations, i.e. their “expansion, extension, and intensification” (Knoblauch & Löw, 2025: 704).

With the concept of refiguration we want to avoid a mere juxtaposition and emphasize that we are not concerned with a new epoch, an epochal boundary, or even a threshold. Communication society is not a dominant type of society, but a diagnosis in the context of an ongoing process of transformation. Refiguration describes this change. Following Elias’ term “figuration”, refiguration is conceived as a process that stresses the

This also means that the subject must be confirmed as a continuous decision-making authority” (Knoblauch, 2020a: 268).

difference from as well as the dependence on the “grand figuration” of modernity. (Knoblauch, 2020a: 273)

Refiguration designates a set of interrelated transformations: 1) “the coexistence and conflict between modern figurations (work ethics, families, industry, nation state) and late modern figurations (hedonistic ethics, creative industry, global communities), resulting in new ‘refigured’ forms (as in the new political populism, spiritual religiosity, or sustainable post-growth economies)”, 2) “changing role of social spaces” – beyond “ongoing tendencies toward world society, world polity, and a postcolonial, neoliberal world system, it also integrates the new forms of geopolitics resulting from, reacting to, and reverting globalization”, 3) the rise of the postcolonial decentering of modern Western society and its epistemologies as well as its forms of capitalism”, and 4) “the process of digital mediatization with its worldwide infrastructures” (Knoblauch et al., 2026: 8).²¹

Refiguration does not simply mean social change or transformation. These concepts are either too general or too linear. Refiguration, by contrast, draws attention to the tensions and superimpositions between different social, temporal, and spatial logics.

With the idea of refiguration, we first want to stress that globalization implies a form of relatedness that goes hand in hand with numerous conflicts. In contrast to the frequent neglect of spatiality in globalization theory (...), we second use the concept of refiguration to emphasize the role of social conflicts as part of a relational concept of spatiality (...). This thesis is based on a more encompassing research question we are posing: How is it possible to understand social change beyond the juxtaposition of globalization and de-globalization, of ascent and descent? How can we develop a multiscale concept of social change, a concept that does not only privilege the global scale? (Knoblauch & Löw, 2025: 704)²²

Refiguration, with its “conflict-laden logics” (Knoblauch & Löw, 2020: 284) designates a process in which older and newer figurations coexist, overlap, conflict, and produce new forms of interdependence.

- 21 Knoblauch and associates further explain: “Digital mediatization is one of the major reasons for the conceptual move toward communicative action, because digitalization implies the materialization of communication, that is, the increasing amount of everyday communication expressed in data that are not only fixed in ever-growing data centers but also reused by interactive AI for further communication, for work, and for production” (Knoblauch et al., 2026: 8).
- 22 Whereas a multiscale approach requires social change to be analysed across different socio-spatial scales without privileging the global, the notion of transscalar (as an important feature of figurations) draws attention to the ways in which these scales are themselves interconnected and traversed through concrete figurations and communicative practices. For instance, “it is the transscalar dimension of the Internet that empowers individual users to communicate with potentially anyone but also subjects them to new forms of ‘data colonialism’ by corporations, as well as by nation-states and other territorial institutions” (Knoblauch & Löw, 2025: 715). Spatial features and the infrastructure of internet are “central to understanding the process of refiguration” (Knoblauch & Löw, 2025: 711).

Refiguration can be understood as an attempt to conceptually adjust sociological theory to societal changes. Knoblauch's diagnosis of "communication society" starts from the assumption that social theory cannot remain external to the society it analyses (Knoblauch, 2020a: 12). If the social sciences are themselves part of social development, then changes in society require changes in conceptual apparatuses (Knoblauch et al., 2026: 8). Communicative constructivism is thus an attempt to understand contemporary social reality by taking seriously the extent to which communicative action has become structurally consequential. Communication is no longer only the symbolic transmission of meaning or "talk about" society; it has become a productive, material, infrastructural, and organisational force. It contributes to economic production, service work, institutional coordination, social differentiation, and the formation of new inequalities.

This shift is closely connected to mediatization.²³ In communicative constructivism, mediatization refers to the historical and structural transformation of communicative action through media, signs, objects, technologies, and infrastructures. It is not confined to the mass media system, for in communication society, media are no longer located in a relatively separate institutional domain responsible for representing society to itself. Digital media and infrastructures penetrate almost all sectors of social life: work, production, logistics, administration, education, urban planning, mobility, intimacy, leisure, and politics. Mediatization changes how society is described or represented, but also how social action is coordinated, objectified, stabilised, and made effective.

Digitalisation²⁴ intensifies this process by coupling material processes with sign systems. Technical processes become communicatively relevant and can be linked to human action through interfaces, displays, feedback loops, sensors, platforms, and algorithmic systems (Knoblauch, 2020a: 243–244). Digital infrastructures are not external machines that simply impose effects upon passive actors. They are themselves institutionalised, maintained, repaired, interpreted, governed, and used through communicative action. They are materialised social structures that continue to exist only insofar as they are enacted and re-enacted in use. Knoblauch's processual concept of "infrastructuring" (2020a: 251–254) refers to the fact that infrastructures are not built once and then passively available; they are continually (re)produced and transformed through coordinated action.

Mediation by technological objectifications and digital infrastructures does not abolish face-to-face interaction. Communicative constructivism insists on

23 "Mediatization means that new media and technologies, such as computers, mobile phones, and cars, are included in communicative actions. In this way (...) not only the structure of action is transformed, but also the nature of the relationships created by action and the spaces generated by it. As a characteristic of communicative action, mediatization is also linked to subjective experiences, emotions, and imaginations, which represent what is meant by absence and presence in a new way and enable an intensification of local experiences" (Knoblauch & Löw, 2020: 278–279).

24 For an explicitly Eliasian treatment of digitalisation, see Bianco (2021), whose chapter develops Elias' reflections on technology and the civilising process and applies his categories to contemporary technological innovations, particularly digitalisation.

the embodied and situated character of communicative action. What is changed is the relation between embodiment and mediation. Bodies remain located, but communicative action can now be coordinated across spatial distance in continuous and materially consequential ways. The result is the reorganisation of embodied action through technologically mediated representations.

This reorganisation is captured by the concept of translocalization (Knoblauch, 2020a: 258–262). It refers to a qualitative change in the spatiality of communicative action. Through digital media, actors can participate in communicative relations across the primary zone of bodily action. Presence and distance no longer function as they did in classical face-to-face interaction. Social relations among friends, families, work teams, companies, religious communities, political groups, and diasporic collectivities can be maintained through regular, sometimes continuous mediated communication. These relations are not merely imagined or symbolic; they can have immediate material consequences. Financial transactions, medical interventions, logistical operations, surveillance practices, military actions, and industrial production can be coordinated across distance through digital representations and “response presence”.

The notion of “response presence” (Knoblauch, 2020a: 212–213) avoids a simple opposition between presence and absence. In translocal communicative action, the other body need not be physically present for the communicative act to be reciprocally oriented and sequentially coordinated. Signs, voices, images, interfaces, and data do not represent absent actors/objects, but they become part of the action itself. The “synthetic situation,” discussed by Knoblauch and Löw (2020: 281) through Knorr-Cetina, is exemplary in this regard. It links spatially distributed actors through digital representations in such a way that they can act upon shared objects. Translocalization therefore modifies the basic spatial conditions under which interdependence is produced and experienced.

A second major dimension of refiguration is polycontextualization.²⁵ If translocalization refers to the spatial extension and redistribution of communicative action, polycontextualization refers to the simultaneous

25 Niklas Luhmann introduced polycontextuality in his magnum opus *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* in the context of modern society's self-description and observation of itself, particularly in Chapter 5 (“Self-Descriptions”) in Vol. 2 (2013), although he gives a brief description of the concept at the beginning of Vol. 1: “modern society (...) is a polycontextual system admitting a plurality of descriptions of its complexity” (Luhmann, 1997/2012: 11). This notion was suggested/adapted for sociology by Luhmann “to counter the argument that modern societies cannot be described in terms of neat and clear-cut functional differentiation. To the extent that functional requirements lose their uniqueness, communication is polyvalent and simultaneously follows different codes. For this reason, polycontextuality refers to the fact that communications can simultaneously have a multitude of references. For Luhmann (...), however, polycontextuality refers only to meaning, so that different sense relations are simultaneously established on different functional systems levels like economy, politics, science, religion, etc.” (Knoblauch & Löw, 2020: 279–280). “The conventional view holds that differentiation is gradually increasing in modernity; to Luhmann, however, the notion of polycontextuality indicates something of a countertendency: Communication increasingly needs to address different codes at the same time. That is to say, it increasingly demands that communication refer to different systems. It is this *multireferentiality* which constitutes one of the basic meanings of polycontextuality” (Knoblauch, 2021b).

embedding of actors, relations, and practices in multiple spatial contexts and scales. The point is that different spatial logics and material contexts (with different institutional orders) become coupled in concrete action situations. A seemingly local action may at the same time be part of a global economy, a transnational network, an urban infrastructure, a digital platform, a legal regime, and an affective community. Communicative action unfolds in situations that are no longer adequately described as simply local, national, institutional, or interactional.

Polycontexturalization is especially important because it prevents us from reducing refiguration to network society or globalisation. Refigured modernity (Knoblauch, 2020a: 274–277) is not simply the victory of networks, flows and mobility over territories, places, and stability.²⁶ Rather, it is marked by the simultaneity and tension between spatial figures: territories, networks, trajectories, and places (Knoblauch & Löw, 2025: 711). Territorial logics continue to matter, often with renewed intensity. Borders, national identities, local attachments, zones, camps, and bounded spaces are not disappearing. At the same time, they are overlaid and challenged by networked relations, transnational flows, digital infrastructures, mobile actors, and communicative circulations. Refiguration names the (unstable) order produced by these tensions.

This is also why refigured modernity should not be equated with postmodernity or with a simple stage after modernity. Knoblauch and Löw define refigured modernity as “that late phase of modernity in which the tension and simultaneity of conflicting forces and logics is characteristic” (2020: 268). Modern forms of structuration, differentiation, formal organisation, territoriality, and centralisation remain present, but are increasingly intersected by processes that move away from classical modern arrangements: networked cooperation, deterritorialization, transnationalization, digital mediati(zati)on, and the multiplication of spatial contexts.

The decisive point is that refiguration develops Elias’ concept of figuration without abandoning its core insights.²⁷ It asks how interdependencies are transformed when communicative action becomes technically mediated, materially objectified, infrastructurally extended, and spatially dispersed. In this perspective, figurations are increasingly refigured through mediatization, translocalization, and polycontexturalization.

26 “The current development towards a refigured modernity can be explained, clearly, by the increase in mobility, the densification of the circulation of goods, knowledge, and information, and, as a consequence, a general acceleration that is essentially based on developments in digital mediatization. In various waves (...) we see new forms of social situations, new spatial linkages, and hierarchies emerging, as well as translocal interactions that go hand in hand with new significances of places” (Knoblauch & Löw, 2020: 282).

27 “We prefer the notion of figuration coined by Elias (...) over structure because it underlines the processual character of social constructions and accounts for the role of subjectivity, agency, and affectivity in its relation to the whole structure of society, thus avoiding the schematic distinction between different vertical levels of social structures, such as micro, meso, and macro” (Knoblauch, 2025b: 188 n2).

The concept of refiguration diagnoses a structural problem that Elias could not have addressed in its contemporary form. The issue is no longer only how individuals and groups become bound to one another in increasingly complex chains of interdependence, but how these chains are communicatively mediated, spatially (re)distributed, technologically (de)stabilised, and institutionally (re)organised.

Refiguration therefore not only describes the tense, spatial, multiscalar changes of society that we empirically investigate, but can also be considered as an essential feature of what comes to be a refigured arising out of the tensions between these different figurations. (Knoblauch & Löw, 2020: 285)

Communicative constructivism does not replace figurational sociology, but extends its imagination into a social world in which interdependencies are increasingly produced through overlapping contexts. The result is a refigured understanding of figuration itself.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the dialogue between Norbert Elias' figurational sociology and communicative constructivism is most productive when it is not framed as a choice between two competing theoretical languages, but as a possible line of theoretical development.

Communicative constructivism, as any theoretical endeavour, should not be accepted without reservation. Its conceptual ambition is also its main vulnerability. The proposal to treat communicative action as the basic form of social action "is likely to be perceived as an overreach, regardless of explanation, legitimation, and justification" (vom Lehn & Kusenbach, 2023, par. 15), especially to sociologists concerned primarily with power, inequality, domination, suffering and/or (institutional) violence. Critics are right to warn that actions such as exclusion, punishment, hatred, administrative denial or coercion cannot be sociologically exhausted by describing them as communicative. Their concern is that within communicative-constructionist research:

(...) much analytic effort is typically devoted to uncovering the patterns and structures of the situated communication itself, rather than evaluating the social, cultural, or political contexts; or the causes, effects, and functions of this "communicative" work in and for the lives of participants and affected groups. (...) [R]esearch questions and results in many key works within CoCo [Communicative Constructivism] differ from those typically asked by sociologists who study work, institutions, technology, and related topics elsewhere. This has led some disappointed reviewers to doubt that CoCo's topics are suitable as "objects of sociological inquiry" and to conclude that works in this tradition are not "sociologically interesting". (vom Lehn & Kusenbach, 2023, par. 18)

In light of this critique, Elias might become useful again. His work reminds us that sociological concepts should be judged by their capacity to grasp the structure of the processes in which people are entangled. In Eliasian terms, the question is whether a theoretical vocabulary increases the “reality-congruence” of sociological knowledge. Reality-congruence does not mean final truth or neutral representation. It refers to the degree to which concepts allow us to understand real interdependencies, long-term processes, power balances, affects, dangers and unintended consequences more adequately (Elias, 1983/1987: vii–xxx, *et passim*). From this perspective, bringing Elias and communicative constructivism together is an attempt to make sociology more adequate to a world in which interdependencies are increasingly communicatively mediated, materially objectified, technologically infrastructured and spatially refigured.

If, as Hepp and Couldry suggest, the “quality of theory development is measured by the extent to which it provides us with tools for critically questioning the material transformations we all struggle with in our everyday lives” (2023: 148), then the dialogue proposed here should be understood as a contribution to that task. It seeks to retain Elias’ relational and processual imagination while extending it towards the temporality, spatiality, materiality, corporeality, sensuality and subjectivity of contemporary social reality. In this sense, the theoretical value of communicative constructivism may lie precisely in its capacity to render visible those new conditions under which figurations are formed, maintained, contested and transformed today.

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TOWARDS A FIGURATIONAL APPROACH TO THE FORMATION OF GENERATIONS: REVISITING NORBERT ELIAS'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF GENERATIONS

Ka figuracijskom pristupu formiranju generacija: doprinos Norberta Elijasa sociologiji generacija

ABSTRACT: *While Mannheim's "The Problem of Generations" has remained the most widely recognized classical reference in the sociology of generations, Elias's contribution has received limited attention in contemporary research in this field. Hence, this paper offers a discussion of the work of Norbert Elias as an underexplored resource for the study of generational relations and conflicts. The aim of this paper is to reconstruct a figurational approach to the formation of generations and the emergence of generational consciousness based on Elias's analysis of generational conflicts in the Weimar Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, developed most thoroughly in "The Germans". The paper first presents Elias's reflections on generational conflicts and places them in dialogue with Mannheim's approach, before turning to a discussion on how his insights may illuminate the process of generation formation along with the emergence of generational consciousness through generational self-identification and differentiation. The analysis shows how socio-historically embedded conflicts between older and younger generations may acquire generational meaning through discursive practices and collective action, thus becoming a basis for a shared sense of generational belonging.*

KEYWORDS: *Norbert Elias, sociology of generations, generational conflict, generational consciousness*

APSTRAKT: *Dok Mannheimov esej „Problem generacija” predstavlja neprikosnoveni sociološki klasik u sociologiji generacija, Elijasov doprinos ovoj oblasti ostao je uglavnom zanemaren u savremenoj literaturi. Ovaj rad razmatra delo Norberta Elijasa kao nedovoljno korišćen izvor za proučavanje generacijskih odnosa i sukoba. Cilj rada je da na osnovu Elijasovih analiza generacijskih sukoba u*

Vajmarskoj Republici i Zapadnoj Nemačkoj, najpotpunije izloženih u delu „Nemci”, rekonstruiše figuracijski pristup procesu formiranja generacija i generacijske svesti. U radu se najpre, kroz dijalog sa Manhajmovim konceptima, predstavlja Eljasova analiza generacijskih sukoba, nakon čega se razmatra na koji način Eljasovi uvidi mogu doprineti razumevanju procesa formiranja generacija i generacijske svesti kroz generacijsku samoidentifikaciju i razgraničavanje. U diskusiji se prikazuje na koji način generacijski konflikti ukorenjeni u određenom društveno-istorijskom kontekstu, kroz diskurzivne prakse i kolektivno delanje počinju da se poimaju kao generacijski i postaju osnova zajedničkog osećaja generacijske pripadnosti.

KLJUČNE REČI: Norbert Eljas, sociologija generacija, generacijski konflikt, generacijska svest

Introduction

Despite the rediscovery of the generational approach in the 1970s (Bude, 2010: 428) and multiple efforts to emphasize its analytical potential (Pilcher, 1994; Eyerman and Turner, 1998; Edmunds and Turner, 2002; Aboim and Vasconcelos, 2014; Woodman and Wyn, 2015; Roberts and France, 2021), the concept of generations remains relatively marginal in contemporary sociology. One can hardly overlook the striking consistency with which sociological research and debates on the concept of generations begin with Karl Mannheim's landmark essay *The Problem of Generations*. This piece has indeed become “the canonical, unifying point of reference in the field” (Purhonen, 2016: 95), consolidating Mannheim's status as a founding figure of the sociology of generations. Although Mannheim undoubtedly gave the concept of generations its most influential sociological formulation, the prominence of his legacy has left little space for drawing on other classical authors as complementary resources.

The work of Norbert Elias has thus remained in the shadow of Mannheim's seminal essay, receiving little attention within the sociology of generations, although insights into intergenerational relations occupy an important place in several of his major works and are discussed most thoroughly in *The Germans*. Some contemporary scholars have taken important steps towards addressing this neglect through both theoretical discussions of Elias's contribution to the sociology of generations (Connolly, 2019) and a small body of empirical research in the field drawing on his figurational approach to generational analysis (e.g. Hinrichsen, 2021). The aim of this paper is to reconstruct Elias's figurational approach to the formation of generations and generational consciousness, as well as to consider its relevance for empirical research. We discuss the relation between Mannheim's and Elias's perspectives on generations and argue that Elias builds on Mannheim's foundational insights by analyzing generational conflicts as processes embedded in historically changing intergenerational relations. The paper draws primarily on *The Germans*, where Elias develops the generational dimension of his historical sociology most extensively through analyses of the generational relations in the Weimar Republic and the Federal Republic

of Germany. The historical contextualization therefore follows Elias's account, while the use of additional historical sources falls outside the scope of the paper. Accordingly, we examine the conditions under which relations between older and younger generations acquire a specific generational meaning and contribute to the emergence of generational consciousness through processes of collective self-identification and differentiation.

Mannheim and Elias on the Study of Generations

The proximity between Karl Mannheim and Norbert Elias was biographical as well as theoretical. They were both shaped by the intellectual milieu of Weimar Germany, first in Heidelberg and later in Frankfurt during the early 1930s, where Elias worked as Mannheim's assistant and pursued his Habilitation under Mannheim's supervision. It is well documented that their early relationship was marked by personal and intellectual closeness (Elias, 1984/1994; Kilminster, 2007). Kilminster argues that Mannheim was "a significant figure in shaping Elias's sociological outlook", while also cautioning against reducing Elias to a mere follower or assuming a one-directional influence from Mannheim to Elias (Kilminster, 1993; 2007: 40–43). The two shared a broad set of theoretical premises that also bring their approaches to the concept of generations close, so that they, as Kilminster notes, "often embody the same idea expressed differently" (Kilminster, 2007: 44).

Mannheim's essay *The Problem of Generations* sought to establish generations as a sociologically relevant concept rather than a purely age-based category. For Mannheim, age proximity and biological succession represent a necessary condition for the formation of generations, but become sociologically significant only if individuals occupy a similar "generation location". He introduces the concept of generation location to capture the position within the socio-historical context that structures a range of possible experiences which may dispose individuals towards particular "modes of behavior, feeling and thought" (Mannheim, 1952: 291).² He considers childhood and youth to be particularly important as formative phases of the life course, since experiences acquired during this period tend to leave a lasting imprint on later dispositions. Generation location, however, remains only a potential basis for the emergence of a generation. An "actual generation" appears only when contemporaries within the same generation location become actively or passively involved in the social and intellectual currents that shape a new historical situation in their society and period (Mannheim, 1952: 304). Within an actual generation, distinct generation units may arise from different and potentially antagonistic interpretations and responses to a common historical situation (Mannheim, 1952: 304–306).

2 A similar perspective was later developed in demographic cohort analysis, where age is understood both as a position in the individual life course and as a location in historical time, thereby capturing the significance of shared historically specific conditions under which successive cohorts pass through key life-course transitions (Ryder, 1965).

Although Elias did not explicitly refer to *The Problem of Generations*, nor did he elaborate a conceptual apparatus as thoroughly as Mannheim, he repeatedly addresses questions central to the sociology of generations, most extensively in *The Germans*.³ He used the concept in a relatively loose sense, employing terms such as younger and older generations, parent and child generations, or pre- and post-war generations, without attempting to define its strict temporal boundaries. Elias also rejected biological determinism and was interested in the relationship between socio-historical experience and the way individuals of different generations behave and think. In *The Civilizing Process*, he traced long-term shifts in manners, bodily practices, sexuality and aggression alongside changing thresholds of shame and self-restraint, showing how successive generations grow into historically changing standards of conduct and feeling (Elias, 1939/2000). Since generations enter the civilizing process at historically different points, the social patterns of self-regulation acquired while growing up are themselves “generation-specific, and thus, in the broader sense, society-specific” (Elias, 1987/2001: 8). Unlike Mannheim’s more abstract formulations, Elias tends to empirically ground his approach by drawing on a range of historical evidence (Connolly, 2019: 8). Elias did not use terms such as generation unit or generation as actuality, but his insights closely resonate with Mannheim’s since he clearly distinguishes between groups within the same generation, most notably by contrasting the positions of middle-class and working-class youth in his analysis of the post-war generation’s student movement in West Germany.

Consistent with the framework of his figurational sociology, Elias interprets relations between older and younger generations as an established-outsider figuration. His reflections on generational relations are tied to his analysis of informalization as a long-term process of transformation in which power gradients

3 An important consideration in reading the historical analyses developed in *The Germans* is that Elias was reflecting decades later, as a German-Jewish emigrant, on a social context of which he had himself been a contemporary and, at certain points, an active participant. Born in 1897 to a German-Jewish middle-class family in Breslau, he grew up on the eve of the First World War, through its upheavals and into its aftermath, in Mannheimian terms, sharing the same generation location that gave rise to the politically divergent youth movements of the Weimar period. Elias was a member of Blau-Weiss, a Zionist youth movement which he appears to have joined while still at high school in Breslau. Blau-Weiss itself encapsulated some of the tensions of German-Jewish identity construction at the time. Its search for a renewed Jewish identity took shape as the idea of assimilation lost much of its appeal among younger German Jews, although the movement remained firmly attached to German culture and national belonging (Kilminster, 2007: 12). Elias’s own position embodied a similar ambivalence and could be read through the established-outsider dynamic as he later described the experience of belonging to a stigmatized minority while being raised in a prosperous German-Jewish milieu deeply embedded in the cultural, political and social life of the German majority (Elias, 1984/1994; Korte, 2001: 14–19). Elias was well aware of the difficulty of self-distancing when analyzing a historical configuration to which he himself belonged (Elias, 1989/1996: 1–2). Nonetheless, his own position within it situated him amid the relations in which processes of generational self-identification and differentiation unfolded. Korte accordingly interprets Elias’s early experiences as sharpening a question that was itself generational in character and occupied him for decades after: “Why am I forced to live in a certain way, distinguished from my contemporaries and different from my parents’ generation and from my forefathers?” (Korte, 2001: 16).

between unequal social groups gradually become less steep. Generational relations are thus situated within the same analytical horizon as other twentieth-century emancipatory shifts towards a more balanced configuration of power between established and outsider groups. In *The Civilizing of Parents*, Elias traces one expression of this process in parent-child relations, showing how the decline of formal symbols of parental authority and other markers of hierarchy accompanies a reduction in the power differential between parents and children (Elias, 1980/1998). In this respect, generational relations represent a changing figuration in which older and younger generations are mutually dependent but possess unequal power chances, with latent tensions potentially developing into open conflict as the power chances of younger generations increase over time.

The processes that most strongly affect power balances between generations are opening and narrowing of channels of opportunity, which represent “the kernel of social conflicts between the generations” (Elias, 1989/1996: 243–244).⁴ Older generations usually monopolize control over power chances and regulate the channels of opportunities available to younger generations, who may thus experience a “cutback in life chances and chances for meaning” (Elias, 1989/1996: 246). By “meaningful life”, Elias refers both to channels for upward mobility and career paths and to individual non-career opportunities for meaningfulness, which, above all, include political engagement and pursuit of ideals through which younger generations could imagine and shape a meaningful future. Although older generations can regulate the channels of opportunity in their own interest to some extent, their opening and narrowing is largely an unplanned process dependent on socio-historical circumstances such as wars and revolutions, which tend to accelerate the succession of the generations, while long periods of peace may slow it down (Elias, 1989/1996: 243–244). As these channels to life chances and chances for meaning narrow, “the latent generational-tension and the associated conflicts intensify”, although the forms taken by generational conflict remain “extraordinarily variable” (Elias, 1989/1996: 245). To illuminate these arguments, he develops his approach through a comparison of youth movements in the Weimar Republic of the 1920s and 1930s, and in the Federal Republic of the 1960s and 1970s.

In the Weimar case, the defeat in war and the collapse of the imperial order in 1918 resulted in profound structural changes in German society, with increasing power chances of the organized working class and their representatives as formerly outsider groups. This redistribution of power in the new republic was experienced as humiliation, especially among the younger men whose expectations had been formed within the Wilhelmine middle-class and military milieu. Since the post-war reductions of the army simultaneously narrowed access to the military career that many of these young men considered to be the only one that accorded with their abilities and status expectations, participation in

4 As Connolly observes (Connolly, 2019: 6–7), Mannheim had also alluded to this process, although to a more limited extent, as he argued that the political orientation of younger generations depends primarily “on whether or not the existing social structure and the position they occupy in it provide opportunities for the promotion of their own social and intellectual ends” (Mannheim, 1952: 297).

the Freikorps and other right-wing groups and student associations was the path that provided a substitute for it (Elias, 1989/1996: 246). Their relationship with the older cadres in the army was deeply ambivalent, as the latter blocked their desired career path and chances for meaningful life and opposed all attempts to end the parliamentary regime by force, yet still represented the worldview they identified with (Elias, 1989/1996: 246). The generational conflict between them therefore remained in its latent form and was redirected into violence against groups they associated with the rise of the new republican establishment, such as organized labor, left-wing activists, and Jewish middle-class circles (Elias, 1989/1996: 247). It was Hitler who later transformed Freikorps' "elite barriers" into a broad populist movement through the concept of 'German race' which "opened the door for many more people than membership of the 'good' noble and middle-class society" (Elias, 1989/1996: 197).⁵

In the Federal Republic of the 1960s and 1970s, Elias identifies another instance of generational conflict centered around young men and women of predominantly middle-class backgrounds, many of whom were students or former students active in the extra-parliamentary opposition. While the underlying dynamics of the conflict was similar to that described in the Weimar Republic, its political content was fundamentally different, now articulated through a left-wing political register and directed against the established middle-class generation of their parents and grandparents which they regarded as individualistic, repressive and morally compromised (Elias, 1989/1996: 198–199). Although Elias also noted narrowing opportunities in some professions and facing "anonymous constraints of the state bureaucracy", he places greater emphasis on the struggles in the political sphere dominated by the older generations who claimed a monopoly over legitimate channels of political action and left little room for ideas that the younger generations perceived as meaningful (Elias, 1989/1996: 248–250). Extra-parliamentary organizations and mass demonstrations provided alternative channels of political action towards a meaningful future defined by social justice and against inequality and oppression, with some groups gradually shifting towards more violent practices (Elias, 1989/1996: 199–200). Furthermore, the generational conflict and the search for meaning contained a specific moral dimension related to the unresolved legacy of National Socialism. For the pre-war generations, facing the Nazi past was merely a matter of "personal guilt or innocence", whereas younger generations, despite being personally innocent, deeply felt the stigma attached to the German nation and increasingly began to question how such a regime had become possible (Elias, 1989/1996: 251–253). The authority of their parents' and grandparents' generations was therefore questioned not only because these generations restricted channels of opportunities and meaning, but also because they were perceived as directly or indirectly responsible for the rise of Hitler and as insufficiently confronting the legacy of National Socialism in post-war German society (Elias, 1989/1996: 252–253; 272–273).

5 A similar pattern of narrowing career chances in the Weimar Republic can be identified among young generations of other middle-class professionals, some of whom later formed a radicalized generation unit within the National Socialist movement (Peukert, 1987, as cited in: Bude, 2010: 429–430).

Discussion: Why Elias Matters?

Elias's significance and contribution to the sociology of generations become clearer when his work is read against the background of the limitations that subsequent research identified in Mannheim's approach. As already suggested in the introduction, Elias can be read as extending Mannheim's insights by developing several issues that *The Problem of Generations* had left open and unresolved. Contemporary sociologists drawing on Mannheim have repeatedly shown that the concept of generations itself is notoriously difficult to operationalize, since methodological implications of his approach largely remain underdeveloped. As Bude summarizes, despite the classical reference to Mannheim's essay, there is still no agreement on how generations are formed or how they are to be identified (Bude, 2004: 108). Some scholars have even pointed to epistemological inconsistencies of the essay with respect to the premises of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, arguing that rather than "setting out immediately from the scientific concept of generations", Mannheim's own approach would first require analysis of how certain social relations come to be understood as specifically generational, "as relations of difference and connection between generations" (Matthes, 1985: 364–365). In her critical appraisal of Mannheim, Rosenthal similarly notes that he "remains, to some extent, bound to a relatively static concept of generations", and therefore argues for developing further his discussion of the interactional constitution of generations, proposing that generations and their units are formed "in an interactional process with other generations" (Rosenthal, 1997: 58). This concern is also found in later attempts to move beyond age-cohort conceptions towards approaches that place "social relations and processes" at the center of generational analysis (Edmunds and Turner, 2005: 561).

While Mannheim leaves underdeveloped the relational and practical mechanism through which shared generation location is translated into "generation as actuality", that is, how "individual members of a generation become conscious of their common situation and make this conscious the basis of their group solidarity" (Mannheim, 1952: 290), we argue that Elias's understanding of generations as firmly grounded in this relational premise, with his analytical vocabulary being correspondingly processual, provides a basis for reconstructing the emergence of generations and a shared sense of generational belonging. He describes the relations between older established and younger outsider generations as marked by "mutual, but unequal and highly complex, dependencies" (Elias, 1989/1996: 276). In the analyses of the Weimar Republic and the Federal Republic, it becomes apparent that the formation of generations occurs at the intersection of the biographical positions of young people, a particular historical context and changing power balances between younger and older generations. Elias's work could therefore be read as anticipating later conceptualizations of the intertwining of biographical and historical time within a shared generation location (Pilcher, 1994: 490; Corsten, 1999: 257–258; Leccardi and Feixa, 2010: 12).

As already indicated, the question that follows is how specific experiences and relations come to be perceived as generational. Bude argues that generational belonging is “initially and mostly defined not by identity markers, but by markers of difference”, since people are often unable to say which generation they belong to, but are certain about the generation they do not identify with (Bude, 2010: 426). The process of generational differentiation has been further elaborated through “discourses of difference” (Aboim and Vasconcelos, 2014: 168) and “generational semantics” (Corsten, 1999), pointing to discursive practices by which both generational boundaries and generational self-reference are articulated. Generational differentiation proceeds alongside generational self-identification, expressed through a distinctive generational “we-sense” within which shared experiences acquire the meaning of generational belonging (Bude, 1997, as cited in: Corsten, 1999: 258). This vocabulary resonates closely with Elias’s use of “we-identity”, “we-image” and “we-feeling” in *The Society of Individuals*, where identification with a we-group is closely tied to its collective self-image and the emotionally charged sense of belonging (Elias, 1987/2001).

In Elias’s reflections on the dynamics of generational conflicts, it is possible to trace how generational consciousness emerges through self-identification and differentiation, which appear as two analytically distinct but closely related dimensions that make the process by which a generation takes shape empirically observable. Just as within established-outsider figurations, generational we- and they-images themselves operate as resources of struggles over power and thus contribute to either reproducing or challenging the existing power balance (Elias and Scotson, 1965/1994: 21–22). Generational self-identification and differentiation are therefore grounded in the structural configuration of generational conflict, with the narrowing of career and political channels and diminishing chances for a meaningful future providing the basis of conflict that is experienced as generational through discourses, moral evaluations and practices (Elias, 1989/1996: 244–245). In line with Bude’s argument, when discussing the cases of the Weimar and the Federal Republic, Elias notes that “in neither case did the young opponents have a clear picture of the form of society which could satisfy their desire for meaning. But they knew exactly what they did not want” (Elias, 1989/1996: 257). Generational differentiation, particularly when it rests on a negatively charged they-image shaped through struggles over power chances and meaning, may precede the emergence of a clearly articulated generational self-identification. For young middle-class generations of the 1960s and 1970s, this negative reference was directed towards the political and moral worldview of the fathers’ and grandfathers’ generations⁶ with the term ‘fascism’ providing the discursive frame within which the legacy of earlier ruling generations fused with the worldview of the contemporary established middle-class generation to embody “the symbolic counter-image of the meaning-bestowing objectives of their own endeavours” (Elias, 1989/1996: 231). Marxism and its derivatives, by

6 It is worth noting that Elias links changes in individual parent-child relations with the broader transformation in intergenerational relations, whether in the wider society or in its particular strata (Elias, 1989/1996: 240).

contrast, provided an ideological and interpretative framework of generational belonging as “it facilitated a decisive distancing from the atrocities of their fathers, and promised entry into a new, just world.” (Elias, 1989/1996: 230). This is consistent with Rosenthal’s argument that “social worldviews – or habituated ways of relating to the world – are constituted not within a generation alone, but through intergenerational dialogue” (Rosenthal, 1997: 58). Elias develops this point by distinguishing between generational chains marked by continuity, as in Weimar Germany⁷, and those in which younger generations define their worldview in opposition to older generations, as in the Federal Republic.⁸ He further observes that discursive frameworks through which social actors interpret conflict may obscure its generational dimension, arguing in the case of the Federal Republic that “behind the ideological use of class conflict stands the reality of a generational conflict as a driving force” (Elias, 1989/1996: 201). Additionally, apart from discursive practices, Elias noted that a sense of generational self-identification and differentiation also takes shape through collective action, stating that for young people who participated in the student movement and extra-parliamentary opposition “communal activities, communal living and mass demonstrations all gave the participants not only a feeling of belonging together, but also the feeling of having a meaningful goal” (Elias, 1989/1996: 199). These practices can thus be read as forms of generational displaying that function as a mechanism through which self-identification and differentiation unfold simultaneously, as young people publicly enact values and orientations that distinguish them from older generations while shaping and consolidating their we-image and sense of generational belonging (Vlajić, Tomanović and Stanojević, 2026: 42, 50–51).

Identifying intragenerational variation, particularly with respect to the ways generational formation is related to class and other socio-structural categories, is one of the key concerns of empirical research on generations (Scherger, 2012: 5), and one that is integral to Elias’s analysis. Although he clearly recognized the gendered character of generational experience, he devotes substantially more attention to the intersection between class and generation. Elias points out that in both the Weimar and the Federal Republic the articulation of generational conflict was driven by young people from middle-class backgrounds. He considers class and generation as analytically inseparable categories, arguing that social power shifts cannot be understood without considering the particular classes whose relations are changing, but neither, in many cases, can they be explained without taking into account “the generational conflict and the problems of generational change in general” (Elias, 1989/1996: 244).⁹ Despite

7 Elias uses the Weimar case to note that the resentment of a younger generation towards the established older generations of its own class may be displaced onto other social groups, which then come to constitute the opposing “they-group” (Elias, 1989/1996: 247).

8 The issue of intergenerational transmission within families is also addressed in *The Established and the Outsiders* (Elias and Scotson, 1965/1994) and *The Society of Individuals* (Elias, 1987/2001).

9 This position stands in direct contrast to the approaches that subordinate class analysis to generational analysis (e.g. Edmunds and Turner, 2002).

not using Mannheim's concept of the generation unit, in his analyses, especially of conflicts in the Federal Republic, Elias recognizes that "the problems which arise here are class-specific" (Elias, 1989/1996: 244), since young people from middle- and working-class families had different experiences over the life course and therefore different potential for collective action and response to the same socio-historical context.

In his account, generational conflict is more prevalent within the middle class than within the working class. His explanation for the predominance of middle-class youth in the movements of the 1960s and 1970s lies in class-dictated differences in their life course trajectories. Limited opportunities for their upward mobility meant that, for most working-class children, the education-to-work transition led them into adult life broadly similar to that of their parents. It was precisely the "relatively taken-for-granted character" of this continuity that satisfied their desire for meaningfulness (Elias, 1989/1996: 470). On the other hand, middle-class children followed a more reflexive life-course trajectory. They remained longer within education and outside established adult roles.¹⁰ Their relative independence from the parental household, together with the prolonged transition to professional life, made questions of their future and meaning "a very pressing and central issue" and the quest for that meaning "accordingly more conscious" (Elias, 1989/1996: 202). This structural position made a collective political response more likely by giving them "a better chance of organizing themselves as a generation, and of closing ranks with their own goals, ideals and patterns of behavior against the older generations" (Elias, 1989/1996: 272). By acknowledging the importance of the life course perspective for the research on the formation of generations and their relations, Elias develops Mannheim's argument a step further, in a way that resonates with later approaches in which "the similar age in which the members of a generation experience important events only becomes meaningful because it is closely linked to similar transitions and related biographical challenges" (Corsten, 2001, as cited in: Scherger, 2012: 8), an insight later extended in some interpretations to formative phases occurring also later in life.

The class-specific life-course positions also shape the search for meaningfulness, which lies at the core of Elias's analysis. The experience of blocked opportunities for a meaningful future among young people may generate the potential for collective action. Although what was considered meaningful differed radically between the younger generations in Weimar Germany and the Federal Republic, Elias identifies the same underlying mechanism of generational conflict: "a younger generation searching for a meaningful life for itself and which finds the channels to such a life restricted or blocked" (Elias, 1989/1996: 197). In the Federal Republic, this search for meaning acquired a distinct moral charge, as the possibility of a meaningful future became tied to renouncing not only the Nazi legacy, but any kind of inequality and oppression. Elias identifies a

10 Elias links this prolonged transition to adulthood with the growing complexity of modern societies, arguing that it creates a greater scope for young people to explore different activities, relationships and modes of behavior before entering the more specialized and restrictive roles of adult life (Elias, 1987/2001: 123–124).

similar pattern of generational conflict across other post-war European societies, which he interprets in the light of the collapse of European global supremacy and younger generations' questioning of the ideals and values of their fathers and grandfathers, embodied in colonial rule and other defining features of the pre-war order.¹¹ This should be understood as closely intertwined with, and read against the background of, ongoing changes in codes of behavior and feeling, which involved conflict over the "formal rituals of behavior" (Elias, 1989/1996: 41) and differences between generations' respective normative patterns expressed across many social practices and relations, most clearly in sexual morality. As Elias notes, the younger post-war generation was particularly unwilling to accept inherited civilizing principles as injunctions of the older generation and instead experimented with different forms of sexual relations (Elias, 1980/1998: 205). These normative conflicts therefore provided further grounds on which younger generations differentiated themselves from older generations and consolidated their we-image and sense of belonging. Generational conflict was thus one of the arenas through which informalization unfolded, and the less unequal distribution of power that remained after the conflict altered the conditions of subsequent generational relations (Elias, 1989/1996: 41–42). By connecting the formation of generations to changes in everyday norms and relations, Elias ultimately moves the analysis beyond the political and intellectual domains of self-awareness emphasized by Mannheim (Aboim and Vasconcelos, 2014).

Conclusion

This article aimed to reconstruct a figurational approach to the formation of generations by drawing on Elias's analyses of generational conflict. Although Elias did not explicitly theorize this process or develop specific concepts for addressing it, we argue that his analyses provide a basis for identifying two analytically distinguishable but interrelated dimensions key to the formation of generations and generational consciousness: generational self-identification and generational differentiation. These dimensions develop within the socio-historically specific power relations between older and younger generations, particularly in the process of opening and narrowing channels of life chances and channels of meaning. However, these structural conditions acquire generational significance only through the ways they are experienced from particular class positions and along young individuals' specific life course trajectories, which play a decisive role in whether and how different groups within younger generations interpret them as a generational issue and develop a collective generational response through social movements. These different biographically and historically shaped experiences provide the basis for the emergence of political and moral

11 Connolly points to the relevance of Elias's insights for discussions of the emergence of transnational and global forms of generational consciousness (e.g. Edmunds and Turner, 2005; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2009), particularly his reflections in *The Society of Individuals* on the lag that may arise between changing social conditions and the social habitus of particular individuals and groups (Connolly, 2019: 15).

discourses through which younger generations interpret their position and struggles over life chances and meaningful futures and construct a generational we-image in opposition to a they-image of older generations. Such discourses contribute to shaping a sense of generational belonging and difference, as well as the potential for collective action. Through collective practices of generational displaying, younger generations further enact and reinforce their generational self-identification and differentiation. Therefore, discursive and displaying practices constitute the underlying mechanism through which shared experiences become the basis of a conscious sense of generational belonging and difference, and through which a social conflict comes to be understood as generational in character.

This analysis suggests that Elias offers an empirically grounded framework for examining the formation of generations and generational consciousness. His reflections follow the lines of Mannheim's theoretical framework and extend it at some of its least developed points, while also resonating with dominant contemporary perspectives in the sociology of generations. In this sense, given the limited attention his work has received within the field, Connolly's judgement remains particularly apt: Elias has not so much been "written out of research on the sociology of the generations" as he has "yet to be written in" (Connolly, 2019: 17).

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HUMAN FEELINGS IN TIME: TOWARDS THE HISTORY AND HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

Ljudska osećanja u vremenu: ka istoriji i istorijskoj sociologiji emocija

ABSTRACT: *The social and historical study of human emotions has undergone substantial theoretical and empirical development over the past several decades, yet its implications for mainstream historical and sociological scholarship remain insufficiently recognized. This paper examines the field of the history of emotions through several of its most influential classical and contemporary contributions. It begins with the foundational work of Johan Huizinga and Lucien Febvre, whose insights established the legitimacy of emotional life as a subject of historical inquiry. Particular attention is then devoted to the historical sociology of Norbert Elias, whose account of the civilizing process remains the most systematic macrosociological framework for understanding the long-term transformation of emotional standards and their structural determinants. The paper also analyzes the theoretical framework developed by Peter Stearns, especially his concept of emotionology, alongside Barbara Rosenwein's subsequent revisions through the concept of emotional communities, assessing the analytical strengths and limitations of both approaches. Drawing on recent scholarship, the paper identifies current theoretical frontiers in the field, and argues that a more rigorously emotion-informed perspective is essential for any adequate account of human social life across time.*

KEYWORDS: *history of emotions, historical sociology of emotions, the civilizing process, emotionology, emotional communities*

APSTRAKT: *Društveno i istorijsko proučavanje ljudskih emocija obeležio je značajan teorijski i empirijski razvoj tokom poslednjih nekoliko decenija, ali su implikacije tog proučavanja za osnovna istorijska i sociološka istraživanja i dalje nedovoljno prepoznate. Ovaj rad istražuje disciplinu istorije emocija kroz analizu*

nekoliko uticajnih klasičnih i savremenih doprinosa. Počinje sa utemeljujućim radovima Johana Hojzinge i Lisjena Fevra, čiji su uvidi ustanovili legitimnost emocionalnog života kao predmeta istorijskog istraživanja. Zatim, posebna pažnja je posvećena istorijskoj sociologiji Norberta Elijasa, čiji opis procesa civilizovanja ostaje najsistematičniji makrosociološki okvir za razumevanje dugoročne transformacije emocionalnih standarda i njihovih strukturnih determinanti. Rad takođe analizira teorijski okvir koji je razvio Piter Sterns, posebno njegov koncept emociologije, kao i naknadne revizije Barbare Rozenvajn kroz koncept emocionalnih zajednica, procenjujući analitičke prednosti i ograničenja oba pristupa. Oslanjajući se na recentna istraživanja, rad identifikuje i aktuelne teorijske proboje u ovoj oblasti, te argumentuje da je za svako adekvatno razumevanje društvenog života kroz vreme neophodna i perspektiva koja je značajnije zasnovana na ljudskim emocijama.

KLJUČNE REČI: *istorija emocija, istorijska sociologija emocija, proces civilizovanja, emociologija, emocionalne zajednice*

Introduction: Emotions in Science and History

It is hard to think of any significant aspect of the past that did not involve emotions (...) The beat of history is kept by the pulse of the human heart. (Dixon, 2023: 1)

Human emotions occupy an ambiguous and analytically contested position within the human sciences. Throughout much of the twentieth century, they were treated primarily as biological invariants: universal, ahistorical, presocial, and therefore epiphenomenal with respect to the structural and institutional processes that constituted the primary objects of historical and sociological inquiry (Reddy, 2001; Rosenwein, 2002; Turner and Stets, 2005; Leys, 2011; Kišjuhas, 2025). From the pioneering work of Darwin (Darwin, 1872/1989) to the influential research of Ekman (e.g. Ekman, Sorenson and Friesen, 1969), emotions and their expression were understood as genetically innate bodily reactions shaped by natural selection. Their function was to adjust the physiological, mental, and behavioral patterns of an organism in ways that increase its adaptive responses to various threats and opportunities (Panksepp, 1982; Nesse, 1990). In that sense, “the past explains the present”, but it is the human (and non-human) long *natural* history that matters the most (Tooby and Cosmides, 1990). Scholarship on emotions has also been burdened by a kind of psychological “imperialism”, or by the claims that emotions are “above all psychological categories” (Lazarus, 1991: 3) and “first and foremost a psychological phenomenon” (Kagan, 2007: 1).

At the same time, with the rise of behaviorism in the 1920s, and cognitivism in the 1950s as well, emotions were frequently viewed as irrational, overly subjective, “elusive”, or at least inaccessible to rigorous scientific analysis (TenHouten, 2007). The notion of emotions as “passions” or physical disturbances was also a perspective with a (far too) long philosophical tradition in the history

of Western thought (Dixon, 2012; Kišjuhas, 2018). Related to this, and despite numerous studies in the field of social and cultural history, history as a discipline “has never quite lost its attraction to hard, rational things” (Rosenwein, 2002: 821). Emotional episodes thus appeared in historical and sociological accounts principally as contextual colour or decoration rather than as analytically significant variables: the rage of a king, the affect of a crowd, the sentiment of a political movement, the grief of a bereaved community, etc. With notable precursors and/or exceptions (see Reddy, 2009: 302–303; Boddice, 2018: 11–26), the systematic investigation of how emotions are themselves (re)produced and transformed by historically specific social arrangements was largely absent from disciplinary agendas.

However, over the past several decades, this situation has changed substantially, especially in the field of history of emotions (see Stearns, 2001, 2008; Reddy, 2009; Wierzbicka, 2010; Matt, 2011; Plamper, 2012/2015; Stearns and Matt, 2014; Rosenwein, 2016a; Boddice, 2018; Rosenwein and Cristiani, 2018; Firth-Godbehere, 2021; Barclay, 2021; Dixon, 2023). As early as 1985, Carol and Peter Stearns (who also founded the *Journal of Social History* in 1967) argued that the history of emotions should become a territory of research in its own right (Stearns and Stearns, 1985). The inaugural address of a leading medievalist Caroline Bynum, when elected as president of American Historical Association in 1997, made particular reference to the changes in forms of emotionality between medieval and modern Europe (Bynum, 1997). Today it is argued that there is “the general turn to affect” among historians (Leys, 2011: 434) and that “history departments around the world appear to have taken the ‘emotional turn’” (Boddice, 2018: 1).

Furthermore, an interdisciplinary scholarship spanning social history, historical sociology, anthropology of emotions, and the cognitive science of affect has converged on the proposition that emotional experience is not simply a biological given but is constituted through cultural norms, social structures, linguistic conventions, and historical processes in meaningful and empirically tractable ways (Lutz and White, 1986; Thoits, 1989; Damasio, 1994; Reddy, 1997, 2001; Newton, 1998; Elster, 1999; Rosenwein, 2002, 2016a; Duncan and Barrett, 2007; Scheer, 2012; Plamper, 2012/2015; Boddice, 2020; Boddice and Smith, 2020). With the rise of the neurosciences, there were calls for formation of a “neurosociology (of emotions)” (Franks and Smith, 1999; Franks, 2007) and “neurohistory” (Smail, 2008; for the neuroscience of emotions see Panksepp, 1998). This convergence does not require the rejection of biological accounts of emotions, although it insists that biological capacities are always actualized through socially and historically specific forms. The implication is that the emotional life of past actors also cannot be adequately understood by projecting contemporary psychological frameworks backward in time, and that the transformation of emotional standards is itself a phenomenon requiring explanation in structural and historical terms.

In this regard, the term “emotions” appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* relatively late, only in 1580, after terms such as “self”, “affects”, and “consciousness”

had lost their negative connotation, and individual experience had become a subject worthy of the attention of science, the public, or society as a whole (Franks, 2001; Kišjuhas, 2025). Therefore, the practice of grouping different emotional experiences (anger, love, grief, shame, etc.) within the framework of a single and discrete mental phenomenon is relatively recent. Accordingly, historical research points to fundamental transformations in emotional standards in the early modern period, that is, in the centuries after 1500, and particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries (Stearns, 2008: 23). In classical antiquity, the much narrower term “passions” was most commonly used for human emotions, deriving from the term *pathos*, which is associated with suffering or with mental events that (passively) overwhelm the individual. Thus, it was only the broader term “emotions” that, in the French language of the 16th century (*émouvoir*), with origins in the Latin word for “movement” or “migration” (*ex + movere*, “to move out” or “from without”), implied that emotions mentally or psychically move people toward a certain action (Kišjuhas, 2025: 25).

On the other hand, human emotions have always been a popular motif in various texts, myths, and narratives, from the very beginnings of civilization or the discovery of writing (Oatley, 2004). In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* we read of the negative emotions of the goddess Inanna provoked by Gilgamesh’s refusal of sexual intercourse with her (Oatley, 2004: 6). In texts from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom, there are songs about “a dispute between a man and his *Ba* (soul)” that witness to negative emotions such as grief and loneliness. In the Hebrew myths that became the Old Testament, emotions were the first thing to occur after the very creation of the world, since God *felt satisfied* with his creation (“and God saw that it was good”, Gen. 1:10). Likewise, Eve and Adam, shortly after eating from the tree of knowledge, *felt shame* because they were naked (Gen. 3: 7-10) (Oatley, 2004: 7; Kišjuhas, 2025: 26).

Furthermore, the first line of Homer’s *Iliad* has the poet calling upon the muse to speak to him of Achilles’ emotions of anger or rage (“Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus’ son Achilles”). Therefore, it can be said that a negative emotion (anger or rage) was “the first word of Western literature” (Engelen, 2009: 395). Various love stories are the most common narratives worldwide, followed by those concerning warlike intentions, aggression etc. (Oatley, 2004: 9). The proto-scientific consideration of human emotions in history can likely be traced back to Thucydides and *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, in which he addresses Athenian courage (as the disposition to fight despite feeling fear), law-abiding behavior (due to feelings of shame), and the concept of happiness (“Happiness depends on being free”, as said by Pericles) (see Boddice, 2018: 11–14).

The research field of the history of emotions today rests on two key assumptions. First, historians of emotions believe that emotions (rather than rational calculations) play a very important role in historical action and, second, that human emotions are subject to change in accordance with changes in the sociohistorical context (Stearns, 2001: 4466). The essence of the history of emotions resides in several “radical” claims: 1) emotions change over time (thus, emotions are as much the subject of historical inquiry as anything else),

2) emotions are not merely the effect of historical circumstances, but active causes of events, 3) emotions are at the centre of the history of the human being, considered a biocultural entity, 4) emotions are at the centre of the history of morality and human virtue (Boddice, 2018: 1–2).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the (socio)genesis and theoretical controversies of the history of emotions as a field, but also to demonstrate its significance for history and (historical) sociology in general. Despite its rich (pre) history, which will be discussed below, sustained scholarly attention to human feelings in history only emerges in the 21st century (Rosenwein, 2002; Leys, 2011; Boddice, 2018). We therefore argue for the relatively recent (yet rapidly expanding) field of inquiry or a long movement *towards* the history of emotions. Furthermore, alluding to the programmatic paper “Bringing Men Back In” by a sociologist George Homans (Homans, 1964), we aim to demonstrate that the time has come for bringing human emotions “back into” mainstream (and not merely specialized) historical and sociological scholarship as well, especially regarding the early considerations of emotions in these disciplines. In this manner, the paper traces the development of this scholarly project across several phases and its key practitioners (see Plamper, 2010), offering a kind of *history of the history of emotions*, while advancing the argument that both history and sociology require a more detailed attention to human emotions in their theory and research.

“Discovering” Emotions in History

Johan Huizinga’s *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Huizinga, 1919/1955) represents one of the earliest systematic attempts in Western historiography to treat human emotions as a primary object of historical analysis (see also Arnade, Howell and van der Lem, 2019). His central argument was that the emotional life of 14th and 15th century France and the Low Countries was structurally distinct from modernity, marked by intense oscillations between many extreme and almost “childlike” states, and by the theatrical public expression of grief, joy, and terror (Huizinga, 1919/1955: 9–30). Human emotions were not simply features of individual psychology but collectively organized emotional performances shaped by the ceremonial and religious structures of late-medieval society.

For Huizinga, “all this general facility of emotions, of tears and spiritual upheavals, must be borne in mind in order to conceive fully how violent and high-strung was life at that period” (Huizinga, 1919/1955: 14). A particular role in the lives of medieval people were highly dramatized and extravagant rituals of mass grief and mourning (such as in the case of the death of a ruler), which are almost identical to Durkheim’s descriptions of the grief rituals of Australian hunter-gatherers (see Durkheim, 1912/1995: 403–405; on tears and weeping in the Middle Ages see also Gertsman, 2012). The function of this collective expression of emotions implied a collective fear of the instability of the soul and a peculiar horror of death. “The contrast between suffering and joy, between adversity and happiness, appeared more striking” and “all things in life were of a

proud or cruel publicity”, which produced “perpetual oscillation between despair and distracted joy, between cruelty and pious tenderness which characterize life in the Middle Ages” (Huizinga, 1919/1955: 9–10).

Several theoretical implications follow from Huizinga’s analysis, even if they were not made fully explicit. Most importantly, emotions are understood as culturally mediated rather than as natural expressions of interior states. For Huizinga, their form, intensity, and occasion are prescribed by shared conventions and enacted through public ritual (see also Kišjuhas, 2024). It also follows that emotional styles are taken to be historically variable: the volatility and expressive intensity Huizinga identified are not universal characteristics of human affective life but products of a specific historical configuration. Simply put, “in Huizinga’s Middle Ages there was a great deal of unrestrained weeping and anger” (Plamper, 2012/2015: 49), meaning that prevailing emotional culture functions as evidence of broader cultural and social organization. The emotional tenor of the later Middle Ages thus reflects and reinforces the symbolic structures of a world in which death, sin, and divine judgment were omnipresent social realities.

In this regard, Jean Delumeau in *Sin and Fear* also argued for a fundamental shift from the simple fear of bodily death to a more complex sets of fears built around sin, guilt, and the everlasting torment of the soul (Delumeau, 1990). This was made possible through a “pastoral of fear”, that is, a complex of sermons, religious literature, and macabre iconography that fostered a pessimistic and punitive outlook regarding earthly life. The gloomy sense of sin and human frailty then widened from the medieval monastic environment into general society. Between the 13th and 18th centuries, the Church was engaged in guilt-instilling efforts, systematically manufacturing anxiety about death, damnation, and bodily corruption as a tool of social discipline – structurally similar to contemporary manufacturers of “well-being” in the “happiness industry” analyzed by sociologists (Davies, 2015; Kišjuhas and Marinković, 2018).

Huizinga’s approach was not without limitations. Rosenwein directly attacks what she calls the “grand narrative” model as the assumption that medieval people were emotionally primitive, impulsive, and childlike (Rosenwein, 2002: 823), or that “Huizinga’s Middle Ages was the childhood of man” – a “fairy tale world” where feelings were sharper and unmediated in contrast to modernity (Rosenwein, 2006: 5). The tendency to treat the emotional character of an epoch as a unified collective psychology has been criticized for underestimating internal differentiation along lines of class, gender, region, and religious community (see Rosenwein, 2002: 844). His interpretive method, which relied primarily on literary and artistic sources, also raises questions about the representativeness of the emotional standards he reconstructed and about the relationship between normative expression and actual experience (see Arnade, Howell and van der Lem, 2019). Huizinga constructs a picture of emotional intensity that may be specific to an exceptional aristocratic context (court culture) and then generalizes it to the entire civilization of the later Middle Ages. Nevertheless, his work demonstrated that emotional phenomena could be subjected to rigorous

historical analysis, arguing that such analysis could illuminate aspects of the past that conventional historiography had overlooked.

Lucien Febvre's contribution to the history of emotions was more programmatic than Huizinga's, and its theoretical implications were correspondingly more far-reaching. In a lecture first delivered in 1938 and published in 1941 as *La sensibilité et l'histoire* ("Sensibility and History: How to Reconstitute the Emotional Life of the Past"), Febvre called explicitly for the development of what he termed a *histoire des sensibilités* (i.e., history of emotions) (Febvre, 1941). For him, the history of feelings or affective life (*la vie affective*) was part of a broader project of social history, namely the research into the "mentalities" of people from a given time (Stearns, 2008: 19; Dixon 2023: 5). That is, he called for a new field of historical inquiry: a systematic historical investigation of the affective and sensory life of past populations, grounded in attention to the historically specific physiological theories, religious frameworks, linguistic resources, and social conventions through which emotional experience was mediated. For these reasons, it can also be said that the historicization of emotions begins with "one solitary man: Lucien Febvre" (Plamper, 2012/2015: 40).

Febvre pointed out that historians already included emotions in their histories, but they did so in an unreflective and unhistorical manner, imposing their own contemporary conceptions of emotion on the past. He insisted that emotions are not automatic physiological responses to external stimuli, but historically specific expressions of cultural norms and social relations (Lang, 2018: 108). In this regard, Febvre "felt a deep antagonism towards psychological essentialism", and "spoke only to the *mentalité* of the present moment", since he understood that emotions "not only took place in social context, but also that they were formed and institutionalised in social contexts" (Boddice, 2018: 26). In this sense, the work of Roger Chartier is also important, as he moved away from the traditional "history of mentalities" approach to focus more on a social history of collective representations (or a cultural history of society) (see Chartier, 1989).

The reasons for his programmatic text were also strikingly sociohistorical: "When Febvre called for histories of emotions in 1941, he was recognizing something that, perhaps, only the Nazis could have brought home to a Frenchman: politics itself is not rational, not unemotional" (Rosenwein, 2002: 821–822). He believed it was important to study emotions because "emotional life is always ready to overflow the intellectual life" and because "the history of hate, the history of fear, the history of cruelty, the history of love" were not "idle chatter" – since this "idle chatter will tomorrow have turned the universe into a fetid pit of corpses" (Febvre, 1941: 19). In other words, by the 1930s, Febvre thought the time had come to take emotions seriously because "the emotions of the masses, stoked and harnessed for political purposes, seemed ready to destroy the world" (Lang, 2018: 108). After (re)reading Huizinga in the context of Nazi horrors, Febvre was actually calling for a moral history that would explain fascism and reveal the principles on which a more rational order could be constructed (Rosenwein, 2002: 823).

Febvre's programme rested on two key influential insights. The first was a constructionist view of emotional experience: what people feel is not determined solely by biological givens but is shaped by the conceptual and linguistic resources available to them (see also Shott, 1979; Harré, 1987: 5–10). For these reasons, it becomes possible to speak of historically formed emotions that are defined in accordance with the moral order of society. This view, now broadly accepted within the sociology and history of emotions (e.g., Reddy, 2001; Boddice, 2018), implied that the task of the historian was not to identify the universal emotion underlying a historical expression but to reconstruct the emotional vocabulary within which historical actors operated. In methodological terms, he proposed an expanded source base that moved beyond the literary and chronicle material which Huizinga had relied on, anticipating the interdisciplinary methodology that now characterizes the field (Dixon, 2023: 5; Plamper, 2012/2015).

The second Febvre's argument dealt with the social determination of emotional standards or "feeling rules" (see Hochschild, 1979). These are the norms governing what one ought to feel and how one should express feeling, implying that emotional displays are products of social institutions and arrangements, not of individual psychology alone. For Febvre, emotions are *not* "rigorously individual", "personal" and "momentary" but "imply relations between person and person, collective bonds" (Febvre, 1941: 7). Thus, emotions are irreducibly collective and socially contagious in character (see also Collins, 2004), which is the reason why emotional life is a legitimate and even necessary object of sociohistorical (rather than purely psychological) analysis. These are the reasons why *La sensibilité et l'histoire* is widely regarded as the founding programmatic text of the history of emotions as a scholarly field, and it remains the essential point of departure for any historical account of human feelings. Febvre urged his fellow historians to "plunge into the darkness of Psychology wrestling with History" and "rediscover a taste for exploration" (literally: "to find their appetite again") (Febvre, 1941: 5).

Together, Huizinga and Febvre planted the seeds of what would eventually grow into the history of emotions as a recognized field. This development indicates the broader intellectual context in which the systematic study of emotions in history began to take shape, namely the crisis of positivist historiography and the influence of the social sciences on historical method in the interwar period (see Plamper, 2012/2015: 49–59). Huizinga and Febvre were also interested in how different historical periods made different demands on the management of feeling, and how the emotional life of individuals was regulated by collective norms and institutions – thus anticipating the field of (historical) sociology of emotions (Hochschild, 1979, 1983/2003). In this respect, their concerns especially converged with those of Norbert Elias, whose *The Civilizing Process* appeared in the same year as Febvre's lecture (1939), though the two were developed independently (Elias, 1939/2000), as will be discussed below.

Emotions and the Civilizing Process

No theorist has contributed more to the historical sociology of emotions than Norbert Elias, whose monumental two-volume study *The Civilizing Process* remains the most ambitious and far-reaching account of the historical transformation of emotional conduct in Western Europe (Elias, 1939/2000). Written during his exile in England following the flight from Nazi Germany, and largely ignored for decades after its publication, it eventually received the recognition it deserved and became one of the most influential contributions to historical sociology of the 20th century (van Krieken, 1998; Mennell, 1998; Loyal and Quilley, 2004; Linklater and Mennell, 2010). It is also recognized as a “classic statement for the sociology of emotions” and a “lasting contribution to the sociology of emotions” (McCarthy, 1985: 320; see also Elias, 1939/2000: xviii; Newton, 1998).

Elias’s central thesis is that Western European societies underwent a systematic and structural transformation of behavioral and emotional standards between the late medieval period and the 18th century. Combining historical and sociological modes of analysis, and drawing on an extensive corpus of etiquette manuals, conduct books, and courtesy literature, he traced profound changes in the norms governing bodily and emotional conduct at the table, in the bedroom, in modes of address and gesture, and in the expression of aggression, shame, and sexual desire (Elias, 1939/2000: 52–182). This transformation, which he called the civilizing process, involved “the gradual transformation of behaviour and the emotions”, the “expanding threshold of repugnance” (Elias, 1939/2000: 71), and the progressive privatization of bodily and emotional functions that had previously been performed and expressed in public without apparent discomfort. Eating, defecation, sexual activity, violence, and the expression of strong emotions were all subject to increasing regulation, formalization, and concealment over this historical period. Some cognitive scientists also link this process to the (alleged) gradual decline in violence in world history (Pinker, 2011).

For Elias, as for Huizinga or Febvre, medieval gestures and movements were “embodiments of a different mental and emotional structure” (Elias, 1939/2000: 49). Since individuals in the Middle Ages “stood in a different relationship to one another than we do”, their emotional life “also had a different structure and character” (Elias, 1939/2000: 60). Modernity gradually gave rise to a new “invisible wall of affects between one human body and another”, grounded in feelings of “embarrassment at the mere sight of many bodily functions of others” or in the “feeling of shame when one’s own functions are exposed to the gaze of others” (Elias, 1939/2000: 60; for a sociological theory of shame and embarrassment, see Goffman, 1956; Scheff, 1988, 2000). In other words, “the civilizing process” also led to a transformation of human emotionality. As a result of this process, “emotions were no longer expressed violently, impulsively and directly. They became refined, subtle and varied. They began to have a history” (Rosenwein, 2016b: 9).

Elias's key theoretical innovation was the explanation of the causes or mechanisms through which this emotional and social transformation took place. Every particular characteristic that we attribute to "being civilized" was a product of a "particular structure of human relations" and of a "particular social structure" (Elias, 1939/2000: 52). His account of emotional change was embedded in a broader sociological theory of state formation and rising social interdependence (see also Newton, 1998: 62–63). In the medieval societies, social control of emotions was mild (Elias, 1939/2000: 91), which changed with the emergence of the absolutist state. "The civilizing process" was not simply a cultural development but was driven by structural changes in European society, above all the monopolization of state violence and the lengthening and densification of chains of social interdependence (Elias, 1939/2000: 257–276). Thus, it was not the result of rational deliberation, individual improvement or moral progress, but an unintended consequence of structural changes in social organization, such as the changing class structure, changes in the forms of authority, and the historical break-up of isolated regions and communities (McCarthy, 1985: 323).

The individuals Elias spoke of (at first) were "the elite, the warriors, men used to bloodshed and plundering" and "without a state to restrain them, they could do whatever their impulses led them to do" (Rosenwein, 2002: 826). The one exception was at the courts of the greatest lords, where more peaceful forms of conduct became obligatory. Thus, Elias especially focuses on how the late-medieval warrior aristocracies were gradually subordinated to the courts of absolutist monarchs from the 16th century onwards. In this process, the conditions that had made spontaneous emotional expression and physical aggression adaptive were progressively undermined. The court society (see also Elias, 1969/1983) constituted a (new) social environment in which one's survival and advancement depended on the management of impression (see also Goffman, 1959). The individuals who could manage their affect and exercise continuous self-monitoring in their interactions were systematically advantaged over those who could not. As market relations extended and the division of labor deepened, pressures toward emotional restraint and behavioral predictability were diffused from court to bourgeoisie and, eventually, to wider strata of European societies (Linklater and Mennell, 2010: 389–394).

As for Durkheim (Durkheim, 1893/1984) or Parsons (Parsons, 1951/1991), "the civilizing process" was in fact the process of "advancing integration, increased differentiation of social functions and interdependence, and the formation of even-larger units of integration" (Elias, 1939/2000: 254). Different (displays of) emotions in history are, thus, the result of different levels of social integration and differentiation. The argument regarding the sociogenesis of emotional constraint is actually rooted in a theory of social structure that Elias termed *figuration theory* or *process sociology* (van Krieken, 1998: 44). A figuration in Elias's sense designates a network of individuals bound together through chains of mutual dependency, in which the actions of each participant constrain and are constrained by the actions of others (see Elias, 1978). Within

this framework, social change is not the product of individual intentions or group decisions but the emergent result of interactions among interdependent actors within changing structural (con)figurations. This is why the long-term processes of social integration and disintegration *themselves* should become the key object of sociological study for Elias (van Krieken, 1998: 48).

Elias's civilizing process thesis has also attracted a substantial body of criticism. For example, in *Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozess* (1988–2002), Hans-Peter Duerr produced a rigorous five-volume critique of Elias, especially of the way he handles historical evidence in documenting medieval customs and sensitivities (see Mennell and Goudsblom, 1997). For Rosenwein, "Elias's narrative is fatally flawed in both its history and its psychology" (Rosenwein, 2016b: 9). She particularly criticises his "hydraulic model" of emotions (viewing emotions like gases or liquids under pressure, eager to be let out), which is inconsistent with the current empirical research in psychology and neuroscience of emotion (and derives from medieval medical notions of the "humors") (Rosenwein, 2002: 834–837). She also criticises his theory as the "grand narrative of emotions" in which the history of the West is viewed merely as the history of increasing emotional restraint, and which he shares with Weber, Freud and Foucault (Rosenwein, 2002: 826–827). According to this Huizingian "grand narrative", "The Middle Ages had the emotional life of a child: unadulterated, violent, public, unashamed", while "The modern period (variously defined) brought with it self-discipline, control, and suppression" (Rosenwein, 2002: 827), which is inadequate. After all, it could also be argued that "we have never been modern" (Latour, 1991/1993), especially regarding our bodily affects.

Today it can be said that this was a stereotypical Eurocentric narrative of civilizational advance that presupposes a normative hierarchy between "civilized" emotional restraint and "uncivilized" expressiveness, while ignoring issues like European colonial violence in modernity (Pepperell, 2016). Elias does focus solely on post-Renaissance Europe, which critics see as an arbitrary limitation of a claimed general theory of civilizing process, ignoring long-term forms of restraint and state formation outside Europe, especially China (Goody, 2002). Additional concerns target his limited treatment of religion (Linklater, 2022). Contemporary historical research on emotional self-regulation in earlier periods, such as Rosenwein's work on the early Middle Ages (Rosenwein, 2006, 2016a), Adams on managing love in medieval romance fiction (Adams, 2005), or McNamer's analysis of affective meditation in the later medieval period (McNamer, 2010), complicated the picture of a linear progression from medieval expressive "spontaneity" to modern managed "restraint".

Moreover, the 20th century presented Elias with an obvious empirical problem. The mass violence of two world wars and the Holocaust could not easily be reconciled with a narrative of civilizational advance, which is a tension Elias addressed through the concept of a "decivilizing process" and in his late work on the Germans (Elias, 1996; see also Frevert, 2019/2023). On the other hand, the brutal violence of the Holocaust can be seen as a "true" expression of "civilized" modernity (Bauman, 1989). Drawing on the emotions of pride and shame, an

interesting (historical) sociology of emotions in the context of nationalism and the world wars was offered by a sociologist Thomas Scheff (Scheff, 1994). Finally, Wouters explicitly extends Elias, showing how the civilizing processes actually *continued* well into the 19th and 20th centuries, focusing on the contemporary control and emancipation of “dangerous” emotions (Wouters, 2011). The notion of “informalization” of emotions from the mid-20th century onward serves as an important corrective to the unidirectionality of Elias’s scheme (Wouters, 2007).

Elias’s historical sociology of emotions demonstrated a fundamental connection between social structure and emotional life (Linklater and Mennell, 2010). What humans feel, how they express it, and what they are ashamed of are not biological constants but products of specific social arrangements. The figuration concept provided a relational view of social life that is more adequate to the analysis of emotional change than either individualist or structuralist alternatives. This standpoint makes it possible to analyze how emotional norms are transmitted, contested, and transformed through ongoing patterns of social interaction without reducing them either to individual psychology or to impersonal structural forces (Collins, 2004; Kišjuhas, 2019). In other words, the feelings of shame, disgust or displeasure are socially nurtured under specific conditions, and they are part of a sociohistorical process of state formation and advancing functional interdependence (McCarthy, 1985). This argument also connects the micro-level transformations in emotional conduct to macro-level processes of market expansion and power reconfiguration, which represents yet another important contribution of Elias’s theory (for the process of micro-macro translation, see Collins, 1981). Despite well-founded criticisms, *The Civilizing Process* “remains the paramount narrative of the history of emotions today, even though it is some sixty years old” (Rosenwein, 2016b: 8).

Emotionology, or the Emotional Communities?

It was not until the 1980s that the history of emotions began to take shape as a distinct scholarly field. As mentioned in the Introduction, the consolidation of the history of emotions as a recognized subdiscipline is directly associated with the theoretical contributions of a distinguished social historian Peter Stearns. In a foundational article co-authored with a psychiatrist/historian Carol Stearns in the *American Historical Review*, the Stearnses introduced the concept of *emotionology* (recalling “sociology” or “psychology”) (Stearns and Stearns, 1985). Emotionology was defined as “The attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression; ways that institutions reflect and encourage these attitudes in human conduct” (Stearns and Stearns, 1985: 813). It is seen as a useful tool to distinguish “the collective emotional standards of a society from the emotional experiences of individuals and groups” and to “illuminate how and why social agencies and institutions either promote or prohibit some kinds of emotions” (Stearns and Stearns, 1985: 813). The historian Stearns also pays particular attention to the development of the sociology of emotions

as a discipline that can assist the research program of the history of emotions (Stearns, 1989b).

The theoretical and methodological significance of this concept lays in the sharp distinction it drew between emotionology (the domain of prescriptive norms) and actual human emotional experience. The former is the object of historical study precisely because it was encoded in accessible historical documents, while the latter remained largely inaccessible to the historical investigation. By restricting the primary object of inquiry to emotionology, Stearns provided historians with a tractable analytical target: the conduct manuals, advice literature, religious texts, legal codes, and educational materials that prescribed and enforced emotional standards in a given society. Through close reading of such sources, it was possible to reconstruct the emotional standards of a given period, i.e., what emotions were considered (in)appropriate in what circumstances, what forms of emotional expression were encouraged or discouraged, how the emotional life of different social groups was differently regulated, etc. He also deliberately avoided using “high-culture sources” and focused on the “common folk” or middle and working classes. For example, “the tradition of courtly love simply did not penetrate far enough into popular culture or into institutional arrangements to count as a genuine emotionology” (Stearns and Stearns, 1985: 830).

Emotionology's emphasis, then, is not on how people actually *felt* (or expressed their feelings), but on what people *thought* about such matters as crying in public, getting angry, or showing anger physically (Rosenwein, 2002: 824). The Stearnses also relied on some early sociological theories of emotions of the 1970s and the 1980s, namely the concepts of “feeling rules” that prescribed people how to feel and how to express those socially mandated feelings (Hochschild, 1979, 1983/2003). While sociologists such as Hochschild argued for “the managed heart” in contemporary times, the Stearnses wanted to look at “the managed hearts of the past” (Rosenwein, 2002: 824).

In this task, Stearns and others produced an impressive series of books and articles regarding emotional history of the United States: *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (Stearns and Stearns, 1986), *Jealousy: The Evolution of an Emotion in American History* (Stearns, 1989a), “The Role of Fear: Transitions in American Emotional Standards for Children, 1850–1950” (Stearns and Haggerty, 1991), *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (Stearns, 1994), *An Emotional History of the United States* (Stearns and Lewis, 1998; see also Gienow-Hecht, 2010), *Battleground of Desire: The Struggle for Self-Control in Modern America* (Stearns, 1999). Taken together, this body of work “comprises the most significant research in the history of emotions to date” (Rosenwein, 2002: 824).

Thus, Stearnses deployed their framework of emotionology across a series of empirically rich studies of American emotional culture, tracing long-run transformations in the norms governing emotions including anger, jealousy, fear, desire, “emotional cool” and others. Arguing that social expectations gave shape to feelings, they began an ambitious effort to chart how the norms governing

feelings (and the feelings themselves) had changed over time (Matt, 2011). In *Anger*, for example, they traced how and why Americans gradually came to adopt tighter restraints on their rage (Stearns and Stearns, 1986). In *Jealousy*, Stearns argued how this emotion, seen before as reflection of manliness and honor, gradually came to be regarded as selfish and “feminine” (Stearns, 1989a). Furthermore, Stearns has sought to uncover not just the history of particular emotions, but the underlying cultural rhythms, institutions, and ideologies that have shaped emotional codes more generally (Matt, 2011: 118). In *American Cool*, he argued that 20th-century Americans learned to restrain and contain their emotions at work and in public life, finding new opportunities for emotional expression (“to ventilate”) in leisure (Stearns, 1994; see Kišjuhas, 2024), and in *Happiness in World History* he traced the ideas and experiences of happiness from the early stages in human history up to contemporary consumerism (Stearns, 2021; see also Kišjuhas and Marinković, 2018).

As a contemporary addition to Elias’s civilizing process (see also Wouters, 2007, 2011) a central finding across these studies was the identification of a significant shift in American emotionological standards between the 19th and 20th centuries. Stearns argued for an earlier “Victorian moral economy of emotion” in which the disciplined management of feeling was construed as a form of moral development and character formation. This attitude later moved towards a distinctly modern culture of “emotional cool” that valorized restraint, composure, and the suppression of strong feelings in professional and public contexts (Stearns, 1994). In a neo-Eliasian manner, he especially analyzed “the dampening of the Passions” (guilt, grief and love), the “new principles of emotional management”, “preoccupation with dispassion”, and “the new standards” in controlling emotional intensity: “Cool has become an emotional mantle, sheltering the whole personality from embarrassing excess” (Stearns, 1994: 1). Stearns connected this transformation to structural changes in industrial capitalism, bureaucratic work organization, leisure, and the reconfiguration of family life as an affective rather than a productive unit (Stearns and Stearns, 1985: 818-821).

Stearns’s framework attracted significant critical attention. A primary objection was that the focus on prescriptive sources produced an account of what people were *supposed* to feel rather than what they *actually* felt, leaving unresolved the question of the relationship between emotional norms and emotional practice (see Scheer, 2012). Recently, however, there has been an effort to move beyond social prescription and to examine lived experience, in order to understand how individual emotions differ from social norms (Matt, 2011: 119). Like Huizinga earlier, the Stearnses in *Anger* also claim that the premodern period was an age with no general emotional control (Stearns and Stearns, 1986: 21–25), and in which adults were in many ways childlike in their indulgence in temper (Rosenwein, 2002: 825). It can also be said that emotionology, as a concept interchangeable with “emotional style” (see Gammerl, 2012), projects a degree of cultural homogeneity that obscured the internal diversity and stratification of emotional standards within any complex society.

Still, the beginning of a substantial historiography of the history of emotions can be precisely dated to Peter and Carol Stearns' "manifesto" in 1985. Their later empirical studies demonstrated the historical variability of emotional standards in concrete, documented ways, and their insistence on connecting emotional change to structural and institutional change established an approach to the history of emotions that was actually (historically) sociological. The history of emotions, from this point on, was clearly about emotions in society (Boddice, 2018: 59), although it minimized cultural context and biological universality.

The most influential theoretical revision of Stearns's approach came from the medievalist Barbara Rosenwein, whose 2002 article "Worrying about Emotions in History" constituted a direct intervention in the methodological and theoretical foundations of the field (Rosenwein, 2002; see also Rosenwein, 2010, 2016a, b). Rosenwein's critique was directed as much at the broader assumptions embedded in the historiography of emotions as at Stearns specifically: "There is a clear theoretical underpinning for the grand narrative. It is a particular model of the emotions, one that prevailed when Huizinga, Febvre, Bloch, and Elias were writing and that prevails today in our very language and in popular conceptions of the emotions" (Rosenwein, 2002: 834). For these reasons, we consider it appropriate to analyze her contributions at this point right away, even though she belongs to a somewhat later generation of researchers (Rosenwein, 2016a, compared to, for example, Reddy, 1997, 1999, and who will be discussed later).

Rosenwein's central target was what she termed the "hydraulic model" of emotion, which is pervasive in historical writing from Huizinga onward – that emotions are like fluids held under pressure by social constraints, as was mentioned before. In this "grand narrative", the history of emotional life is fundamentally a history of the progressive elaboration of mechanisms for containment, regulation, or (Foucauldian) discipline and punish. For Rosenwein, "The grand narrative that has dominated emotions scholarship cannot stand. It is based on a debunked theory of the emotions and its concomitant, but flawed, notion of progressive self-restraint" (Rosenwein, 2002: 845), adding that "Focused studies of emotions have treated the Middle Ages as one emotional period. I challenge this view" (Rosenwein, 2006: 2).

In place of this model, Rosenwein proposed the plural concept of *emotional communities*, defined as "groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions" (Rosenwein, 2006: 2). Emotional communities may take the form of families, neighborhoods, monasteries, guilds, courts, or any other social formation in which shared norms of feeling are transmitted, enforced, and reproduced through practice and interaction. The researcher or historian of emotions looking at these communities seeks above all to "uncover systems of feeling". Such systems include the recognized "nature of the affective bonds between people" and "the modes of emotional expression that people within these communities expect, encourage, tolerate, and/or deplore" (Rosenwein, 2002: 842).

Multiple emotional communities coexist within any society at any given time: rather than a single, dominant emotionological standard, any given

historical period is characterized by a plurality of overlapping, nested, and sometimes competing emotional communities. “To sum up: there were many medieval emotional communities” (Rosenwein, 2002: 844). Therefore, the task of the historian is not to reconstruct a unitary emotional style (“emotionology”) but to map the emotional communities present in a given period, to analyze the norms and practices that constituted each, and to trace their interactions, transformations, and dissolution across time (Rosenwein, 2006: 1–31; Rosenwein and Cristiani, 2018). Rosenwein has taken a different task than uncovering unified “emotionology” in some historical period, focusing on the *multiplicity* of emotional modes and styles that often coexist in social life (Matt, 2011: 118). Every day and in all societies, individuals moved through various environments (families, churches, taverns), with its own guidelines, standards, and expectations for emotional expression, changing individual’s affects as they moved between venues.

Rosenwein developed her framework through detailed philological and contextual analysis of early medieval sources (letters, hagiographies, chronicles, and legal documents) demonstrating that emotional life in the early Middle Ages was neither uniformly intense in Huizinga’s sense nor simply undisciplined (“uncivilized”) in Elias’s. She carefully reconstructed how different social groups expressed grief, managed feeling, and regarded family relations. The emotional standards of one’s time is constructed at various social levels, in groups configured in any number of ways, and related to each other at various points of intersection (Boddice, 2018: 78). For Rosenwein, a community is forged on face-to-face encounters and common feelings of its members, which is a view she shares with many sociologists of emotions since Durkheim (Durkheim, 1912/1995; see also Goffman, 1967; Collins, 2004). The concept of emotional communities has now been widely adopted and productively extended in subsequent research. It has informed studies of religious communities (McNamer, 2010), but also views of the European Union as an emotional community (Koschut, 2024), or academic seminars (Karlsohn, 2016; see also Collins, 1998) and social science teaching as an emotional community as well (Blennow, 2019).

Bringing Emotions Back In

In the 21st century, the history and the (historical) sociology of emotions have been considerably advanced by theoretical contributions that both extend and challenge the frameworks examined in the preceding sections, especially in their dialogue with the (natural) sciences. For example, historian William Reddy’s concept of the “emotives” and the framework of *emotional regimes* and *emotional refuge* constituted a major theoretical advance (Reddy, 2001). He bridges the gap between the universalist thesis of cognitive psychology and the constructionist thesis of cultural anthropology, arguing that by making these two converge, the historian can use emotions to understand the mechanisms of historical change (see also Reddy, 1997, 1999, 2009). For Reddy, “there is no nature outside culture, and there is no culture outside nature” and “we are, as it were, biocultural” (Boddice, 2018: 63).

“Emotives” are a phenomenon that combines one’s beliefs about emotions and their appropriate social roles, implying that emotions are not simply expressions of inner states (feelings), but actively shape and alter those states (mainly through language). A speech act (to say “I am afraid”) is not merely to report fear, but to engage in an act that mobilizes, intensifies, or redirects the internal affective process. With this in mind, the “emotional regime” is the set of normative emotions and official rituals that any political regime imposes and depends upon, while “emotional refuges” are spaces where alternative emotions can be practiced outside the dominant regime control (Reddy, 2001: 128–129), similar to Rosenwein’s different emotional communities. Reddy also argued that romantic love is not a universal human emotion but a historically contingent Western invention produced by a very particular institutional pressure by the Catholic Church (and its attempts to eradicate sexual desire from social life) (Reddy, 2012; for constructionist sociology of love see also Jackson, 1993). Still, Reddy was “unconvinced by radical constructionists who seemed to throw out biology altogether”, while aspiring to transform emotion research as a whole (Boddice, 2018: 62).

For historian Monique Scheer, emotions should primarily be understood as *practices* rather than interior states that are subsequently expressed in behavior (Scheer, 2012). Drawing on Bourdieu’s sociological theory of practice, emotions are things that people *do* rather than things they *have*: they are “habits, rituals, and everyday pastimes that aid us in achieving a certain emotional state” and “manipulations of body and mind to evoke feelings” (Scheer, 2012: 209; see Kišjuhas, 2024). She views emotions as an act composed of interdependent cognitive, somatic, and social components, trying to integrate the material, bodily facets of emotional processes without having to resort to the ahistorical, universalist assumption that the body is conditioned only by human evolution (Scheer, 2012: 219–220).

In historiography, this shifts the evidentiary focus from introspective testimonies to observable practices, connecting the history of emotions directly to the history of the body and the history of material culture (see also Boddice and Smith, 2020). Similarly, historian Benno Gammerl outlined the concept of “emotional styles”, raising questions about the subject and its potential for choice and agency (Gammerl, 2012). The seminal work of Ute Frevert and colleagues at the Max Planck Institute on the history of emotions in modern Europe has produced a body of empirical research that models what a rigorous emotions-informed historical practice might look like. The edited volume *Emotional Lexicons* (Frevert et al., 2014) represents the analysis of emotional vocabulary across multiple European languages and periods, demonstrating how changes in emotional language contribute to changes in emotional practice and emotional knowledge.

Finally, the interdisciplinary project represented by Rob Boddice’s *The History of Emotions* (Boddice, 2018) and the co-authored *Emotion, Sense, Experience* (Boddice and Smith, 2020) has articulated a theoretically sophisticated programme for the history of emotions that engages with recent developments in

the cognitive science of emotion and affective neuroscience, while maintaining the historian's insistence on the irreducible historical specificity of emotional experience (see also Boddice, 2020). For Boddice, emotions are biological phenomena that are expressed through historically and culturally specific practices and meanings, which provides a framework that holds together the biological and the historical without collapsing one into the other. The similar can be said for some biosocial theories of emotion in sociology (e.g., Massey, 2002; Hammond, 2003; TenHouten, 2007; Turner, 2007).

Despite a rich prehistory, and the founding of the discipline in 1985 (Stearns and Stearns, 1985), the proliferation of studies in the field of history of emotions is relatively recent. As late as 2012, Jan Plamper said that the history of emotions is a "rocket ship taking off" (Boddice, 2018: 2), and Rosenwein argued that "despite a generation's worth of social and cultural history, emotions have seemed tangential (if not fundamentally opposed) to the historical enterprise" (Rosenwein, 2002: 821). It is also notable that in 2010 Plamper conducted an interview with leading practitioners of the history of emotions "as an burgeoning field": William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns (Plamper, 2010). Their consensus was that the history of emotions is not merely a specialized field, but the crucial means of integrating the category of emotions into social, cultural, and political history.

Thus, it can be argued that "rational" historical and sociological accounts that view one's emotional life as analytically irrelevant are systematically inadequate to the phenomena they purport to explain. Even a superficial reflection on emotions points to the fact that they largely represent a kind of "glue" that "holds people together", and generate commitment to larger social and cultural structures (Barbalet, 1998; Hammond, 2003; Turner, 2007; TenHouten, 2007; Kišjuhas, 2024). In political history, for example, the analysis of processes such as the French Revolution or the rise of fascism without attention to the emotional regimes through which political subjects were formed and mobilized (the politics of fear, enthusiasm, shame, and resentment) produces accounts that are structurally incomplete (Reddy, 2001). The same goes for social history, the histories of everyday life, or the historical theories of social change, which fail to account for one's emotional communities (Rosenwein, 2006, 2016b). In sociological theory, frameworks of rational action, structural constraint, or cultural reproduction that fail to incorporate the affective dimensions of social life are correspondingly impoverished (Turner and Stets, 2005).

The concepts surveyed in this paper such as emotional figurations, emotionology, emotional communities, emotional regimes, emotional practices and others, provide key insights into the importance of "bringing emotions back in" to historical and sociological accounts. After all, the founders of sociology did incorporate the topic of human emotions in their research, including Marx's and Engels's feelings of worker's alienation and rage (Marx and Engels, 1848/1906), Weber's protestant anxiety (Weber, 1905/2005), Durkheim's emotional "collective effervescence" (Durkheim, 1912/1995), Simmel's analyses of love (Simmel, 1918/1984), or Cooley's analyses of pride and shame in social interaction (Cooley, 1902/1922), among others.

Emotions are much more than biological reflexes, and crucially they change over historical time. As vehicles of social and psychological meanings they were made possible only through particular modes of life and thought, and “as those modes of life and thought changed, the emotions experienced and expressed by people changed” (Dixon, 2023: 6). Thus, and recently, the first strictly historical journal focusing on emotions (*Emotions: History, Culture, Society*) with two issues per year, has been launched by Brill in 2017. *The Routledge History of Emotions in the Modern World* was published in 2023, offering the analysis of the modern (from the late 18th century onwards) history of emotions such as love, happiness, anger, pain, etc., among other topics (Barclay and Stearns, 2023; for the histories of fear and happiness see also Bourke, 2005; McMahon, 2006; Stearns, 2021). It is also worth noting that the history of emotions has been recently addressed by scholars in Serbia (Radenović, 2019a, b, c, 2020; Radenović and Akkad, 2022) and Croatia (see Janković, 2015).

This paper has traced the emergence and development of the historical study of human emotions across a century of scholarship. Huizinga and Febvre were credited with establishing the legitimacy of emotional life as an object of historical analysis, and Elias’s *The Civilizing Process* as the most ambitious macrosociological account of the long-run structural determinants of emotional change, despite the criticisms to which it has been subjected (its hydraulic model of emotion, Eurocentrism and implicit progressivism). Emotionology by Stearns provided the first systematic conceptual framework for historical inquiry into emotional standards, and his empirical studies demonstrated the analytical strength of that framework. Rosenwein’s emotional communities offered a theoretically more adequate and empirically more flexible alternative, one that has been widely adopted and productively extended. Contemporary scholarship, such as Reddy’s emotional regimes, Scheer’s emotional practices, Frevert’s comparative emotional histories, Boddice’s biocultural framework etc., has advanced the field both theoretically and empirically, addressing many of the limitations of the foundational generation while opening new methodological and substantive frontiers.

In conclusion, it can be argued that both historical and sociological perspectives are equally necessary for the analysis of human feelings in time, especially when it comes to emotions and social change (see Lemmings and Brooks, 2014) or emotions and social movements (Jasper 1998, 2011). The burgeoning field of history of emotions is also the reason why a specifically *historical* sociology of emotions is needed (see Newton, 1998), and which has not yet developed fully (Bucholc and Mennell, 2022). Unfortunately, key (historical) sociological accounts on state formation and the organization of coercive power (such as works by Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, and Michael Mann) “devote little or no attention to the transformation of human emotions” (Linklater and Mennell, 2010: 385–386). On the other hand, important sociological theories of violence that take human emotions (and history) into account have recently emerged (Collins, 2008, 2022; Malešević, 2022). Further research on this topic should imply a closer link between the history and (historical) sociology of

emotions, but also their closer communication with findings from the natural sciences regarding human affect.

“Bringing emotions back in“, or the integration of human emotional life into the mainstream of historical and sociological analysis, is underway but remains an unfinished project. Nevertheless, an emotions-informed approach is not just a supplementary refinement of established historical and sociological theories but a necessary condition of their scientific adequacy and relevance (Kišjuhas, 2025). After a century of detailed scholarship, it is a fact that “Emotions not only *make* history. They are also *made* by history. They are transformed by social institutions and events that differ across time and place. Emotions *have* a history, and it is complex” (Frevert, 2019/2023: 5). The case for a more systematically emotions-informed history and sociology is ultimately a case for a more adequate and more fully human science of social life across time.

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Milena Kojić¹

University of Novi Sad
Faculty of Philosophy
Department of Sociology

Pavle Milenković²

University of Novi Sad
Faculty of Philosophy
Department of Sociology

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WORLD TIME AND THE TIME OF HISTORY: NORBERT ELIAS AND FERNAND BRAUDEL IN A RECKONING WITH THE PRESENT

Vreme sveta i vreme istorije: Norbert Elias i Fernan Brouel u obračunu sa sadašnjicom

ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the theoretical convergence and interdisciplinary contribution of Norbert Elias and Fernand Braudel through the prism of their critique of the “short-sighted present.” Rejecting event-based history (l’histoire événementielle), both authors prioritize slow rhythms and long-term processes (longue durée). Although Braudel’s geo-historical structures do not fully coincide with Elias’s figurations and cultural habitus, the paper argues that the rhythms of long duration can be complemented by a processual character (Prozesshaftigkeit) understanding of social change at both the collective and individual levels. At the core of this theoretical affinity lies time as a fundamental dimension of social life. The paper further demonstrates that, unlike Braudel, Elias develops a more explicit theory of time as a symbolic and socially learned category. Through a discussion of the history of mentalities, imagination, and utopian thought, it highlights the significance of Elias’s psycho-historical perspective for understanding post-Braudelian developments within the Annales School and contemporary debates on social temporality. Finally, Elias’s and Braudel’s critique of the present is interpreted, on the one hand, as a methodological critique of event-based history and sociology’s orientation toward the present and, on the other, as a basis for criticizing the presentist “preoccupation with the now” deprived of a utopian horizon.*

KEYWORDS: *civilization, time, processuality, long duration, presentism, eschatology, utopia, fantasy, crisis*

1 milena.kojic@ff.uns.ac.rs; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9783-5391> (autor za korespondenciju)

2 pavle.milenkovic@ff.uns.ac.rs; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2704-361X>

APSTRAKT: Rad istražuje teorijsko približavanje i interdisciplinarni doprinos Norberta Elijasa i Fernana Braudela kroz prizmu njihovog obračuna sa „sadašnjicom kratkoga daha”. Polazeći od otklona od događajne istorije (*l’histoire événementielle*) oba autora daju prioritet sporim ritmovima i procesima dugog trajanja (*longue durée*). Iako se Brodelove geoistorijske strukture ne poklapaju u potpunosti sa Elijasovim figuracijama i kulturnim habitusima, rad pokazuje da se ritmovi dugog trajanja mogu dopuniti procesnim (*Prozesshaftigkeit*) razumevanjem društvenih promena na kolektivnom i individualnom nivou. U središtu ove teorijske bliskosti nalazi se vreme kao ključna dimenzija društvenog života. Rad pokazuje da Elias, za razliku od Braudela, razvija eksplicitniju teoriju vremena kao simboličke i društveno naučene kategorije. Kroz razmatranje istorije mentaliteta, imaginacije i utopijskog mišljenja ukazuje se na značaj Elijasove psiho-istorijske perspektive za razumevanje postbrodelovskih pomaka unutar škole Anala i savremenih rasprava o društvenoj temporalnosti. Konačno, obračun Elijasa i Braudela sa sadašnjicom, razmatra se, s jedne strane, kao metodološka kritika događajne istorije i sociološke usmerenosti na sadašnjost, a s druge kao mogućnost kritike prezentističke opsednutosti sadašnjošću lišene utopijskog horizonta.

KLJUČNE REČI: civilizacija, vreme, procesnost, dugo trajanje, prezentizam, eshatologija, utopija, fantazija, kriza

Introduction

When Norbert Elias publishes *Über die Zeit* (Elias, 1984) and *The Retreat of Sociologists into the Present* (1987),³ Braudel’s texts *Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée* (Braudel, 1958) and *Histoire et Sociologie* (Braudel, 1969) already have, for several decades, the status of a conjunctural event. Some thirty years separate the four texts of the two authors, during which the famous figure of *long duration* (*la longue durée*) acquired its canonical place in the social sciences. The extroverted Braudel institutionalized himself rather early, already in the 1950s. He directed large projects, and skilfully managed to represent the postwar *Annales* school as much as himself. In the same period Elias was in a kind of (self-)isolation; and when, not without reason, it is said that he was a school unto himself, among those reasons one should certainly include the circumstance of his slow and, at moments, uncertain integration into the academic and intellectual circles of the English milieu in which he was, to be fair, a partial outsider almost until the very end.

And yet, the somewhat older (and longer-lived) Elias (1897–1990) shared with Braudel (1902–1985) not only the European cultural and geopolitical space⁴

3 The essay *The Retreat of Sociologists into the Present* (Elias, 1987) was published three years after the German version of the *Essay on Time* (Elias, 1984). Both texts emerged in the late phase of Elias’s intellectual career.

4 “Both of them,” as Enrique Guerra Manzo draws attention, “had some similar experiences: they observed Europe from the African continent; they lived through the trauma of world wars (Elias fought and was wounded in the First World War, and in the Second he lost his

(and thereby, indisputably, numerous connections and controversies of German-French relations during the twentieth century /Lepenes, 2001/), but also an epistemological horizon that would, in subsequent disciplinary reconfigurations, be disciplinarily enthroned under the name *historical sociology* (Smith, 1991; Delanty & Isin, 2003). Perhaps not with identical intentions, but certainly with related research and theoretical contributions – in any case, both give priority to slow rhythms, patterns of everyday life, routines, ponderous processes of cultural and structural transformation, and finally to the durability of civilizations. Looking over and beyond short time span trivialities and the current of ongoing events, both authors cast their gaze upon civilization, striving to decipher and describe it through their analytical and theoretical insights. The pictures differ not only in details, but also in the arrangement of large figures: Braudel's material structures, spatial networks and patterns of everyday life are not identical with Elias's cultural and civilizational habitus, but the cyclical rhythms of "structures that last a long time" may nevertheless be supplemented, perhaps even described, as *processual figurations*, both at the collective and at the individual level. Yet the large frame, the space between the figures, perhaps even the figures themselves, the proportions, what the pictures say – indicate that the two depicors share more than thematic affinity and complementary reciprocity. If the relation of "history and sociology" (Braudel, 1969) is reconsidered, with special reference to the "retreat of sociologists into the present" (Elias, 1987), the two pictures of civilization stereoscopically condense into one, and what connects them, or better: synchronizes them, is the phenomenon of time.

Both are critical of the growing tendency in their time for social research and theoretical works to linger too long on that which floods the present. Indeed, short time duration – namely, *short-lived events (courte durée)* (Braudel) and the transience of the ongoing present (Elias) – can be synthesized into a critique of a *short-sighted present*. At the core of this critique lies a preoccupation with the immediate present, while the "reckoning" with presentism is at least two-dimensional. On the one hand, it functions as a programmatic, theoretical, and methodological reflection on the prevailing state of historical science and sociology, from the perspective of Braudel and Elias. On the other hand, it serves as a contemporary and retrospective critique of the presentist eschatology of crisis – an obsession with a present stripped of any utopian horizon – seen through the eyes of Elias and Braudel.

Braudel's civilizational polychrony and Elias's civilizational processuality remind us that representations of time, even when they are utilitarianly unquestioned and disciplinarily dominant, are always socially mediated: time is a social fact *par excellence*. Is it not therefore unusual that, in sociology, time is still and yet again treated as a neutral, linear and universal dimension, instead of being observed as a historically produced and socially structured phenomenon? How can Braudel's critique of the fixation on short time span and Elias's critique

parents; Braudel was a prisoner of war between 1939 and 1945) and reacted against their ominous present, each writing his main work in very close periods: Elias in 1939, Braudel finished the first version that year, and in 1949 the work saw the light of day" (Guerra Manzo, 2005: 124).

of the obsession with the present be understood within our own *contemporary preoccupation with the now* – in the reduction of historical consciousness to that which is marginal and short-lived? Are the currently intrusive presentist discourses in the social sciences something that the two researchers of civilizations critically anticipated? Regardless of whether current “regimes of historicity” (*régime d'historicité* / Hartog, 2015), in their obsession with and fear of the future, lead to contractions and “acceleration of our pace” (Rosa, 2015) or to its expansion – to the “broad present” (Gumbrecht, 2014), we are confronting crisis dissonances in the comprehension of social time, which Elias, in his own time, recognized as a cognitive weakening of sociology, as an impoverishment not only of our comprehension of the present but also of our possibility of orienting ourselves in the social world (Elias, 1987). *World time* and the *time of history* are certainly not understood as universal history, that is, as a singularly experienced time; quite the opposite, they are the result of interactions in which different synchronicities participate, from psycho-historical interiorization, psychogenetic and sociogenetic figuration, to geohistorical and territorial domination. Each of these interactions takes place in complex processes of long duration. Precisely for this reason these processes are irreducible to one plane – to what takes place only in the present. Let us therefore look at what our authors have to say about this: first Braudel, then Elias.

Braudel's World Time

The texts on *la longue durée* and on the relation between sociology and history had, at the time of their emergence, an equally programmatic and theoretical character, for they redefined the relation of the *Annales* school to intellectual currents on the French scene after the Second World War. Today these texts are a series of influential statements about different durations and types of historiography and, what is especially significant, about *social time*. The research explication of Braudel's theoretical programs is well known and already well established.⁵ We shall remain here with the figure of *world time*, developed in the third volume of the extensive research on capitalism as material civilization bearing the same title. In *Le Temps du monde*, European capitalism is presented not only as a compilation of national histories, but as a globalized economic and capitalist order. Through careful research and descriptions of trade, communications, cities, markets and developmental asymmetries, Braudel offers the representation of capitalist civilization as a hierarchized, multi-layered history of the world. Immanent to this history is *world time* as the time of historical processes through which not only the capitalist economy but the entire capitalist civilization is enthroned by the complex crossing of imperial

5 *Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949) and *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*. The third volume of this study in English translation is titled *The Perspective of the World* (1984), which does not reflect Braudel's basic intention in the French original, *Le temps du monde*. *World time/le temps du monde* points to the externalization of the temporality of European capitalism beyond its borders, that is, through the expansion of borders.

domination and centers of power, pulsating exchange, the development of the market and communication, globally asymmetrical directions of development, and therefore, inevitably, temporally layered *processes of capitalist civilization*. For Braudel, world time is not world time as the totality of human history, but a set of processes that, from one *world-economy* (*économie-monde*) within the history of the world, constitute a civilization that becomes globally dominant. It is necessary to repeat that these are processes unfolding over long temporal sections, each of which has its own rhythm and, what is equally important, its own geographical and symbolic scope.

For Braudel, capitalism is not only a liberal/market economy, but the totality of exchanges and circulations within the total materialist civilization of capitalism. Finally, each of these circulations has its own temporality, which leads to each having its own history. There is no universal history that would unfold within some universal time. There is no temporal totality/totality of time. This lesson may also be read in Braudel's methodological and programmatic texts on duration and time. Since Braudel's vision of social history is structural and geographical, so too the representation of civilization is dominantly spatial. Thus temporalities are of different rhythm, length and duration, and polychrony saves this conception from epistemological reduction to space alone. Moreover, this polychrony warns that binding oneself only to one dimension of duration, that is, to one experience of time, is fatal. Let us recall the decisive reckoning with event-history (*histoire événementielle*), which concerns itself only with short-term events. This reckoning, as previously stated, is as much the result of a deep conviction as it is of a polemical struggle for the position of historical science. Elias writes something similar when he criticizes the sociological obsession with the present, only in a more measured tone.

For Braudel as for Elias, time is first of all dynamics; for Braudel it is an unavoidable epistemological as well as research horizon, because events, as the basic building material of historiography, can be comprehended and narrated (*récit*) only in categories of duration, that is, of time. Elias, for his part, emphasizes that time, insofar as it is a norm, is also a social convention. Elias's conception of time, undoubtedly concordant with Braudel's descriptive typology, is nevertheless more complex and epistemologically deeper. It has already been noted that Braudel lacks a more developed theory of time which might, as a possible consequence, call into question the merely conventional and, generally speaking, socially mediated comprehension of time;⁶ and this is precisely what Elias does in his two essays on time (Elias, 1984/1992; 1987). Both conjunctural time and the time of long duration, which theoretically offers more, are also a "matter of agreement," so that Braudel's somewhat frenetic apotheosis of long duration can certainly be called into question. Braudel's formulation that civilizations "last

6 See especially Santamaria & Bailey, 1984; Tomich, 2011. It should nevertheless be recalled that Braudel's understanding of time arose as much from the powerful intuition of a born historian as from polemical discussions about temporality in historiography and sociology conducted with Georges Gurvitch, whose sociology of time is incomparably more complex (Maillard, 2005; Ranković, 1970).

for only a few seasons; others endure for several centuries; others still persist so long as to seem immutable. The appearance, of course, is illusory; for, slowly and imperceptibly, they too change and decay.” (Braudel, 1994: 27) sounds somewhat Kantian and transcendent, since, elsewhere, he equated long duration “with the point of view of the good God” (Braudel, 1972: 454). True, that is at the same time typically Braudelian metaphor. Elias nevertheless goes further when he warns that time is not an ontological but a symbolic category.

Elias's Time of History

Elias's concise criticism of the sociological obsession with the present resembles Braudel's criticism some twenty years earlier. When Braudel criticizes history of events, he takes structurally inspired sociology as his model. Reproaching historiography for its fixation on daily events – rather than engaging with what transcends the fleeting vogues of the day – Braudel offers a theoretical conceptualization, transposing evental transience into structure. When Elias recognizes that same fixation on daily events – embodied in the sociological and empiricist preoccupation with the present – as a deviation, he recommends that sociology return to temporality and emerge from its preoccupation with the present. “Not much attention has been paid to the retreat of sociologist into the present,” he says at the beginning of his essay. “This retreat, their flight from the past, became the dominant trend in the development of sociology after the Second World War” (Elias, 1987: 223). While Braudel wants to correct “bad” history with sociologized history, Elias, as will be seen below, corrects presentist sociology with historicized sociology. What condenses this “obverse and reverse”, as Braudel would say, that is, what permeates society and civilization in their long duration, is processuality, or, as Elias says, processual nature. In fact, processuality is the way in which Elias operationalizes social temporality without thereby falling into the trap of objectifying social time – and especially time as a Kantian a priori category (Theis, 2009) – constantly reminding us that what we treat as time is historically and socially learned, not a priori and universal.

Elias develops a theory in which time is observed as the result of long-term processes of social development and the transformation of knowledge. In *Time: An Essay* he claims that “what we call time is a symbolic synthesis of successive events” (Elias, 1984/1992: 82), thereby defining time as a socially produced means of orientation. This formulation receives its full meaning if considered within the development of figurational sociology during the 1970s and 1980s. During that period, Elias became an internationally recognized author; his books and papers aimed to establish a basis for scientific sociology, all sharing a clear thematic connection (Elias, 1970/2007; 1983/1987; 1987/1991; 1991/2012). *Time: An Essay* (1984/1992) is a continuation of the effort to develop a processual (figurational) epistemology, and the text represents an attempt to transform this abstract philosophical problem into an empirical-sociological research program.

Time: An Essay begins with an apparently simple, but theoretically radical question: how is it possible for time to be experienced as something objective, although it is entirely dependent on social practices of measurement and coordination? The answer does not lead toward a philosophy of consciousness or toward conceptions close to the natural sciences, but toward the sociogenesis of temporal standards, formed through long-lasting processes of social differentiation and the growing interdependence of people (Elias, 1984/1992; 1939/2000). The critique of the understanding of time as a universal and unchanging category, as something “objective” or a constituent part of the human mind or consciousness (Elias, 1984/1992), is consistent with Elias’s entire oeuvre. Throughout his entire intellectual career, he consistently highlighted the broader problem of the domination of myths, deceptions and erroneous beliefs in human thinking, considering it necessary to abandon all forms of ideology and mythology (including German philosophy as a whole), that is, philosophy in general (Kilminster, 2007). Elias also does not spare physicists and mathematicians who, by dealing with time, enter the field of the social sciences and attempt to “measure” and “quantify” something that is entirely of social origin (Elias, 1984/1992).⁷ Physicists are mistaken when they transfer methods for studying simpler, less integrated phenomena to complex processes that belong to the social level. Speaking of “measuring time,” they implicitly assume that time exists as an entity that can be isolated and quantified; therefore, he states: “(P)hysicists and philosophers lost sight early on, in their specialized reflections, of the connection between their knowledge and its native soil of developing human society. In addition, the structure of this development was devalued through being misunderstood as structureless ‘history’, as something ‘mere historical’. Sociologists, for their part, concerned themselves little with ‘time’. So ‘time’ remained a mystery” (Elias, 1984/1992: 105).

In *The Retreat of Sociologists into the Present* (1987), Elias warns that the problem of contemporary sociology is the ahistorical approach to social phenomena, problematizing the fragmentation of knowledge and excessive specialization that contribute to the loss of a broader processual perspective. Sociology thereby abandons its key analytical advantage – the understanding of long chains of social development – reducing itself to the description of current states, without an explanation of their origin. Such a “return to the present” leads to theoretical short-sightedness and to the development of inadequate explanations (Elias, 1987), such as, here, the creation of the “myth of time” (Elias, 1984/1992: 43), and the assumption of the existence of a difference between “natural” and “social” time. However, as he says, “The very term ‘natural time’ compared with that of ‘social time’, conveys the idea that the former is ‘real’, the latter an arbitrary convention. The difficulty is that ‘time’ does not fit into the conceptual schema

7 This critique is based on the idea that different scientific disciplines can be arranged along a continuum according to the degree of complexity and integration of their objects of research. Moving through the mentioned continuum, through organic chemistry, the natural sciences and finally anthropology and sociology, an increasing complexity of the field of research is presupposed. None of these levels can be reduced to the previous one, nor can analytical procedures from one field be used in others (Elias, 1983/1987).

of this dualism" (Elias, 1984/1992: 117). Thus, Elias rejects the ontological understanding of time as a natural and universal category. Instead, he develops an understanding of time as a socially produced category, whose "objectivity" is not based on natural laws but on the long-lasting institutionalization of social practices. Time, according to Elias, does not exist "in itself," but only in relation to social processes of coordination and synchronization of activities. "Time," as he says, "is not something which exists in the same way as physical objects; it is a means of orientation" (Elias, 1984/1992: 84).⁸ What is experienced in everyday experience as objective and self-evident, e.g. "exact time," "historical period," "epoch," is in fact the product of long-lasting processes in which certain forms of temporal organization impose themselves as dominant. Conceived in this way, time appears as a social institution and not as a neutral framework, thereby opening space for its sociological analysis.

In figurations, time also appears as a mechanism of social power that does not operate through direct coercion but through stabilized patterns of coordination, expectation and self-regulation. Such an understanding enables the analysis of time as a specific form of social control, whose efficiency lies precisely in its unobtrusiveness. In the contemporary context, punctuality, respect for deadlines and the capacity for planning are positively valued traits, while lateness or temporal unpredictability are sanctioned. Time thus operates as a normative framework that shapes the behavior of individuals even in the absence of formal control. Elias's analysis shows that the power of temporal norms is not based on external coercion but on their internalization (Elias, 1939/2000). Individuals learn to "govern themselves in time," adapting their own impulses and activities to socially prescribed temporal rhythms.

This process has a clear historical dimension. Control over time in earlier societies is connected with religious authorities, while in modern societies it is transferred to state and administrative structures: "setting of time, like coining of money became one of the monopolies of the state" (Elias, 1984/1992: 53). Depending on the degree of development of a society, church and state are "holders of the monopoly of timing" (Elias, 1984/1992: 54), and the process of internalization of temporal discipline is closely connected with the development of the state, the market and bureaucracy. Nevertheless, it cannot be reduced to their formal mechanisms: time functions as a diffuse form of power that acts through habits, expectations and the "self-evident" norms of everyday life. Such a historical dimension, from a figurational perspective, implies that changes in relations of power, patterns of behavior and emotional regulation occur gradually, often without clear discontinuities. A key aspect of these theories is reflected in the rejection of the idea of sudden and radical social changes as the basic model of explanation. In Elias, even deep transformations of behavior, such as the increase of self-control or the change in the relation toward violence, unfold

8 Thus, neither clocks, calendars nor standardized temporal units are neutral technical means, but materialized forms of social relations. Their "objectivity" derives from the fact that they are socially obligatory, and not from an alleged natural necessity. Elias insists that time cannot be understood without the analysis of figurations, that is, dynamic networks of interdependencies that produce the need for temporal coordination (Elias, 1970/2007).

through long-lasting processes of civilization. What is important to understand is that the civilizing process takes place at the level of the entire society, but also at the level of the individual (Elias, 1939/2000).

The similarity with Braudel is recognizable in the understanding of temporalities as slow, developmental articulations of cultural, political and economic patterns during long duration that is at the same time processual, that is, of a processual nature. The emphases are thematically different, but epistemologically similar, if not almost the same. Society cannot be understood outside its processual temporality, outside multidimensional temporality, reduced only to one dimension: to the short time span (*temps court*) of short-lived events (*courte durée*), that is, by deciphering only what the present offers. What Elias analytically and astutely observes, and what is absent in Braudel, is psycho-history, to which a branch of the *Annales* school, close to the themes of mentalities and ideologies, would devote special attention.

Psycho-History, Fantasy and Utopia

In reflections on Elias's presence in French intellectual life, two circumstances are most often mentioned: the translation of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* at the beginning of the 1970s, and the attention that Elias's work, after acquaintance with the mentioned book, gained from historians close to the *Annales* school. André Burguière suggests that the French translation of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, under the title *La civilisation des mœurs* in 1973, was a turning-point event in the discovery of Elias not only in France but also in the Anglo-American context. It seems that the *orbital Annalists* – François Furet and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie – by their affirmative reviews of the French edition of Elias's book won over Anglo-American publishers as well.⁹ Perhaps this claim is too strong and subjective, but it is also supported by unusual similarities between *Annalist* and Eliasian themes. Elias's psycho-history immediately won over Le Roy Ladurie and Furet, as well as the initially reserved Le Goff. The affinity with Elias's investigations of court customs, rituals, etiquettes and historically variable regimes of (self-)control is recognizable in Phillipe Ariès, Jacques Le Goff, Michel Vovelle, especially in the field of the history of mentalities and sensibilities, but

9 "Through their contacts within the American academia these historians, all associated with the *Annales* school, enabled the translation of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* into English, which Norbert Elias himself, although he had taught in Great Britain for forty years, had still not obtained" (Burguière, 2009). Something similar would be repeated with the *Essay on Time* – there is a temporal discrepancy between the emergence of the text, its publication and later editorial interventions. Although the essay was written in the mid-1970s, it was first published only in 1984 in German under the title *Über die Zeit*, edited by Michael Schröter (Elias, 1984). The text was translated into German from an unpublished English original, which further indicates its complex textual genesis. The first English edition, under the title *Time: An Essay*, was published in 1992 and was partly translated from the German, whereby this work became more accessible to the international academic public and acquired a significant role in the dissemination of Elias's theory of time. Michael Schröter, Elias's long-time collaborator and editor of many of his works and unpublished manuscripts, including *Engagement und Distanzierung* (1983/1987), had a key role in this.

also of the history of corporeality, affects and behavior.¹⁰ French historians close to this current returned, after a longer hiatus, to the themes of politics and the political, by studying value orientations and mental and collective representations in the domain of politics and ideology, and Elias's psycho-history at least indirectly contributed to this return (Burguière 2009). The *Annalists* tried to develop their own version of psycho-history (*psycho-histoire*). Similarities were perhaps sometimes overemphasized with the intention of changing the dynamics within the *Annales* school after oversaturation with Braudelian geohistory and structural historiography, but Elias's literary and theoretical influence in this respect is not in question (Chartier, 2010).

Here, under the wing of the French Braudelian and post-Braudelian "new history," one recognizes the theoretical capacity of Elias's works that goes beyond convenient symmetries with Braudel and the common basis in *longue durée*. Long duration is, after all, not abandoned when the focus is shifted from geohistorical structures to mentalities and, even more, to the *imaginary* (*l'imaginaire*) with which Jacques Le Goff and Georges Duby operate in their analyses of ideologies and regimes of hierarchization of medieval societies. With the necessary limitations, that is, terminological precisions, it is legitimate to bring Elias's analyses of fantasy, fantasizing and utopian thinking into relation with categories of the medieval imaginary in the field of religious representations, corporeality and sexuality, which, in analyses of the articulation of these regimes in the domain of mentalities but also of practices – especially in Le Goff and Duby – comes significantly close to Elias's figurational and processual models of explanation. Moreover, *fantasy-thinking* is constitutive both for practical and for scientific knowledge, and for *utopian thinking*, which, as will soon be seen, is one of the weak points of the presentist worldview. In Duby and Le Goff the imaginary is a structured, ideologically consistent fantasy of order and orderedness and is, to that extent, filled with the promise of merits in the future. *L'imaginaire* is undoubtedly permeated by the phantasm of utopia, just as utopia is permeated by the fantasy of desires and expectations. Both correlate with Elias's consideration of fantasy-thinking.

In *Time: An Essay*, fantasy-thinking appears in the analysis of early representations of time. Elias shows that in many societies temporal flows were explained through relations with spirits, deities or cosmic forces, without a clear boundary between perception and imagination (Elias, 1984/1992). Cyclical representations of time were often connected with rituals and magical practices that "governed" natural processes. Time was therefore not an abstract dimension, but part of a symbolic universe in which fantasy and experience were intertwined. The development of standardized time does not mean the disappearance of fantasy, but its transition into a different form: into abstract, socially stabilized symbols that enable the coordination of complex societies.

10 Burguière particularly emphasizes the similarities between Elias and Phillip Ariès: "Certain passages from *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* seem to paraphrase Elias's text, for example when Ariès analyzes the new ways in which sexuality is mentioned before children, or rather kept silent about." (Burguière, 2009).

It may be said that early representations of time were dominantly fantastic in the sense of a high degree of involvement, while contemporary representations tend toward greater detachment (Elias, 1983/1987). Elias's analysis suggests that fantasy does not disappear, but changes form. Contemporary representations of time, even when they are scientifically grounded, contain elements of fantasy, especially if time is reified as an independent "thing" or when the present is experienced as autonomous from the past and the future. Accordingly, following Elias, it could be argued that presentism represents a kind of fantasy about time, but about a time that is compressed, filled with anxiety, risk and fear. It is possible to establish an analogy between past and contemporary fantasies: "Especially in urban societies they make and use clocks in a manner reminiscent of the making and using of masks in many pre-urban societies: one knows they are made by people but they are experienced as if they represented an extra-human experience. Masks appear as embodiments of spirits. Clocks appear as embodiments of 'time'" (Elias, 1984/1992: 118).

The fantasies of the contemporary age have a different character from earlier magical representations, but they are equally rooted in social structures. The development of complex societies and a high level of interdependence have led to a strong regulation of drives, which is the central place of Elias's theory of the civilizing process (Elias, 1939/2000). With the increase of self-control, a need emerges for compensatory forms of fantasy that enable the symbolic expression of emotions (Kojić, 2023). These fantasies are not directed toward the supernatural, but toward experiences of intensity, excitement and immediacy, which take place "here and now."

In that process a specific image of the individual as *homo clausus* is also formed, analyzed in detail in *The Society of Individuals* (Elias, 1987/1991). This representation develops from the early modern period and presupposes the experience of oneself as a closed, autonomous being separated from the world. Such a mode of self-understanding also contributes to a specific relation toward time: the present is experienced as a personal experience, separated from the social processes that shaped it. Accordingly, "The assumption of this quasi-spatial divide between an 'inner world' and an 'external world' is an individual and collective fantasy" (Elias, 1984/1992: 124). When we speak of the *homo clausus* fantasy of the contemporary age, it is important to understand that this is a romantically idealized image of the metaphysical freedom of the human being, which creates fictive antitheses between "freedom" and "determinism" (Elias, 1970/2007: 143).

Processes of excitement, which Elias and Dunning analyze, additionally illuminate this phenomenon. The actors of the present – the heroes of our age, as Lermontov would say – confronted with a high level of control, develop a strong need for experiences of intensity that are often connected with the impulse of the "here and now." The civilizing process led to learning the postponement of reactions, that is, to the suppression and limitation of immediate drive impulses. The change of which the authors speak is the change from the immediate and strong "affective discharge" that existed in the Middle Ages toward the restraint of

drives in an unexciting civilized society in which they become “depersonalized” and acquire their special “temporal and spatial enclaves” (Elias & Dunning, 1986). The term “unexciting” is used by the two authors ironically, since contemporary societies offer a broad repertoire in the search for and finding of pleasures. In this context, Elias also writes about the development of romanticized view of the past, which implies a longing for uncontrolled emotions as a shortcut to freedom and creativity (Elias, 1960/2018).

This orientation toward immediate experience can be understood as a form of fantasy that compensates for the long-term demands of social life. At the same time, it contributes to the shortening of temporal horizons and the weakening of consciousness about long-term processes. Finally, these processes can be interpreted as a contemporary “utopia of the present,” in which the present moment is experienced as the central and self-sufficient dimension of experience. Thus, this is not only a methodological problem, but a form of fantasy-thinking. This presentist fantasy is centered around the impatient subject and the urgency of satisfying “needs.” And if, in Elias, utopia and utopian thinking are functional and purposive in maintaining social balance, that is, in reducing risk, then the presentist world-historical stuckness in the present is highly risky. If presentist hedonism, ultimatums of urgency and speed, anxiety about tomorrow and a certain social passivization are joined at one point, they could be articulated as a kind of *eschatology of crisis* whose *imaginary* (*l’imaginaire*) may be called the *utopia of the present* (Milenković, 2025). The key consequence of this state, which also has its processual, that is, developmental side, is the narrowing of historical consciousness, as well as the impossibility of imagining a future different from what the present offers. The processual side of current presentism, meanwhile, lies in the tension between systemic control and the channeling of conflicts, the production of crisis and the consumer matrix of capitalism which, through commodification, encompasses every segment of the order (Hartog, 2015; Lošonc, Milenković & Losoncz, 2022). Crisis thus generates fear of tomorrow, while presentism compensates for the human need for fantasy and fantasizing that does not reach beyond the current present.

How are we to understand the circumstance that presentism is unfavourable to utopian thinking, that is, to everything that goes together with Elias’s “fantasizing” in relation to time and thereby, certainly, in relation to the future? Did Elias in fact thereby mark presentism as a utopically unimaginative project, incapable of fantasy – fantasizing? One possible interpretation, following Elias, lies in civilizational progress in “risk management,” that is, in Weberian rationality: through the development of science and the increase in the degree of detachment, one arrives at a gradual reduction of uncertainty and greater control over the environment, but also at the transformation of the very forms of danger. Presentist ideology would thus be the logical consequence of a shift of emphasis in the recognition and processing of these risks, with the important note that risks connected with uncertainty and anxiety are placed in the future; therefore, by collapsing the past and the current moment into the present, as Hartog showed in his analysis of regimes of historicity, the neuroticism connected with the uncertain future is displaced into the hysterical present.

Presentist world time is different from Braudel's, since the global moment that lasts, the eternal present, is at the same time a fear of time as something that slips away and dramatically warns of transience: "I have no time" is a typical diagnosis of the state of crisis of contemporaneity, which is in fact the inevitable consequence of the socially constructed compression of temporal planes and the shortening of past and future toward the "now." The struggle against time, waged through the negation and neglect of both the utopian horizon and historical consciousness, fails to alleviate anxiety; instead, it only exacerbates frustration. At the same time, the neurosis of the "risk society" (Beck) merely changes its objects. In Elias's analysis, instead of immediate threats, more complex and mediated risks appear, which require long-term planning and abstract thinking (Elias, 1983/1987). It is neglected that time, as a symbolic system of orientation, emerges precisely in this process: it enables the connection of past experiences with expectations of the future and thereby contributes to the reduction of insecurity. However, this capacity is not given in advance, but develops through history, together with growing levels of integration of knowledge and social relations. By altering the rhythms of these temporalities, clouding historical consciousness, and demystifying and anesthetizing utopian thought (out of fear of its potential subversiveness and capacity for resistance), the community is effectively disarmed, and the crucial resources for its survival – knowledge and reflexivity – are severely undermined.

Presentism as the End of Utopia

In the text *Spontaneity and Self-Consciousness*, Elias conducts an interesting thought experiment in which he considers what the "citizen of tomorrow" might look like, especially in the sphere of leisure. Starting from long-term processes of civilization and increasing self-control, Elias assumes that future individuals might develop the capacity to use free time in a way that simultaneously enables spontaneous expression and reflective awareness of their own emotions. In that imagined scenario, leisure would no longer be limited by "temporal and spatial enclaves" that serve for the mere "discharge" of drives or escape from everyday obligations, but would be a field in which a careful balance is struck between excitement and self-control. Even when he enters into thinking about the future, Elias does not offer a normative vision of progress, but carefully balances between analytical insight and the conscious projection of a "utopian scenario." His image of the future individual, who in leisure succeeds in harmonizing spontaneous impulses with developed self-consciousness, does not represent the final state of development, but a hypothetical extension of existing processes of rationalization and regulation of drives. Precisely for this reason this vision is marked by uncertainty: increased rationality and control of emotions do not guarantee a "better" life, but only a different organization of experience, in which the tension between drives and their social regulation remains permanently present.

Thus Elias's reflection on the future can be read as a controlled use of fantasy within a scientific framework. While in earlier societies fantasies serve

the explanation of the world, here they become a means of thinking through possible directions of development, but without the illusion of the final resolution of contradictions. His “citizen of tomorrow” is not freed from drives, nor is he a fully rationalized subject, but a being who learns to govern his own impulses in more complex social conditions. Thereby time too appears as an open horizon, and not as linear progress toward a goal given in advance: the future remains uncertain, while theoretical models serve as points of orientation rather than as predictions.

It is precisely the future that presentism shrinks from – as Braudel’s and Elias’s critiques indirectly intimate. The reckoning with presentism here runs in two directions: first, as a polemical observation about the state of sociology and historiography at the time when Elias and Braudel formulated their critical statements; but also as an epistemologically generalized diagnosis of the spirit of the age *after* our two authors, one articulated – as will be seen – in the voices of various critics and commentators. In Braudel and Elias it is couched as a general diagnosis, yet not without individual actors. Elias’s critique of the reduction of processes to states (*Zustandsreduktion* / process-reduction) was advanced already in *What Is Sociology* (1970/2007), where he takes aim at Parsons as „the leading sociological theorist,“ and at his structural functionalism as the theoretical matrix of that reduction. A similar critique, albeit in a different context, had been advanced some ten years earlier by C. Wright Mills in his well-known book of essays *The Sociological Imagination* (Mills, 1961). One might object to Elias that a single author – however influential a representative – does not stand for an entire community within a science or a discipline. Yet, as Helga Nowotny reports, drawing on Hermínio Martins’s observations from the 1970s: „None of the post-functionalist schools, movements and cult figures competing for a share or even the monopoly of the sociological imagination, he scolds, have translated the concern with ‘becoming, process, diachrony, historicity’ which was found lacking in functionalism, into their own theoretical programmes“ (Nowotny, 1992: 424). Mills’s sharp critique of Parsons’s abstracted empiricism disguised as grand theory is, in Elias, muted by generalization: Elias no longer sees Parsons alone, but an entire current. An echo of both critiques is implicitly present in Hartog, who is concerned neither with individual cases nor with a sociological current, but with a diagnosis of the epoch as a flight from the future into an extended present. Presentist regimes of historicity entail not merely the neglect or the forgetting of the past, but its displacement from collective memory into spatial commemoration. Pierre Nora recognizes this as a shift from environments of memory (*milieux de mémoire*) to sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) (Nora, 1989) – a marginalization of historical consciousness through spatialization and enclosure within a memorial park. Jerome Basche critically proclaims the tyranny of presentism, that is, of the present. He radicalizes this observation by tying presentism to capitalism, so that both are articulated as the ideology of neoliberalism and of capitalism as a temporal regime of the urgent, the market-driven and the competitive. Fukuyama’s figure of the „end of history“ functions as an ideological form of presentism (Basche, 2018).

These diagnoses of the spirit of the age after Braudel and Elias lose something of their polemical edge and of their confrontational charge, because presentism has gained the upper hand; hence the bitter observation that “when historical consciousness is weak, as it is now in British sociology, contemporary society’s self-understandings are not challenged but uncritically reproduced” (Inglis, 2014: 103). Inglis’s diagnosis of 2014, advanced with respect to the state of sociology in Great Britain, can be read as a variation on Seidman’s more general critique directed at historiography in the 1980s: “A presentist historiography reconstructs the history of science as a progressive movement toward the present, marked by occasional detours, brilliant anticipations, but in the main consisting of piecemeal contributions to current systematic knowledge”, he writes (Seidman, 1983: 80). The crisis of historical consciousness and its epistemological simplification — widely noted as the reductionism of episodic history and as the reduction of processuality to a (current) state — are recognized anew in particular scholarly milieus as an abandonment of history: “Rather than being characterized by a condition where profound historical knowledge fundamentally underpins the sociological gaze, in sociology today presentism rules. Such presentism involves the unintended and unremarked privileging of contemporary concerns and dispositions within specific modes of analysis” (Inglis, 2014: 100). Fredric Jameson’s striking slogan “Always historicize!”, formulated in his critique of postmodernism, precedes Hartog’s critique of presentism, while Jameson himself, in a later retrospect, registers the end of temporality and the liquidation of the future: “This situation has been characterized as a dramatic and alarming shrinkage of existential time and the reduction to a present that hardly qualifies as such any longer, given the virtual effacement of that past and future that can alone define a present in the first place” (Jameson, 2003: 708). There are further examples of this kind, so that one might well agree with Helga Nowotny about the notable liveliness of the debates surrounding the reawakened interest in the temporal dimension of sociological theories.

If, by way of a summary of sorts, one were to seek out the basic types of presentism — following Braudel and Elias as well as their later critics — there would be several. *Event-history*, or *episodic*, presentism: a preoccupation with short-lived events and a neglect of the synchronic–diachronic dimension of social life, to which the members of the *Annales* school, with Braudel at their head, frequently drew attention. Next, *sociological* presentism: the retreat of sociologists into the present, without sufficient study and understanding of the genesis of institutions and actors within a broader temporal framework — something Elias warned against, while at the same time affirming his own figurational sociology as an analysis of long-term civilizing processes. *Memorial* presentism: that which relocates the past out of social memory and into the memorial, as into a presentist commodification meant for viewing and for remembrance, but not for tomorrow. And *neoliberal, no-alternative* presentism: the ideological matrix of a capitalism without alternative and therefore without any utopian imagination of another, different order. Each of these presentisms — and further ones could be listed — carries within it a polemical reckoning and stock-taking with the past as much as with the future.

The reckoning with presentism is thus not only a reckoning with the presentist marginalization of the past, but also with the suppression of the future. Norbert Elias, for his part, discusses the future in *Time: An Essay*, seeing his contribution as “no more than an introductory contribution” (Elias, 1984/1992: 191) – a contribution reflected also in a heightened self-awareness which likewise carries no evaluative tone in the direction of a “better tomorrow”: “(T)he theoretical model of the development in this direction is to be understood as no more than an expression of its author’s desire for a better world. I have no interest in saying that it is better to have the time-experience of later societies. I do not know if it is better. I have simply attempted to solve a previously unsolved problem” (1984/1992: 192). Contemporary presentism, however, resolves this “unsolved problem” by a “retreat into the present” (as Elias would likewise put it), in that, put simply, some other and better world is simply no longer imagined.

The rapprochement of Elias and Braudel takes place in an interdisciplinary and antidogmatic distancing from the short time spine, in the reminder that the present cannot be understood within itself, that the understanding of social processes requires a gaze that reaches beyond what is immediately in front of us. And yet, both move in the area of long duration and the temporality of processuality and, ultimately, in the field of the epistemology of historical time mediated by social consciousness. One could say: the Durkheimian figure of collective consciousness in Braudel is transformed into the social time of the structures of the economy, everyday life, communication, exchange, as much as of climates and environment in the geo-historical sense. In Elias, still more explicitly, time is treated as a convention which, in an entirely Durkheimian manner, is institutionalized and internalized as a *social fact*.

The presentism criticized by Braudel and Elias is the obsession with the present in social research. The presentism of the present criticized by François Hartog or Jerome Baschet (Baschet, 2018) is the fear of the future that has seized the present, capillarily infusing every aspect of it. The eternal present of which Baschet speaks – the “tyranny of presentism” – reveals the deficit of imagination, that is, of phantasm in late capitalism, and corresponds to Elias’s understanding of fantasizing, but without a utopian point of support. Braudel’s world time, according to the diagnoses of Hartog and Baschet, has reached the limit of its historical imaginativeness, locking the utopian horizon into the “now.” Elias’s time of history does not unfold, in the current tyranny of presentism, within the frameworks of civilizational regulation and pacification, but through pathological temporality. Thus, contemporary presentism can be read as a crisis precisely of those long processes of temporal self-discipline that Elias describes in his works.

Is presentism, then, a crisis of historical consciousness, a symptom of theoretical insufficiency (which is already Elias’s and Braudel’s statement), an expression of current fashion (due to saturation with previous theories), or is it the consequence of a global deficit in civilizational discipline, that is, of a deficit of self-discipline? Has the Foucauldian-Deleuzian society of disciplining become, paradoxically, a society that counter-disciplinarily deviates from cultural and civilizational collective and individual interiorization and, by

introducing pseudo-transgressive presentist consumerism, in fact testifies to the disappearance of the socially constructed (significant, great) past, as well as to the disappearance of the socially constructed (promising, utopian) future? In other words, world time (globalized, totalized, totalitarianized) has overpowered the time of history (processuality, reflexivity, embeddedness, transformativity). If this is so, current presentism does not testify to a crisis of time as an ontological category (which, as we have seen, Elias dismisses), but to the crisis of one type of historically dominant/socially constructed time – the time of history, as time that is constituted and constructed on historical consciousness, which is displaced by (globalized, presentist, counter-Braudelian) “world time”. This would, in other words, mean that presentism reveals the crisis of historical time but not of world time, with an important and rather unsettling statement: this is a world without a vision of its own future.

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WHY DO “GYPSIES” STEAL CHILDREN? AN ELIASIAN PERSPECTIVE ON ANTI-GYPSYISM

Zašto „cigani”² krađu decu? Anticiganizam iz elijasovske perspektive

ABSTRACT: *The article draws on Elias’s theory developed in *The Established and the Outsiders*, *The Civilizing Process*, and *The Court Society*, applying it to the case of racism, and particularly anti-Roma racism. The content of the stigma attached to the outsiders in Winston Parva is strikingly similar to that attached to the Roma people. Moreover, the Roma and their ancestors simultaneously constitute local communities stigmatized by established neighbours, while also forming a transnational community through which stigmatization can be observed as a long-term process unfolding in parallel with the civilizing process. The article examines how the topos of “Gypsies who steal disobedient/badly behaved children”, reproduced for centuries in everyday discourse, reveals not only the nature of the figurations into which Roma enter with majority populations, but also the established groups’ we-image, their attribution of group disgrace to Roma communities, and their fears of losing status prestige and the group charisma associated with membership in the established group through failure to conform to prevailing standards of conduct.*

KEYWORDS: *established-outsider relations, Roma, anti-Gypsyism, group charisma, group disgrace*

APSTRAKT: *U članku se primenjuje Elijasova teorija razvijena u delima *Etabilirani i autsajderi*, *Proces civilizacije* i *Dvorsko društvo*, na slučaj rasizma, a posebno rasizma prema Romima i njihovim precima. Sadržaj stigme koja je pripisana autsajderima u *Vinston Parvi* u najvećoj meri se preklapa sa predrasudama koje važe za Rome. Pored toga, Romi i njihovi preci podjednako čine i lokalne zajednice koje stigmatizuju odomaćeni susedi, ali i formiraju transnacionalnu zajednicu kroz koju se stigmatizacija može posmatrati kao dugoročan proces koji se odvija paralelno sa procesom civilizacije. Članak ispituje kako topos „Cigana koji krađu neposlušnu/loše vaspitanu decu”, reprodukovano vekovima u svakodnevnom*

1 andrej.kubicek@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4564-2827>

2 Malo početno slovo označava stalešku, a ne etničku grupu.

diskursu, otkriva ne samo prirodu figuracija u koje Romi ulaze sa većinskim populacijama, već i sadržaj „mi-slike” „etabliranih” grupa, njihovo pripisivanje grupne sramote romskim zajednicama, kao i njihove strahove od gubitka statusnog prestiža i grupne harizme povezane sa pripadnošću etabliranoj grupi, usled nepoštovanja preovlađujućih standarda ponašanja.

KLJUČNE REČI: *odnosi odomaćenih i stranaca, Romi, anticiganizam, grupna harizma, grupna sramota*

The Princes and the Paupers

When asked about their earliest memories of Roma people – fellow neighbours who, until recently, often stood out across the Balkans because of their different “skin colour” – many will recall a disturbing image from childhood. Like a frame from a film, this image is more than just another photograph preserved in a family album of memories. It is accompanied by a narrative without which it would be incomplete. The sight of a Roma family – a mother or grandmother accompanied by one or more children – was often paired with a warning: “The Gypsies will take you away!”, or one of its many variations (“they will steal you,” “they will carry you off,” “I will sell you to the Gypsies,” or “I will give you to the Gypsies”) (McGarry 2017: 4).

In this discursive performance, transmitted from generation to generation as a form of cultural heritage, conspicuous-looking strangers remain passive, even though they are assigned the leading role. They are unwillingly drawn into the upbringing of the majority population’s children, without any opportunity to utter a single word, let alone deliver moral lessons. This small dramatic piece has been performed for so long that its origins disappear into the history of everyday speech, while references to it can already be found in the writings of Miguel de Cervantes at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Bogdal 2010/2019: 78–80)³. The same phenomenon in Serbia is documented by Ivan Janković (Janković 2018), who also points to the tragic consequences that this fantastical belief – grounded in imagined representations, but also in very real social figurations – can produce⁴.

3 Although, for centuries across Europe, there also existed a moral panic concerning Jews who were likewise alleged to abduct Christian children (today, similar accusations are directed at purported Satanic cults or criminal networks involved in organ trafficking), one important detail completely changes the social function and origin of this fantasy. Jews were accused of abducting children for their blood, implying that the children were also killed. Roma, by contrast, are alleged to keep abducted children alive in order to turn them into beggars and thieves.

4 Specifically, the history of crime reporting recalls a case from 1933, when members of a Roma caravan were accused of abducting a “Serbian girl,” whom they allegedly blinded and forced into begging. Angry visitors at the fair in Varvarin killed all the Roma and threw their bodies into the Morava River, together with the animals they were travelling with. A later investigation showed that the girl, Ana, had actually been born blind in Romania, which is why her impoverished family had abandoned her, and that a Roma couple who had no

The widespread diffusion of this *topos* points to its strong embeddedness in real social figurations. “Gypsies” remain a recurring figure of fear. Ancient demons of nature from rural settings are replaced by sexual offenders, homeless people, and drug addicts in urban contexts. It should also be noted that already in the nineteenth century, the prominent criminologist Hans Gross – although himself the author of a text that encyclopaedically covers almost all racist *topoi* concerning Roma – rejected the claim that “Gypsies” abduct children as a “product of popular fantasy”, comparing this belief to the superstition from earlier times that “Gypsies” also eat human flesh. His article *Die Zigeuner, ihr Leben und ihre Eigentümlichkeiten* was translated and published in Serbian as article series in Police Gazette (*Policijski glasnik*) in 1898 (issues 43–47). The argument with which Hans Gross refutes this popular belief is very simple: according to him, “Gypsies reproduce excessively, and therefore they hardly need to feed other people’s children, while at the same time exposing themselves to great dangers” (*Policijski glasnik*, 1898: 343).

Who, then, are these enigmatic “outsiders”, objectively present yet shrouded in a veil of mystery like mythological beings – social, but also ontological outsiders? And, more importantly, what can the study of their relations with the established populations reveal about relations of power, conformity to standards of civilized conduct, and group charisma within the framework of Norbert Elias’s theory?

Anti-gypsyism: The Reflection of the Entrapment within Roma–Non-Roma Figurations

Norbert Elias, in collaboration with John L. Scotson, demonstrated through research conducted in the 1960s and published as *The Established and the Outsiders* (1965/1994), how differences in social power can emerge between two very similar working-class communities in a small English town (named Winston Parva). The more powerful group, the established, succeeded in monopolising power within their relationship with the outsiders by stigmatising them through gossip. It was precisely in this established–outsiders figuration that Elias identified a broader social context in which racism, as well as ethnic and class-based hostility, can emerge. The content of this stigmatising gossip corresponded to the patterns of conduct described in his theory of the Civilising Process, that is, to the norms that gradually developed alongside the centralisation of the state in the West and the formation of its monopolies of physical force and taxation. More specifically, the content of gossips that mirrors racist discourse directed at Roma (as well as at many other racialised groups) can be understood as a negation of the standards of civilised conduct: self-restraint and consideration for others, cleanliness, an aversion to violence, and adherence to work discipline

children had adopted her as their daughter. The role of Roma as dangerous bogeymen who abduct children – mirroring similar accusations historically directed at Jews, accompanied by claims of ritual use of children’s blood – has been reinforced primarily in children’s stories. When members of this outsider group were actually encountered or accused of such acts, the sanctions imposed by the established population were often extremely brutal (Janković, 2018).

(Bucholc, 2024; Elias, 1939/2001, Elias & Scotson, 1965/1994; Goodwin & Hughes, 2016; Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998; Mennell, 1989; Mennell, 1998).

In light of this, attempting to understand anti-Gypsyism as a specific form of racism directed against Roma and their ancestors from the perspective of Elias’s theory of the established and the outsiders – and more broadly of the civilizing process – is highly interesting for several reasons. First, the relationship between the majority population and the Roma and their ancestors constitutes a long-term social process (Lewy, 2000; Mayall, 2003; Tumminelli, 2016), precisely the kind of process Elias himself preferred to analyse. Moreover, as Bogdal points out (Bogdal, 2010/2019), the earliest written sources attesting to the presence of Roma in Western Europe emerge in the context of their conflict with the developing state apparatus, which chronologically coincides with the beginnings of the civilizing process. Ancestors of Roma were witnesses to the “Autumn of the Middle Ages” and occupied a precarious position between nobility, peasants, and burghers – between court, countryside, and marketplace. Like the nobility, they defied absolute rulers, albeit with greater success; they engaged in similar service and productive occupations as the bourgeoisie, yet failed to accumulate capital; they were despised and impoverished like the peasantry, but instead of achieving equality through emancipation, they came to be treated in ways more similar to subjects of (former) colonial populations (Lucassen, Cottar & Willems, 1998). Throughout this period, they offered all strata of society alternative forms of salvation through magic and entertainment, which the clergy never regarded favourably (Soulis, 1961: 145; Richardson, 2021; di Nola, 1987/2008).

Second, the Roma constitute a large transnational community linking numerous countries in Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas, numbering perhaps up to 15 million people, toward whom established populations maintain remarkably stable prejudices regardless of geographical space and historical period. At the same time, the Roma also consist of networks of concrete minority communities in specific settlements, communities resembling “Winston Parva”. For this reason, this racialised ethnic group represents an excellent case not only for the application of Elias’s theory of established and outsiders, but also for examining its connection to long-term social processes and for uncovering the dynamics that shape patterns of social relations which at first glance appear static and eternal (Powell, 2016: 135-136; Mennell, 1989: 124-5).

Finally, in much of Eastern Europe, Roma are often newcomers, or descendants of newcomers, or outsiders. Even when they are not, they are perceived by the majority population as later arrivals, whether for economic or political reasons (as is the case with Roma expelled from Kosovo and Metohija by Albanians). For this reason, the case of anti-Roma racism can serve as a bridge between the findings Elias and Scotson derived from their study of Winston Parva and their broader relevance for understanding loss of power, stigmatization, and gossip in local communities (Bucholc, 2024: 3), which become enduring discourse and the production of lasting representations of both one’s own and other groups. In short, the social position of Roma and the stigma attached to them can simultaneously be studied as a situational, local, and

microsociological phenomenon, and as a macrosociological long-term process across Europe. Indeed, the case of Roma and their ancestors precisely connects these two analytical levels.

For all these reasons, it is hardly surprising that the description of mutual relations and representations among residents in Winston Parva sounds as if it referred to a local community in Serbia that includes a Roma settlement, rather than to two groups of English people in England. The identical attitudes that the established inhabitants of this locality held toward their neighbours – ranging from accusations of deviance, through roughness, loudness, dirty homes, quarrels and violence, uncontrolled children, and hints of promiscuity (Mennel, 1989: 117) – can be heard when speaking about residents of Roma settlements.

However, readers of Elias's study know all too well that its subject is not the Roma. Nor does Norbert Elias here, or elsewhere, refer to the more recent ancestors of today's Roma, the "Gypsies". Yet, much like Max Weber before him, he did not resist to show interest in their distant ancestors and the caste system of India⁵ (Elias, 1994a: XLVIII–XLIX; Weber, 1920/1958; Kubiček, 2017: 202–204). Special attention is devoted to the segregation of their occupations connected with blood, skin, flesh – and more generally with the bodies of dead animals (tanners, butchers, fishmongers, knackers, etc.) – as well as with human corpses (executioners and undertakers) (Elias, 1994a: L), as well as barber-surgeons in the case of Roma. The link between these despised caste occupations is contact with ritually impure substances, a point that will be discussed further below. For Elias, the Indian caste system did not only provide an example that appears timeless and unchanging – its religious legitimation indeed claims precisely this – but also a case that seems to invert the situation observed in Winston Parva, since in India (according to then-dominant historiographical interpretations) outsiders achieved dominance over the established population (Mennell, 1989: 122). In addition to the analysis of caste society, Elias applies the same explanatory model to the Japanese Burakumin (Elias, 1994a: XXVIII–XXIX), who, like the outsiders in Winston Parva, are not physically distinguishable from the majority population in Japan. The reason for their stigmatization again lies in the types of occupations they traditionally performed (also executioners, gravediggers, butchers, and leather workers). In the context of Norbert Elias's historical sociology, it is important to note how religious norms played a similar role to that of later civilizing norms in including and excluding individuals from the community of believers, or from the community of the "civilized." Both religious and civilizing norms can subsequently be rationalized as being essentially hygienic in nature. Prohibited contact with an animal carcass in Hinduism and Buddhism may indeed pose a health risk, but this does not apply to the processing of animal hide, which may be sanitary and safe, yet still retains its status as a taboo because it constitutes a part of the same body of the dead animal. Similarly, civilizing norms often acquire hygienic explanations

5 "As a social phenomenon "guest peoples" existed everywhere within the Hindu community. They are to be found to this day. Contemporary remnants still evident among us are the gypsies, a typical ancient Indian guest people which, in contrast to others, has wandered outside of India." (Weber, 1958: 11–12).

only retrospectively, even though their original origins and functions may not have been related to health risks, but rather to processes of social distinction, self-restraint, and the establishment of boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Elias's observations on the Burakumin in Japan are highly significant for understanding the position of Roma within established-outsider figurations. Although often poor, the Burakumin are not poorer than other deprived individuals in Japan, and there are also cases of relatively well-situated Burakumin, nevertheless, they are all originally religiously stigmatized because of the occupation practiced by their ancestors. (Elias, 1994a: XXXIV). The same applies to Roma in any European country, since their stigmatization does not cease with upward social mobility (individual or collective), and is equally applied to numerous non-poor Roma, in accordance with the logic of *pars pro toto*, that is, the generalisation of traits attributed to the “anomic minority/minority of the worst”.

Alongside the aforementioned religious taboos (Hindu in India and Buddhist in Japan), through which dominant clergy unified the community of believers (Elias, 1994a: XLI)⁶, Elias also emphasises the importance of social functions that outsiders may perform in relation to established groups. Where such a social (most often economic) function is absent (as in the case of the indigenous populations of the Americas, but also the ancestors of Roma under certain socio-historical conditions), they may be expelled or even exterminated (Elias, 1994a: XXXI).

Roma have traditionally, like Indian castes, Burakumin, and other similar groups, occupied a position that corresponds to Max Weber's historical totality concept of “pariah peoples” (*Pariahvolk*)⁷. By monopolising certain occupations, they entered into a limited, one-sided, and in a sense “tangential” interdependence with more powerful groups. Regardless of possible criticisms of such an interpretation (particularly the drawing of parallels with India), it remains the case that Roma have traditionally performed service occupations, which made them dependent on their customers – the majority population. Since their first appearance in European sources, just like other similar groups elsewhere in the world, they have never constituted self-sufficient communities. The survival of Roma has depended on broader economic systems within which they occupied or created specific socio-economic niches. The goods and services they offered changed according to economic circumstances, but their service-oriented character remained constant. As a group, Roma could survive only within a wider economy and society through which they moved, offering occasional goods and services and relying on spatial mobility and a multiplicity of occupations (Okely, 1983: 30). The service-based nature of such occupations

6 A mechanism that was often also present in Christian churches in Europe (Soulis, 1961: 145), as well as in Islamic relations toward Roma within the Ottoman context (Ginio, 2004).

7 “The purest form of this type is found when the people in question have totally lost their residential anchorage and hence are completely occupied economically in meeting demands of other settled peoples – the Gypsies for instance, or, in another manner, the Jews of the Middle Ages.” (Weber, 1958: 13).

within figurations – members of these “ethnoclasses” must sell their goods and services in exchange for basic necessities, unlike peasants who are in this respect self-sufficient – becomes a source of stigma rather than a religious taboo regarding the materials they handle.

Although it is clear to the reader that the described relations are, at the very least, burdened by what is commonly called racism, Elias himself uses this concept only with considerable reservation (Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998: 106). Indeed – following Weber’s approach (Weber, 1922/1978: 323–325) – Elias is highly cautious when writing about “race” and “racial” (relations, connotations, etc.), consistently placing these terms in quotation marks. He argues that phenomena commonly regarded as “racial” actually constitute a specific type of established–outsider relations, and that insisting on “race” as such amounts to placing the ontological “cart before the horse”. Elias is not alone in this epistemological critique of racism, as similar positions were later also advanced by other major authors (Wacquant, 1997: 227; Omi & Winant, 2014: X; Bonilla-Silva, 2003: 9). The real question for Elias is in fact: how did it come to be that individuals with different skin colour were perceived as members of a separate group, pointing to processes that produced differential power balances at the moment of contact. Over time, skin colour itself became a marker of group belonging associated with unequal power. Physical differences are not of substantive importance here; they function merely as a means of recognition, a “reinforcing shibboleth”. Moreover, by insisting on “race” as a kind of original source of prejudice, we would grant this ideology the status of an *a priori* fact, which would be entirely contrary to Elias’s broader theoretical framework (Elias, 1978/2007). Fantasised representations of certain groups are not “racial realities” existing independently of social relations and subsequently internalised by individuals as part of their worldview. If we were to treat them as such, it would be difficult to explain the widespread diffusion of racist beliefs (especially toward Roma) without partially accepting their validity. This leads to the key question: what is it that generates these beliefs which we commonly refer to as “racist”?

Power Inequalities, Gossips and Collective Images

In brief, Winston Parva is a small suburb of Leicester consisting of three neighbourhoods. The railway line represented a negligible physical but conspicuous symbolic boundary between the smaller Zone 1 (middle-class) and the two larger Zones 2 (working-class) and 3 (also working-class). The first group (Zones 1 and 2) understood itself as “the established”, while the second (Zone 3) occupied the role of “outsiders”. The division between the two groups was based on length of residence in Winston Parva, which structured different power relations. Members of the established group were more powerful within the local figuration. The established group had a strong internal cohesion and was able to stigmatise the outsiders. This resulted in status differentials and power inequalities that excluded the outsiders (Elias and Scotson, 1965/1994).

In Winston Parva itself there were no differences in nationality, ethnic origin, religion, “skin colour” or “race” between the two parts of the settlement and their inhabitants; on the contrary, they were homogeneous with respect to all these characteristics, eventually including material status as well. The fundamental difference was that some were long-established residents, while others were newcomers (Elias, 1994a: XVII). Norbert Elias also relates this figuration to relations between “whites” and “blacks” – but on the basis of other social divisions (ethnic and religious, in contexts where such groups stand in unequal relations of power) (Elias, 1994a: XVI; Smith, 2001: 60), as has also been noted by other researchers of groups stigmatized as outsiders (Bilefeld, 1991, 1995/1998: 16). For Elias, power is a polymorphous property generated within figurations, a property of all social interdependencies (Mennell, 1989: 115). He explicitly states that “what one calls ‘race relations’, in other words, are simply established–outsider relationships of a particular type” (Elias, 1994a: XXX).

A universal regularity of any established–outsider figuration is that the established ascribe superior human qualities to themselves, while simultaneously excluding others not only from membership in their own group, but also denying them any desirable traits, and ultimately taboos on social contact between their members and outsiders. This taboo is maintained through gossip (blame-gossip) directed at presumed transgressors (Elias, 1994a: XVI) and through prohibitions on contact with outsiders. One important element of this process of contamination consists of quasi-hygienic fantasies associated with the bodies of the subordinated (Elias, 1994a: XXVII). Elias rightly observes that presumed dirtiness (to which bodily smell should be added) often plays a complementary or substitutive role in relation to differences in “skin colour”. It is complementary when outsiders are in fact of “different complexion”, and fully substitutes for it when no physical differences exist⁸. Elias particularly emphasises the familiar and widely known image of the nineteenth-century British working class, which was described as “the great unwashed” (Elias, 1994a: XXXV). Similar conclusions have been reached by contemporary researchers of anti-Roma racism, who have clearly shown that poor hygiene and the emphasis on bodily dirtiness either reinforce the discursive topos of dark skin, or fully replace it in contexts where it is absent or where the emphasis on it is delegitimised (Bhopal & Myers, 2008: 95).

Such gossips constitute the local manifestation of what could be described as a racist discourse at the global level. The Roma do not form an established–outsider relationship with a single social group (e.g. Serbs), but rather form such networks of relations with almost every established population across the region and throughout Europe as a whole. For this reason, stigmatizing labels directed

8 As in the case of Jews, or the Burakumin in Japan, who were believed to have bluish marks under their armpits (Elias, 1994a: XXXIV); or in the case of another mysterious community in medieval Europe, which Elias does not mention, but which in a full sense represented “European Burakumin” and the “Pariahs of the Pyrenees”: the Cagots. The Cagots were also craftsmen (carpenters) excluded from medieval French society on accusations of ritual impurity and under the stigma of “white lepers” (Barzilay, 2022: 44–45). Similarly to the Burakumin, the Cagots were also considered physically marked: with deformed earlobes, tails, bleeding from the navel on Good Friday, as well as an unavoidable stench.

at Roma are numerous, resilient, and reflect a significant power imbalance (“cigani”, “ciganštura”, “mandovi”, “kalaštura”)⁹. On the other hand, the opposite term, “gadjo” (*gadža*), similarly to the Jewish “goy”, does not carry the same capacity to function as a strong stigma (Elias, 1994a: XXV). Richard Pym notes an interesting example in which the Spanish, from the eighteenth century onward (in the Age of Enlightenment!), were stereotypically equated with “Gypsies” in French and English imaginaries, i.e. this figuration of established and outsiders was projected onto international relations as well (Pym, 2007). A similar pattern can also be observed in the Balkans, where Croats sometimes equate Serbs with “Gypsies”, just as Serbs sometimes do in relation to Romanians or Greeks.

The possession of social power is thereby equated with individual and group qualities, and vice versa. Norbert Elias illustrates this vividly by noting that the adjective “noble” has preserved a dual meaning to this day (in English, but similarly in many European languages, including Serbo-Croatian): it can denote both high social status and highly valued personal qualities of an individual (Elias, 1994a: XV)¹⁰. “Old families”, or those who perceive themselves as such, everywhere display an ambivalent and competitive intimacy characteristic of aristocratic circles and urban patricians – but in the case of Winston Parva and similar small communities, even of working-class families (Elias, 1994a: XXXVIII). The abolition of ancient estate privileges did not abolish aristocracy; rather, it has led to a situation in which everyone to some extent aspires to noble honour and recognition. At higher levels of abstraction, speaking of the nation, and even of a transnational community of “civilised people”, the role of the peasantry is symbolically assigned to the Gypsies.

Elias’s claim that differences in the degree of cohesion are an important factor shaping social power and its inequalities (Elias, 1994a: XXII) is also crucial here. While this claim may hold in the case of local communities whose members know one another face-to-face, it is less applicable when analysing larger social groups such as “nations”. On the contrary, in the case of Roma, it is precisely those who live in smaller, kin- and neighbourhood-based settlements who in fact display stronger internal cohesion than the majority population, which is far more atomised. This observation is important for any possible understanding of how the theory of established and outsiders operates in the case of larger, more numerous groups, where cohesion and solidarity are not necessarily produced through actual acquaintance and direct relations, but symbolically, through mutual recognition and acknowledgement of belonging to the same group.

Elias’s argues that members of established groups tend to attribute to outsiders generalized characteristics of the “worst” (“anomic minority”) (Elias, 1994a: XIX), which is also highly significant in the context of Roma and anti-

9 Unlike other ethnic groups: the term “Šiptari” still carried a real stigmatizing force when Albanians were subordinated to Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, whereas this is no longer the case today; the term “Švabe” (“Swabians”) never had such a strong stigmatizing potential, except perhaps in the immediate post-1945 period.

10 In English language, the same relationship can also be observed in the opposite direction: the term “villein,” which originated as a designation for a peasant or a person of low social status, also came to denote a person of low moral character – a wrongdoer or “villain.”

Gypsyism. In any sufficiently large group, whether a neighbourhood or a transnational ethnic community numbering tens of millions, it is inevitable that a minority will violate certain social norms. The norms allegedly violated by Roma in majority imaginaries are precisely – and not coincidentally – the same as those attributed to “outsiders” in Winston Parva. Members of outsider groups are those who fail to conform to norms, and whose anomicity becomes the measure of the normativity (and even normality) of their own group (Elias, 1994a: XXIV). Contact with them, from the perspective of established group members, carries the risk of contamination through “anomic infection”. As Norbert Elias further explains, full participation in the dominance of one’s own group and in the group charisma it carries entails submission to group-specific norms; charisma and dominance are therefore rewards for subordination (Elias, 1994a: XXIII).

The we-image, we-ideal, and they-image are paradigmatically illustrated by the already mentioned example from literature. The plot of Cervantes’s *La Gitanilla* (“The Little Gypsy Girl”) can almost serve as an illustration of Elias’s *Court Society* (Elias, 1969/1983), both as an artistic representation and as a critique of the habitus of courtiers – that is, of the established. The Spanish aristocrat Preciosa, the main heroine of the drama, as a young girl experiences the threat voiced by parents to “naughty” children: she was taken away by “Gypsies”! Although she is unaware of this, as are the non-Roma among whom she moves and for whom she is a “Gypsy” herself (which clearly indicates that there are no physical differences between her and the Roma), her new family constitutes an unambiguous antipode to her true family of Spanish nobility. The band of Gypsies is a kind of inverted court, monastic order, or artisan guild, in which a clear hierarchy exists. In earlier depictions other status symbols of aristocracy are also visible (horse riding, hunting dogs, jewellery and expensive clothing, even ducal or royal titles derived from “(Little) Egypt”) (Bogdal, 2010/2019: 28). Yet its members are portrayed as unruly, greedy, ignorant of Christian morality, prone to theft, deception and lasciviousness. Most strikingly, they are depicted as inclined to incest (as in many jokes still told in the region today). Although Cervantes uses this image of outsiders to criticise his contemporaries – the aristocrats, particularly their vanity (a trait associated with the early stages of the civilizing process and unsuitable for the absolutist court) and their false flattery and insincerity (traits of the “civilised courtier”) – the essence of his work is that Preciosa, although raised among “Gypsies”, retains her aristocratic habitus. She not only remains chaste and uncorrupted, “shy”, but “neither sun nor bad weather succeeded in disfiguring her face or roughening her hands”. As Klaus-Michael Bogdal observes, even nature itself respects her aristocratic refinement. As Bogdal concludes, in a status society, those excluded from honour include not only those engaged in dishonourable occupations – executioners and knacker workers – but also “unfree people and serfs, as well as Jews, Turks, pagans, Gypsies, and Wends (Slavs)”. The stigmatisation of these categories constitutes the reverse side of the grand glorification of the noble, particularly under absolutism (Bogdal, 2010/2019: 50).

Here we arrive at the next major theme: the connection between the figuration of established and outsiders and the civilizing process, and thus the question of where the fantasised content of we-image, we-ideal, and they-image actually originates. Elias and Scotson's study *The Established and the Outsiders* was, after all, an attempt to demonstrate the applicability of this aspect of his magnum opus to contemporary empirical data (Goodwin and Hughes, 2016; Mennell, 1989; Blomert, 2021: 317).

The Civilized Habitus and Its Discontents

The bodily dimension of the fantasised *they-image* of outsiders, and thus of racist discourse, is not accidentally connected to the shame attached to the body and bodily functions in Elias's theory of the civilizing process. Such representations begin with physical differences (most commonly skin colour), but no less emphasis is placed on other bodily traits, as well as corresponding mental and moral characteristics – typically closely associated with a weak control of bodily functions, aggression, and/or sexuality. Although Elias and Scotson only outlined these connections in a preliminary way, it is precisely the possession of allegedly “more civilised” standards that became one of the central elements of the self-understanding of the inhabitants of Winston Parva and the basis on which they distinguished themselves from the “Cockney” newcomers, who in their eyes represented a threat to local traditions and the collective identity of the community (Mennell, 1989: 119).

The scope of this article does not allow for a detailed exposition of Elias's magnum opus, *The Civilizing Process*, and therefore recourse will be made to Stephen Mennell's concise summary. He enumerates the following properties that characterise civilised behaviour: “politeness and good manners, consideration for others; cleanliness and good personal hygiene habits; refinement, gentleness and courtesy; restraint, self-control and composure; and aversion to the use of violence (except in exceptional circumstances). Above all, to be civilised means to live with others in an orderly, well-organised, just, predictable and calculable society” (Mennell, 1998: 29).

A further key characteristic of the civilizing process, which links it to the figuration of established and outsiders, is that the origin of these qualities lies in the increasing complexity of positions within chains of social interdependence. Compliance with these norms of conduct is accompanied by a sense of solidarity¹¹ in a variety of social relations that bind individuals into complex societies in which personal relations play an increasingly minor role. Generalised patterns of behaviour, and especially self-control over (primarily bodily) impulses, are particularly important for inclusion in the prestigious community of the civilised

11 This brings us once again to Max Weber, this time to his understanding of status distinctions: “Every status society lives by conventions which regulate the style of life, and hence creates economically irrational consumption patterns and fetters the free market through monopolistic appropriations and by curbing the individual's earning power” (Weber, 1978: 307).

– the community that adheres to the norms of civilised conduct – and for individuals to experience themselves as part of it (Elijas, 1939/2001: 523–524).

In addition, an important aspect of civilisation also involves “rationality” and presumed work habits (Elijas, 1939/2001: 536–537). The moral hierarchy of national and cultural differences, in which Western Europeans – with the exception of the Irish – occupied the top position as diligent, industrious, and generally skilled workers, while Slavs, Jews, and Southern Europeans were placed lower, are accused of dirtiness, insularity, or laziness (Sennett & Cobb, 1972: 14), illustrates how such perceptions are structured within broader patterns of social valuation. Similarly, other sociologists studying racism have reached comparable conclusions in the case of relations between “blacks” and “whites”: “doing so establish criteria by which they themselves are represented. In the act of defining Africans as ‘black’ and ‘savages’, and thereby excluding them from their world, Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were representing themselves as ‘white’ and ‘civilised’” (Miles and Brown, 2003: 50).

According to Elias, the roots of civilisation are firmly rooted in the soil of shame. Elias defines “shame” as a specific shaping of the instinctual structure, more precisely as a particular excitation, a form of anxiety about social degradation experienced in encounters with other, more powerful individuals (Elijas, 1939/2001: 543–544). As “civilised” people become more self-disciplined and self-aware, their “threshold of repugnance” shifts. They become more disgusted by their bodies; they dress and screen themselves; higher levels of delicacy and restraint are demanded; natural functions become increasingly distasteful; sexuality and aggression are progressively inhibited (Smith, 2001: 149). Shame is produced by any transgression against the rules of the group to which one belongs or with which one identifies. A very high proportion of shame experiences in civilised societies is produced by specific embarrassment about the body. As Johan Goudsblom in his article *Shame as a Social Pain* (Goudsblom, 2016) argues, that shame arises where bonds of solidarity or hierarchy are weakened, which is always experienced as unpleasant and painful. In such situations, when individuals perceive that their behaviour has jeopardized their relations with those more powerful than themselves or with their social equals, and that their social position and the respect accorded to them have thereby been called into question, shame emerges as a particular form of social pain. It signals that the established relations of hierarchy and solidarity have been disturbed, while at the same time expressing the individual’s recognition that they have failed to live up to the standards expected of them within the social group. In this sense, shame is not merely an inner psychological experience, but a socially constituted emotion through which individuals experience the weakening or disruption of the social bonds that sustain their position within a given social figuration.

Analysing narratives about Roma – historical or contemporary, as there is little difference between them – it becomes clear that the civilising process itself, or its presumed negation, constitutes the main mechanism generating the discourse of anti-Gypsyism. In much of the literature on Roma, one finds

representations of their allegedly childlike nature, “spirit of play”, innocence, naivety, and a life filled with joy and adventure. They are portrayed as a “people” who never mature, but remain permanently at the level of childlike mental, moral, and emotional development. Particularly interesting are narratives linking the fact that Roma do not have a state to their presumed characteristics. “Roma have no state” – a claim elaborated by the pioneer of Serbian Romani studies Tihomir Đorđević through a folk tale: “The Gypsy kingdom, as it is said among the people, lasted only three days. On the first day the Gypsy king rode his mother through the town, on the second he hanged his father, and on the third the Gypsies overthrew him. Therefore, for something that lasts a very short time it is said: it lasts like the Gypsy kingdom!” (Đorđević, 1973: 125)¹². Other prominent researchers of the social history of Roma and of representations of their position provide numerous examples that illustrate this point. The Italian encyclopaedist Francesco Predari, in his work *Origine e Vicende dei Zingari* (The Origin and Fate of the Gypsies, 1841), speculated that the Gypsies were in fact descendants of a primitive pre-population of Europe, who – due to a geological and political catastrophe – were forced to live permanently as nomads (Leigeois, 2006: 23). Even more interesting is a text by the Marquis Baroncelli, who invited Buffalo Bill (William Cody) to his estate and, among other things, asked him to express his opinion on the links between Gypsies and American Indians. Cody allegedly confirmed this, stating that they shared “a series of striking similarities.” On this basis, the Marquis concluded that Egyptian peasants (fellahin), Native Americans, Roma, and Basques (!) ultimately shared a common origin (op. cit.: 24–25). The ancestors of Roma were repeatedly identified either with communities from earlier stages of the “evolution” of humankind (primitive peoples, nomads, etc.), or with contemporary “primitive” communities from exotic regions – thus serving as a living illustration that “uncivilised” people do not exist only in the past and/or in distant geographical areas.

The other face of anti-Gypsyism, the one that at first glance appears affirmative, uses representations of Gypsies in order to criticise phenomena perceived as lacking within the “civilised” we-image. As Judith Okely has pointed out (Okely, 1983: 232), “outsiders have projected onto Gypsies their own repressed fantasies and longings for disorder”¹³. Mattijs van de Port, following a similar line of argument, writes on the position of Roma in the 19th century: “The Gypsy camp was Europe’s erogenous zone, the closest wildness, invested with the unfulfilled desires, impossible yearnings and unsatisfied passions of

12 This example from folk literature is particularly relevant in the context of the chapter on the sociogenesis of the state in *The Civilizing Process*. A community that is not capable of organising a political order is also not civilised; in the imaginative logic of the folk storyteller, however, causality is reversed – “uncivilised” peoples are not even capable of founding a state (let alone an empire).

13 In support of this claim, there exists a vast body of Romantic literature across various genres in which the fantasised image of Roma life is contrasted with the proclaimed values of the Enlightenment: sensuality and passion versus reason; spontaneity and freedom versus order; intimacy versus distance; sincerity versus artificial conventions of behaviour. Yet, regardless of whether the image of “Gypsies” is positive or negative, the opposition between this image and the values of “civilised” society remains a constant.

bourgeois civilisation” (van de Port, 1998: 7). Jean-Pierre Liégeois also captures this insight aphoristically: “Ants have always despised grasshoppers, but they have also envied them” (Liégeois, 2006: 139).

Civilisation as an ethical concept in Norbert Elias’s theory provides insight into the sociogenesis of anti-Gypsyism and its interrelations with other social processes. At the same time, “civilisation” as a common-sense, emic category has considerable explanatory power for understanding the content of prejudices against Roma and their ancestors, particularly their uniformity across time and space, which brings us back to the narrative of child abduction from the beginning of the text.

Conclusion

It is precisely fears of the loss of distinguishing hereditary prestige . . . that have to this day a decisive part in shaping the prevailing rule of conduct. Precisely those fears . . . are particularly predisposed to internalization; they, far more than the fear of poverty, hunger or direct physical danger, become rooted in the individual member of such classes, through his upbringing, as inner anxieties which bind him to a learned code almost automatically, under the pressure of a strong super-ego, even independently of any control by others. The continuous concern of parents whether their child will attain the standard of conduct of their own or even a higher class, whether it will maintain or increase the prestige of the family . . . fears of this kind surround the child from its earliest years . . . They continuously add fuel to the fiery circle of inner anxieties, which hold the behaviour and feelings of the growing child permanently within definite limits, binding him to a certain standard of shame and embarrassment, to a specific accent, to particular manners, whether he wishes or not. (Elias, 1939/1994b: 521-522)

The lengthy passage cited above from Elias’s *The Civilizing Process* clearly explains what lies at the root of the threat directed at children that “the Gypsies will take them away.” The centuries-long process of civilization continues to be reproduced, even today, within every family aspiring to the status of “decent people” (van de Port, 1998: 40–42). The very construction of “the Gypsy” within this “grand narrative” represented, from the outset, the darker side of the formation of the European cultural subject who conceived himself as the bearer of world civilization and progress (Bogdal, 2010/2019: 12). Distance from the Gypsy became a measure of one’s own degree of civilization (Bogdal, 2010/2019: 140).

In the theoretical introduction to *The Established and the Outsiders*, Elias likewise emphasizes the capacity of communities to impose cohesion upon their members precisely through the tabooing of contacts with stigmatized groups. More than that, images of outsiders play a crucial role in the internal conflicts of the established themselves. Condemnation for failing to comply with proclaimed standards is accompanied by an automatic association with the

stigmatized outsiders and by the loss of prestige and power within the privileged group (Elias, 1994a: XL), whether through “the Law of Similarity” or “the Law of Contact or Contagion.” This threat constantly hovers over adult members of the established group, but especially over the heads of children who have yet to become established within it.

What, however, constitutes the actual content of collective fantasies about outsiders remains an open question in Elias’s work. For him, such discourses represent social facts *sui generis* – neither rational nor irrational. They are “protean historical phantoms”: images that appear entirely arbitrary, although they are not. Here, as in *The Civilizing Process*, Elias stresses that the contents of these fantasy-images acquired during childhood exert a powerful influence upon patterns of affect and conduct later in life (Elias, 1994a: XXXVI). The fear instilled in children from an early age that they might be “taken away by Gypsies” is, in fact, the shadow cast by the fears of older generations that their descendants may fail to acquire the standards of civilized conduct, lose the prestige and power associated with them, and ultimately become “like Gypsies.”

This mechanism establishes a clear distinction between those who are shamed in order to be corrected – that is, members of one’s own community – and those who are humiliated in order to be excluded because they are perceived as incapable of being “corrected” (“Gypsies”). As Smith observes: “Unlike shaming, humiliation does not pull its victims back into their proper place. Instead, it pushes them out of their old place; it displaces them. Instead of trying to reform the victim, humiliation deliberately weakens and damages her. The humiliated victim is not reintegrated into the group but cut off from it” (Smith, 2001: 155).

Gossip is of central importance in figurations in which the established and the outsiders are not physically distinguishable and live within communities characterized by face-to-face interaction, as was the case in Winston Parva. In such situations, group membership is known to community members themselves but not necessarily to outside observers. By contrast, a developed and recognizable racist discourse assumes the role of local gossip and rumour once the figuration of established and outsiders becomes a long-term historical process.

Unlike gossip, however, racist discourse does not require the objective existence of local cohesion and intensive communication among the established. Indeed, in the case of Roma populations and immigrants from the Middle East in Western European countries, the opposite often holds true: it is they who display stronger internal cohesion than the dispersed established populations (Hogenstijn, van Middelkoop & Terlouw, 2008: 147), a fact that is today frequently interpreted as yet another indicator of their alleged “uncivilized” character.

Racist narratives enable communities of the established to sustain a common *we-image* across vast territories and in the absence of direct interpersonal contact. In this way, fantasies of their own group charisma and of the group disgrace attributed to outsiders, together with fantasy-images of the latter’s supposedly “uncivilized” habitus, are transmitted across generations. They survive in diverse discursive genres – from everyday speech to literature – and can always be reactivated as ready-made frameworks of perception and understanding.

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ELIAS AND THE BOMB: EARTHING FIGURATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

Elijas i bomba: uzemljenje figuracione sociologije

ABSTRACT: *This article asks what becomes of Norbert Elias's figurational sociology when its developmental grammar of control – particularly over extra-human entities – is read from the standpoint of the nuclear Anthropocene. Elias treated the bomb largely as a Cold War symptom of human groups unable to master the dangers they create for one another. The article starts from a different premise: the bomb is more than a technological instrument or a fetish of interstate fear. As a technoscientific chimera, it becomes the critical figure for earthing figurational sociology: a threat that enters Earth materials and temporalities, returning through radioactive matter as a durable condition of future interdependencies. The article first revisits Elias's theory of levels and the triad of controls, showing how biological and extra-human processes are integrated yet subordinated within a developmental hierarchy of security and danger. It then treats the bomb as a limit-case of figuration: an artefact produced within human interdependencies that, as an extra-human agent, can nevertheless reorganize valences, balances of power and the architecture of constraint. Finally, it follows the bomb through deep Earth temporalities, where the problem of control reappears as geological residue, planetary exposure and apocalyptic species imagination.*

KEYWORDS: *figurational sociology, theory of levels, earthing, nuclear Anthropocene, control*

APSTRAKT: *Rad postavlja pitanje šta se događa sa figuracionom sociologijom Norberta Elijasa kada se njena razvojna gramatika kontrole – posebno nad izvan-ljudskim entitetima – sagleda iz perspektive nuklearnog antropocena. Elias je bombu uglavnom razumeo kao hladnoratovski simptom ljudskih grupa koje nisu u stanju da ovladaju opasnostima koje proizvode jedne za druge. Rad polazi od drugačije pretpostavke: bomba je više od tehnološkog instrumenta ili fetiša*

međudržavnog straha. Kao tehnonaučna himera, ona postaje ključna figura za „uzemljenje” figuracione sociologije: pretnja koja ulazi u zemaljske materijale i temporalnosti, vraćajući se kroz radioaktivnu materiju kao trajan uslov budućih međuzavisnosti. Članak najpre razmatra Elijasovu teoriju ravni i trijadu kontrola, pokazujući kako se biološki i izvan-ljudski procesi integrišu, ali i podređuju unutar razvojne hijerarhije sigurnosti i opasnosti. Zatim se bomba razmatra kao granični slučaj figuracije: artefakt proizveden unutar ljudskih međuzavisnosti koji, kao izvan-ljudski agens, ipak može da preuredi valence, ravnoteže moći i arhitekturu prinude. Konačno, rad prati bombu kroz duboke temporalnosti Zemlje, gde se problem kontrole iznova pojavljuje kao geološki ostatak, planetarna izloženost i apokaliptički imaginarijum vrste.

KLJUČNE REČI: *figuraciona sociologija, teorija ravni, uzemljenje, nuklearni antropocen, kontrola*

Introduction

Why are human societies more resistant than non-human nature to a successful exploration by human beings, and thus to a more adequate handling of their self-made dangers and possible catastrophes? (...) Why do most people appear to consider it both impossible and undesirable that human beings might learn to rid themselves of the dangers they constitute for each other and for themselves, in the same way they learned to get rid of, or at least to contain, many of the dangers with which non-human nature threatened humans in former days? (...) Is it not true that the threat of a new epidemic caused largely by non-human agents is today immediately countered by the mobilization of scientists in many parts of the world? (...) In the case of wars or revolutions, however, which are in no way smaller and often even greater human disasters than great floods or epidemics, few people would look to social scientists for help and advice; and if they did these scientists might come up with advice which few were ready to accept or even listen to. (Elias, 1983/1987: 1)

The questions that open Elias's epistemological study *Involvement and Detachment* now acquire a different historical resonance. Within the Cold War horizon of his writing, the problem could still be posed as an imbalance between two kinds of control: modern societies had developed an exceptional capacity to explain, technically mediate and partly contain extra-human processes, yet remained unable to curb dangers arising from their own relations – war, violence and the possibility of nuclear destruction. Read against Elias's broader account of the monopolization of violence and pacification, this comparatively neglected study already sensed a discrepancy that exceeded the deficient self-control of social figurations. What it registered only fleetingly were the consequences of the scientific and technological capacities through which “nature” was supposedly brought under control. Yet the altered climate and disturbed Earth-system

processes that the strained concept of the Anthropocene seeks to encompass bring precisely this blind spot into view: the material effects of technoscientific processes persist beyond the figurations that produced them. In this respect, the Anthropocene overturns Elias's continuum of security gained through rising knowledge of "external" risks, showing that "social" dangers do not remain inside society, just as "natural" dangers no longer arrive from an external nature. Rather, the same figurations that expanded zones of security, prediction and control now arrive as sedimented in atmospheric, biological and geological processes. The question, then, is whether Elias's legacy can be pushed a step further, towards figurations whose effects begin to operate as conditions and constraints of future interdependencies.

A modest but significant body of literature has recently placed Elias's sociology directly within ecology and Anthropocene debates, especially extending his attempt to connect social development with biology. These interests first appeared in Johan Goudsblom's (1987, 2002) analyses of fire, from agrarian to industrial regimes. Following Elias, Goudsblom shows that civilizing processes were never merely intra-social processes of conduct- and institution-formation, but also long processes of reshaping what he calls the anthroposphere-biosphere relation, especially through fossil-fuel use. This distinctively ecological reading of Elias has ultimately pushed processual sociology towards long socio-ecological transformations that can no longer be thought apart from trophic expansion, that is, from the constant enlargement of the share of biospheric productivity redirected towards maintaining the anthroposphere. Psychogenesis and sociogenesis are not thereby abolished, but placed within a wider processual web in which phylogenesis, biogenesis and ecogenesis intertwine, each with distinct temporal rhythms and levels of integration (Quilley, 2010, 2011). At the same time, processual sociology is renewed as an apparatus for grasping modernity's paradoxes, since the Anthropocene does not abolish the command-and-control model but demands its reshaping through the "controlled de-controlling" of ecological controls (Keulartz, 2010). Hence Elias's place in debates on degrowth and post-growth, the limits of low-energy cosmopolitanism, the political economy of livelihood, and the question of whether modern, liberal and scientific society can survive without high material and energy throughput (Quilley, 2013, 2020; Quilley and Zywert, 2019). Yet these debates do not necessarily imply decivilizing regression, but rather possible reconfigurations of the triad of controls around collective self-limitation, localized interdependencies and convivial autonomy (Schmelzer, 2025). The conceptual pair involvement/detachment is therefore cast in a new light, since the Anthropocene requires less detached knowledge of ecological processes and demands new forms of involvement, ecological conscience, ritualized restraint and identification with the biosphere (Quilley, 2009, 2020).

In tracing long-term anthroposphere-biosphere processes, these approaches leave Elias's civilizational model of evolutionary (dis)continuity, embedded in his level theory, largely unexamined. While this theory offers a rare attempt in sociology to think sociogenesis in close conjunction with biological dispositions, it also presupposes a "civilizational" discontinuity which, through the well-known "triad of

controls”, concerns the bodily self-regulation of inherited human plasticity and, even more explicitly, the control of natural events. Some authors are right to argue that neither the origins of ecological crisis nor possible responses to it can be understood without this triad of controls (Saramago, 2023; Wouters, 2014). Elias can indeed be aligned with contemporary authors who treat the modern civilizational recasting of “nature” as one source of current climate destruction (Charbonnier, 2020; Haraway, 2016; Savransky, 2021; Viveiros de Castro, 2019). Yet the civilizing process cannot be reduced to a general increase in the distance and (self-)control that “humanity” gains over the biosphere, even when this appears through catastrophic side effects. Such a generalization blurs the specificity of Western modernity, colonial and extractive regimes, fossil capitalism and unequal historical responsibilities, as well as the variety of non-Western ontological arrangements in which boundaries between the human and the non-human are drawn differently (Barry and Maslin, 2016; Descola, 2013; Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2018). More importantly, it remains within “[t]he story of Species Man as the agent of the Anthropocene”, as Haraway (2016: 47–48) puts it ironically. This is “an almost laughable rerun of the great phallic humanizing and modernizing Adventure, where man, made in the image of a vanished god, takes on superpowers in his secular-sacred ascent, only to end in tragic detumescence, once again. Autopoietic, self-making man came down once again, this time in tragic system failure, turning biodiverse ecosystems into flipped-out deserts of slimy and stinging jellyfish”. Hence, the belated awareness of a drastic rupture, in which modern societies have destabilized the material conditions of their own reproduction, is only one part of the tangled Anthropocene mosaic. The need for what we call *earthing* is driven especially by the recent planetary turn and its attention to the long histories through which collectives become bound to planetary materialities: Earth’s geo-biological temporalities and the movement of matter, energy and life across terrestrial spheres (Chakrabarty, 2021; Clark and Szerszynski, 2021; Szerszynski, 2016, 2018, 2019). *Earthing*, in this sense, names the theoretical operation of thinking material convergences with Earth: how collective histories enter its movements and return as planetary conditions.

The proposed earthing of Elias’s sociology rests both on critical examination of level theory and rethinking of the processual and relational ontology built into the recognizable, yet delicate, concept of figuration, so that extra-human agents may also become nodes of interdependence. Figurations are usually read as Elias’s answer to the exhausted dichotomies of individual and society or action and structure, and defined as emergent relations of interdependence (Featherstone, 1987; Dolan, 2014; Landini, 2013; Landini and Dépelteau, 2013; Loyal and Quilley, 2004; van Krieken, 2017). In this sense, figuration has rightly been recognized as one of relational sociology’s key concepts, since it derives the social world neither from individual actors nor from supra-individual wholes, but from shifting networks of mutual dependence (Emirbayer, 1997; Tsekeris, 2013; Donati, 2018). Yet this stabilization of the concept, especially after the posthumous canonization of Elias’s work (van Krieken, 1998; Smith, 2001; Kilminster, 2007), has often sidelined the ambiguities of his wider ontological and epistemological apparatus. In general, “one would search in

vain to find Elias's definitive statement of his 'methodological', 'ontological' or 'epistemological' position" (Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 99). Heinich (2013) therefore rightly notes that many misunderstandings in Elias's reception stem from under-explication, which repeatedly pulls his work back into registers from which it sought to distance itself: normativism, evolutionism, universalism, and above all substantialism and logicism. Elias is thus credited with a teleological philosophy of history, while the relational language deeply built into figuration is repeatedly translated back into the language of separate entities: the "individual", "society", "mental structures" and "social structures" (cf. Hughes et al., 2022). Critics have rightly warned that the concept sometimes remains descriptive, theoretically overstretched or insufficiently precise in coordinating different levels of analysis (Layder, 1986; Mouzelis, 1993; Déchaux, 2013). Figurations are therefore both productive and methodologically elastic: they may refer to interactional arrangements, groups, institutions, classes, states, international relations, even long civilizing processes. Yet this indeterminacy is not necessarily a weakness. It allows figurations to be thought as open processual arrangements – less horizontally, as chains of interdependence among people, groups and states, and more vertically, through the Earth and non-human agencies in general.

Through the concept of *earthing*, the article contributes both to Elias's scholarship more broadly and to its recent socio-ecological turn by treating the nuclear bomb as an uncanny technoscientific chimera and a speculative figure through which the concept of figuration can be extended beyond its humanist premises. Although it remains a passing example of Cold War animosities, in Elias the bomb is nevertheless a strange technical artefact of coercion that recasts security-danger opposition underpinning Elias's account of social development as expanding control over extra-human processes. Read through *earthing*, the bomb opens a different problem, since the dangers of the nuclear Anthropocene do not remain within chains of human interdependence, thus providing a basis for thinking figurations through the agency of non-human entities. As a limit case of figurational thinking, the nuclear bomb shows how socially produced danger attaches to ore bodies, reactors and sediments, and then returns as a long-lasting constraint and as the apocalyptic imaginary of a species facing the possibility of its own end. In short, it is a product of prior interdependencies which, despite its minuscule scale, inserts itself as a planetary agent and begins to organize new scales of temporality and interdependence. The article therefore starts from the internal tension of Elias's level theory: society belongs to the evolutionary continuum as a "level of nature", yet also separates out as the level on which biological dispositions and non-human processes are contained through the "triad of controls". The second section examines figuration more directly and introduces the nuclear bomb as an enigmatic figure whose efficacy suggests that the architecture of interdependence, presupposed by the concept's relational and processual ontology, must be thought beyond pre-given human nodes. The final section examines the genealogy of the nuclear bomb as an intersection of Cold War figurations and Earth's deep temporalities, where historical and planetary time are refracted through plutonium, fallout and sedimentary trace, and where

the question of control returns through materials that become conditions of future interdependencies.

The Trouble With Levels: Elias, Control and the Subordination of Nature

Elias's highly idiosyncratic attempt to illuminate how biological dispositions are socially activated, channeled and historically recast through level theory, has received only passing attention. Quilley (2010) usefully notes that this theory took shape in a specific intellectual milieu. Drawing on British organicist biology and evolutionary humanism, it presents a "modern synthesis" against mechanistic reductionism and vitalist metaphysics in which the phylogenesis of the human species is inserted into a developmental and emergent continuum where physical, biological and social levels remain connected, yet relatively autonomous within "great evolution" (Quilley, 2004; Saramago, 2023). Newton (2007) is therefore right to read Elias as a rare sociologist who brings nature, corporeality and biology into sociological theory without returning to biologism. The theory's potential is thus chiefly epistemological, since it largely anticipates realist critiques of vulgar constructivism (Newton, 2007). Still, drastic ontological differences remain between physical, biological and social levels, as these levels are hierarchically temporalized: the physical and the biological remain slower, deeper and conditioning levels, while the social level appears as a space of acceleration, learning, orientation and control. Conceptually, the triad of controls further cements this hierarchical developmental imaginary and ultimately produces a specific asymmetry. Posed as a criterion of social development, the growth of control capacities implied by level theory renders this integration incomplete: biological agents and, more broadly, the non-human world are included primarily through the antinomy of danger and security, and thus remain primarily shaped through human capacities of control.

Although it runs through a number of Elias's publications, the basic assumptions of level theory are perhaps most clearly stated in *Involvement and Detachment* (1987), and above all in *What Is Sociology?* (Elias, 1978). This attempt to define more precisely the place of physical, biological and non-human processes in social development in an anti-reductionist key reflects Elias's intention to confront one of the discipline's constitutive dilemmas. It is striking that Elias's main interlocutor, and even the source of inspiration from which he takes the idea of levels and ontological hierarchy, is none other than Auguste Comte. After all, Comte tried to solve the major intellectual puzzle of the emerging discipline: how to study human societies as a distinct level of reality without separating them from human biological characteristics. Elias writes that Comte understood sociology's object as having a *sui generis* character that cannot be reduced to human biological or physiological properties. Yet Elias notes that Comte does not reject the interweaving of physiology and sociology. Social phenomena are necessarily anchored in the human organism, although they cannot be reduced to the effects of physiological laws. The point is that

social conditions modify these physiological premises, so instead of linking them too readily, one must rather think in terms of “more comprehensive levels of integration” which are “[...] no more than a combination of figurations of the less comprehensive levels” (Elias, 1978: 45). Level theory therefore speaks of differentiated planes that are autonomous and ontologically specific, with their own structures, functions and forms of regularity. At the same time, they are historically and functionally connected in shifting figurations, and their interconnection forms a distinctive ontogenetic and developmental continuum in which “human society is a level of nature” (Elias, 1991: 85).

The key question is how certain features of human biological constitution are socio-historically shaped, as Elias’s writings on language and death show. In *The Symbol Theory* (1991), the analysis of speech serves precisely to attack “metaphysical humanism”, that is, the assumption that symbolic capacities introduce a radical break between humans and animals through spirit, mind or soul. Speech depends on the body’s biological organization – the larynx, oral cavity, tongue, neuromuscular apparatus and cerebral capacities – but human languages do not function as innate signal systems. They are learned, group-specific and historically mutable arrangements of symbolic transmission. Hence human “technolinguistic plasticity” (Newton, 2007) develops through language learning, representation, intergenerational knowledge transfer and bodily techniques, but without leaving the biological conditions that make it possible. Similarly, in *The Loneliness of the Dying*, death appears as “(...) a problem of the living” (Elias, 1985/2001a: 3), that is, an undeniable biological fact that becomes a problem for humans only through symbolic anticipation. The living have a problem with death because they know they will die, because they fear losing others, and because they understand their own finitude through networks of dependence, memory and expectation. This is why death is a “bio-social danger” (Elias, 1985/2001a: 12): the body ages, decays and ceases to function, but the ways this process is seen, repressed, ritualized, medically organized or affectively endured depend on historical figurations. Images of death are “stage-specific” and “group-specific” social treatments of biological finitude, such as religious fantasies, thresholds of shame before the corpse, hospital routines, care homes and secular unease before farewell. In both cases, the biological and the social remain inseparable, but they do not do the same analytical work: biology sets a disposition or limit, while social figurations activate and recast it.

Language and death therefore show that, for Elias, the biological and the social are differentiated processes intertwined in concrete forms of human life. Yet, despite the assumption that “nature and society or, if one prefers, nature and culture, [...] firmly locked into each other” (Elias, 1991: 52), hierarchically ordered levels of complexity and divergent temporalities essentially retain an ontological separation. Elias proposes reserving the term evolution for processes dependent on genetic transmission, while development designates processes dependent on intergenerational symbolic transmission. In the first case, characteristic of animal societies, organic arrangements are transmitted, which means that such societies change significantly mainly through biological species change. In the second case, specific to human societies, what is transmitted are

languages, standards of conduct, affects, orientations and socially accumulated experience. Transitions from tribal to state, feudal, capitalist or industrial forms of organization occur without major genetic changes in the species. The evolution/development distinction is not merely a terminological division. As de Carvalho (2018) suggests, it is part of Elias's wider attempt to move beyond the old philosophical antinomy of physical and social time, or natural process and human time-experience. This certainly softens the crude nature/society dualism, but opens another problem: the integration of levels is not a synchronous connection, but an ordering across presumed, successive, even teleologically arranged degrees of complexity. By securing the dispositions, limits and material conditions of human "plasticity", the biological level remains constitutive, but is obscured before the social level, which assumes the role of acceleration, learning and cumulative change. Elias's first level is therefore at once necessary and largely prefigurational. Once woven into figurations, this level loses ontological potency and dynamic force. Hence the differentiation of social temporality as far more complex bears the mark of implicit speciesism, since human development ultimately "represents a post-animalic stage of evolution" (Elias, 1991: 42).

Hierarchical temporalization thus appears somewhat teleological, as phylogenesis – and, more precisely, the level of social organization – assume primacy in recasting both biological constituents and "external" nature, while also subordinating extra-human agents. This is especially visible in the binary opposition security/danger, according to which "primitive" societies lag within the hierarchy. A footnote from *Established and Outsiders* (Elias and Scotson, 1965/1994: 95, fn.1) makes this clear: "Simpler societies are also far more threatened and insecure because, partly as the result of such incongruities, they have less control over 'nature', over themselves and each other. And because they have less control, again, they are generally more insecure. In fact, this is one of the most fundamental of the human traps". Elsewhere, Elias justifies this through an epistemological articulation in which the natural sciences receive the ultimate task of pacifying the "external" world. Interestingly, Elias by no means treats the natural sciences as the ultimate model of knowledge. This is visible in his insistence that sociology must free itself from two inadequate models (Elias, 1978: 17–22). The first is magical-mythological or naively egocentric: social processes are explained through the character, intentions or ill will of individuals and groups, while oneself or one's own group is exempted from the figuration. The second is natural-scientific: social constraints are imagined as physical forces acting externally on objects. Both errors block the development of autonomous sociological concepts, becoming either the "Scylla of physics" or the "Charybdis of metaphysics". Yet the achievements of the natural sciences are imposing for Elias (Elias, 1978: 22–24; see also: Elias, 1987), and not only as a relatively effective shift towards detached knowledge. In the domain of natural phenomena, knowledge accumulates, the standard of researchers' self-discipline is high, fantasy-laden and egocentric elements are more easily controlled, and orientation towards the object of inquiry is more stable than in social life, where collective fantasies, ethnocentrism and affective involvement remain far stronger. Hence the natural sciences, in a curious way, represent the highest sophistication of social development. They provide the technological apparatus and thus the

enormous capacity of modern societies to increase control over problems caused by “extra-human natural events”.

Treating “external”, and even internal, nature as danger, risk or a source of atrocities leaves level theory ontologically trapped in the very dualism it seeks to avoid. Quite simply, the human relation to these agents, however mutable, is implicitly tied to the long development of knowledge and self-discipline that provide tools of collective control, characteristic of European state formation. This Eurocentric and technocratic view is especially pronounced in the formulation of the “universal features of society”, that is, the outline of the “triad of basic controls” in *What Is Sociology?* (Elias, 1978: 156). At the very end of this study, Elias offers a hierarchy which, resonating with deeply universalist-evolutionist premises, presupposes a way of measuring society’s developmental temporality. The first form of control is the articulation of “external” nature, embodied “by the extent of its control-chances over non-human complexes of events – that is, control over what are normally called ‘natural events’”. The second presupposes the “extent of its control-chances over interpersonal relationships – that is, over what are usually called ‘social relationships’”. Finally, the last degree of control also concerns bodily self-discipline – a theme that inevitably permeated Elias’s understanding of habitus transformation. Thus the final component of the triad of basic controls refers to control over “himself as an individual – for, however dependent he may always be on others, he has learned from infancy to control himself to a greater or lesser degree.”

The idea of temporal progression that emerges within level theory and crystallizes as hierarchical mastery over these agents through the triad of controls contains, however, a far more delicate paradox than the one historically reversed into the destructive recasting of the biosphere. Malešević and Ryan (2012) rightly note that Elias’s ontology rests on a “temporal arc”. Although writing on violence, they stress that deviations from the civilizing process are too readily returned to the black box of regression, backwardness or barbarism, as civilization’s Other. Within this ontology, civilization’s Other also seems to include, to a large extent, the “emancipation” of non-human agents, concealed by the idea of integration. Whether narrowly bodily or extra-human, temporality guarantees hierarchical supremacy: far more mobile and historically adept forms of social control can pacify passive entities caught in cyclical and recursive patterns. Yet what if Earth’s temporalities are civilization’s “First” – and far more tangled than the descriptive, even normative, assumptions that burden level theory and its anthropocentric verticals? It is not only that, as Chakrabarty (2021) repeatedly insists, social history can no longer be thought in diachrony with “natural” history. In fact, the “slowness” of the planet’s deep history means neither lesser complexity nor any suppression of the complex material, metabolic and energetic exchanges with sediments, climatic rhythms and Earth movements. The architecture of integration was hardly ever fully detached from dynamic and often violent processual arrangements that precede humans, escape them and periodically throw them off their historical trajectories (Clark, 2011). Even when one has in mind the highest sophistication of control, embodied in technical systems produced by human knowledge, these systems are not only woven from

planetary materials; they can also grow into a relatively autonomous Earthly sphere, with its own metabolic demands and constraints for the humans acting within it (Haff, 2014). Although control undoubtedly changes the architecture of integration, especially in our energy-hungry societies, by moving matter, organisms and technical arrangements, accelerated social time also dwells in the deep time of Earth's different spheres. It is precisely this crossing with Earth's multiple temporalities that creates hybrid nodes which turn level theory's presumed hierarchy upside down, suspending the ontological dictate of human control. The nuclear bomb's *language of death* does precisely this.

Re-thinking Figurations Through... Bombs!

The nuclear bomb seems indeed to be a "foreign body" within figurations, but also a paradoxical figure capable of drastically rearranging them. The self-evidence surrounding the reception of figuration apparently makes it difficult to move the concept towards more-than-human formations. The truism that figurations provide a distinctive relational vocabulary which dissolves the individual/society dualism in favour of processual relational outcomes certainly holds (Dolan, 2014; Loyal and Quilley, 2004; van Krieken, 1998). Elias (1991/2001b: 55-60) was also a stubborn opponent of both the idea that "society" is an external shell around the individual and the idea that the individual is society's pre-social basis, which makes him a significant precursor to later attempts to bridge methodological nominalism and methodological holism. While Elias (1978) himself complained about the weak capacity of European languages, burdened by static terminology, to describe dynamic processes of binding, coordination and dependence, figurations remained largely idiosyncratic and obscured by a handful of provisional definitions pointing to expansive "networks of interdependence". At its core, this idea implicitly remained tied to the recasting of bodies and habitus as the result of more complex, wider and more encompassing relations. By desubstantializing actors, viewing them through valencies, dependencies and shifting power balances, Elias at the same time keeps them within a strictly humanist frame. The most stable unit of figuration remains the interhuman constellation, while valencies are primarily the ways people bind themselves to one another within shifting power constellations – power being an attribute of relations between two or more people, but also between people and "natural objects" (Elias, 1978: 116). Epistemologically open to varieties of interhuman relations, the concept of figuration is nevertheless grounded in a humanist perspective that progressively detaches social processes from non-human entities.

Even though figuration would become the recognizable marker of his sociology, Elias treated this concept rather unevenly, mostly through passing corrections of possible misreadings. Chronologically, *The Established and the Outsiders* is the first major site where figuration gains a more explicit analytical function, though still without systematic theorization. Here figuration denotes the relation between two groups shaped through a durable regime of mutual observation, moral ranking,

stigmatization and membership control (Elias and Scotson, 1994). A similar logic appears in the expanded edition of *The Civilizing Process*, where Elias introduces the dance analogy. Figuration is neither a structure above the dancers nor the sum of their individual movements, but a moving pattern of mutual coordination that exists only while it is performed, even though it cannot be attributed to the will of any participant (Elias, 1939/2000: 482). In *What Is Sociology?*, the same intuition takes a cleaner form through game models. Elias first confronts the language that treats family, school, state or society as things, and then shows them to be relatively stabilized cross-sections of interdependence chains and shifting power balances (Elias, 1978: 14–15). This gives the card-game example a special status: it is a “changing pattern created by the players as a whole”, “as concrete as the players themselves”, but has no separate being outside the players, existing instead as a “flexible lattice-work of tensions” produced by their mutually conditioned moves (Elias, 1978: 128–131).

This is where the question arises of what a shifting pattern means and what the participating units are made of. If figuration is neither a structure above people nor the sum of their individual actions, then the “players” cannot be imagined as ready-made, closed subjects who only subsequently enter relations. Elias comes closest to a provisional ontological specification in *What Is Sociology?*, by linking valencies, dependence and power. The figuration diagram at the beginning of the book therefore carries more weight than is usually noticed: humans are shown as units with open and attached valencies, that is, as beings formed through the possibility of binding, not as self-sufficient points connected externally by a network (Elias, 1978: 14–15, 175). Valencies should not be read as mere psychological dispositions, although they are deeply woven into habitus. They designate capacities for attachment through which people become operative for others at all: through love, fear, the need for recognition, dependence, hostility, loyalty, identification, but also through attachments to family, profession, state, nation or other symbolically condensed units (Elias, 1978: 134–138). Power therefore does not come from outside, as an addition to an already established relation. It is the inequality of binding itself: the difference in who can hold, direct, replace, oblige or discard whom. Elias’s rejection of power as a thing someone possesses is crucial for understanding his relational ontology. Power is always relational, at least bipolar, more often multipolar, and exists only through shifting balances of dependence (Elias, 1978: 73–75). Figuration thus appears as a tense order in which actors are shaped only post facto as differently attached, differently replaceable and differently able to influence the course of relations.

Can the bomb, then, recast the course of interdependencies? The broader paradox of figuration’s conceptual purification comes to light in the few moments when Elias, besides nuclear bombs, discusses machines and technology. On the one hand, he treats with some irony the disgust many express at the “horrors of scientific wars” which, alongside astonishing innovations, have produced such instruments of destruction (Elias, 1978: 24–25). At the same time, he firmly rejects accusations too readily directed at scientists, since what is at stake is a “pretext for concealing from ourselves our complicity in the reciprocal hostility, or at least our individual

helplessness in the face of the apparent inevitability of threat and counter-threat". In general, the technical thing "in itself" cannot be the source of danger; the source lies in interdependent human groups that threaten, discipline and coercively orient one another through technical means. "The hydrogen bomb was after all developed at the instigation of statesmen, who would be the ones to order its use if they thought it necessary. Yet to us the nuclear bomb serves as a kind of fetish, an object onto which we project our fears, while the real danger lies in the reciprocal hostility displayed by groups of people in their relations with each other". The bomb is recognized as a material node of the nuclear age in which Elias writes, but the explanation must return to people, states, hostilities, fears and power balances. In itself, the bomb is not a source of constraint: it has no will of its own, does not invent or produce itself, even if we fetishize it. Technology may change the conditions of the game, extend power's reach, accelerate threat, stabilize coercive relations and make them more destructive, but it rarely becomes a full figure of action.

Yet the way bombs and machines, bodies and biological processes are placed in a strange ontological positionality, seemingly lateral and disconnected from figuration, makes them begin to function as points of attachment, constraint and action-redirection. In this reading, the bomb is an emanation of control capacities and technological development, but it appears as far more than a means: in a certain sense, it is a medium of human coordination that begins to dictate the figurations. Perhaps the best illustration is a brief reflection on this unsettling technoscientific chimera in *Involvement and Detachment* (Elias, 1987: 99). Its paradoxical status lies in being, at once, the product of civilizationally developed technoscientific control, a source of danger and a possible condition of pacification. As Elias notes, "ideological weapons, and more generally the emotional fantasies and beliefs of the antagonists in relation to each other, play as significant a part in keeping this process going as the circularity in the development of material weapons. Relaxation of the double-bind process (...) may just be possible because fear of the bomb may outweigh the fear and hatred of the enemy". Although this latter process is slow, requiring "a higher level of detachment and self-control in their dealings with each other", the bomb itself becomes another Other of civilization, an uncanny figure that rearranges the security/danger binary and changes the contours of interdependence in such figurations.

In a strange way, the bomb begins to recast the very frames of figuration and to stabilize valencies not through affective or other attachments, but precisely by emerging as an emanation of power inequality. Such efficacy may seem enigmatic. Yet precisely because figuration acquires an entirely new architecture with the bomb at its center, the very idea of figurations as a "flexible lattice-work of tensions" must be reconsidered more thoroughly. The concept that Elias used to dismantle the myth of the closed individual and substantial society must now be turned against its own residue: against the assumption that interdependence can be thought through bodies, affective attachments and power only when its nodes are human in advance. This recasting requires thinking how agents are given form within a web of relations, for which Latour's (2005) brief reflection on figuration in his programmatic *Reassembling the Social* is especially instructive. An agent

always appears through some figure – a person, institution, technical object, formula, document, virus, machine or statistical aggregate. What matters less is whether an actor possesses intention, consciousness or inner will than whether its presence changes the course of action: whether it enables, blocks, accelerates, delays, translates, stabilizes or makes something obligatory. Agency is therefore traced through its effect in a chain of mediation, that is, through the difference a given node makes in the distribution of dependencies and the possibilities of further action. In a certain sense, Latour implies a language of interdependence – of long, often ungraspable formations of entities which, much like Elias's formula, presuppose a processual and relational ontology. In this way, it becomes possible to retain the epistemological openness contained in figurations while moving them out of an excessive neo-Kantian intersubjective culturalism, towards hybrid nodes that not only change the courses of human figurations but also complicate the anthroposphere-biosphere nexus. The bomb is a limit figure here precisely because it forces figurations to be thought no longer only horizontally, through external constraint, but vertically, through the Earth.

Earthing Figurational Sociology

Thinking the nuclear bomb in Earthly terms first requires theoretical refinement, in a direction that, following Donna Haraway's (1997: 11) proposal, takes figurations as a kind of topological device, "condensed maps of contestable worlds". The analytical formula of figurations as "performative images that can be inhabited" comes into particular relief in the vividly titled *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™*, where, among other things, Haraway treats the nuclear bomb as a specific product of the implosion of the natural and the artificial which, as we will shortly discuss, occupies a particularly prominent place in the geochronology of the Anthropocene. Far beyond the status of an isolated Cold War artefact, the bomb belongs to the same sequence of technoscientific production of new kinds of entities: the chip, gene, seed, fetus, database, race, brain and ecosystem. As a cyborg life form, it condenses technobiopower through the convergence of the technical, political, organic, economic, textual and imaginary. In short, it is a node linking the Cold War, nuclear culture, biotechnology, capital, classification, kinship, apocalypse and the material-semiotic production of the Earth. The figure of the nuclear bomb also reflects with particular force what Haraway (1997: 41–44) understands as an apparently oxymoronic "Christian-secular millenarian regime". Technoscience is never fully freed from theological residues: it produces apocalyptic threats and radiant promises through the imaginary of salvation, from the "peaceful atom" and the protective shield against the enemy to life extension and deliverance through scientific breakthrough. This *chronotope* of threats and promises particularly complicates the security/danger opposition. Against the processuality that in Elias implies a more or less coordinated development and expansion of control, the genealogy of the nuclear bomb points to a far more tangled web of relations positioned both synchronically and deeply diachronically in relation to the Earth. In this respect, these "condensed maps" of the nuclear Anthropocene can be read

through the geologization of figurations, the rescaling of their temporalities and the recasting of control.

Behind the surface understanding of the nuclear bomb as an expression of Cold War animosities, arms race and coercion, its genealogy reveals a more tangled geological aspect of figurations, in which socially produced danger attaches to the deep times of ore bodies, the reactor-based recasting of isotopes and the political mobilization of Earth materials. Earthing appears primarily within the emerging nuclear complex, where the gradual mobilization of planetary energy inscribed in geological sediments began. What Haraway (1997) aptly calls a chemical-political genealogy involves reaching for plutonium through the periodic table as a “taxonomic device” for what modern technoscientific culture understands as nature. With atomic number 92, uranium interestingly marks the last element appearing on Earth as a stable boundary of that order, more than 4.5 billion years old, as georadiological dating of the Earth shows (Carpenter, 2014). This deep and stretched diachrony of uranium as sediment is pulled by the nuclear apparatus out of geological time and into the regime of mines, reactors, military secrecy and long-lived waste. The production of so-called transuranic elements, beginning in 1940, starts to exceed the ore body itself, since their chemical and political recasting in reactors breaches the boundary of Earth’s “natural” inventory and introduces substances that are at once Earthly and artificial, laboratory-made and geopolitical. Plutonium, with atomic number 94, emerges precisely as an element belonging to the periodic table, but also as the product of an entire amalgamation of reactors, military secrets, organized labour and state coercion, culminating in the Manhattan Project and the first self-sustaining nuclear reactor, built in 1942 on a squash court at the University of Chicago. The nuclear bomb tested near Alamogordo and the one dropped on Nagasaki express the strange miniaturization that Haraway (1991: 12–13) elsewhere sees precisely as the link between technology and power: “Miniaturization has turned out to be about power; small is not so much beautiful as pre-eminently dangerous, as in cruise missiles”. The trace of these miniature figures, produced in the short time of the nuclear age, would begin to stretch across geologically barely imaginable spans of time (Brunnengräber and Görg, 2017).

The bomb is born from a long history of Earth materials, but its amalgamation within the “fast” technoscientific temporality of plutonium separation and reactor-based recasting returns as a new sediment in the hydro- and biosphere. The anthropogenic radionuclides released by nuclear fission become woven into a new geological layer, several hundred metres beneath the surface, across time spans that political history can scarcely think. As the first major plutonium-production apparatus of the Manhattan Project, Hanford remains after the Cold War as a contaminated landscape of decommissioning and slow leakage from trenches and disposal sites into groundwater (Liu, 2023). This is what Orsini (2024) calls the “myth of containment”, tied to the forgetting that nuclear facilities operate as porous technologies bound to water, soil and air, while radionuclides are, more importantly, also transported biotically. Radionuclides hardly remain sediments: they are materials moving through soil, plants, animals and food chains, introducing genetic instability into the biosphere. Radioactivity therefore

lives on through transport between planetary spheres and different temporalities that ultimately produce “mutant ecologies” (Lengefeld, 2020). As deep plant roots absorb radionuclides and radioactive “tumbleweeds” spread contamination, salmon, birds of prey and other organisms become part of the chain that tracks and disperses radioactive residues. Plutonium, likewise, does not remain where it is deposited: burrowing animals, grass roots and particle movement through surface layers extend the life of waste beyond factory and military infrastructure. Hence this sophisticated cyborg life form, shaped in a short historical breath as an unprecedented means of coercion and a condensed expression of the violence that preceded the postwar world order, becomes a chimera that enters ice, soil, lake and marine deposits, threatening the very reproduction of life.

The transformation of short-lived nuclear events such as explosions and tests into a long-lasting trace legible in Earth’s geological “archives” also brings a drastic rescaling of social and natural temporalities – but in such a way that the former lose the ontological primacy Elias grants them through level theory. At first glance, the nuclear bomb has already become a figure illustrating a major disruption in the anthroposphere-biosphere nexus. The very geochronology of the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch, around which heated debates unfolded, eventually made nuclear testing at the end of and after the Second World War almost iconic (cf. Brown, 2022b; Spencer, 2022). Starting with probably the best-known case marking the dawn of the nuclear age, the Trinity bomb test in July 1945, nuclear fallout became one of the most pregnant signs of the overlap between drastic shifts in Earth patterns and the body of anthropogenic activities gathered under the concept of the Great Acceleration. The mid-twentieth century therefore appears as the presumed marker around which stratigraphic findings cluster: above all, the planet-wide trace of plutonium-239 – this technoscientifically recast element, long-lived, poorly soluble and firmly bound to sediment particles (Waters et al., 2015; Zalasiewicz et al., 2015). The findings from Crawford Lake, intended to establish the so-called golden spike of the new geological epoch, further consolidated this status of plutonium, since traces of nuclear testing in thin sediment layers intersect there with indicators of industrial expansion, increased fossil-fuel combustion, acid rain and other signs of the Great Acceleration (McCarthy et al., 2023). Yet although the Anthropocene has not been formalized (IUGS-ICS, 2024), the geochronological formula by which humans become key geological agents usually obscures the fact that the new geological epoch catalyzes a major dispossession of human supremacy. Precisely in this sedimentary legibility, history proves no longer sufficient as a measure of duration: altered Earth cycles introduce time spans and uncertainties that political imagination can scarcely encompass.

The geochronology of the nuclear Anthropocene therefore disrupts the calmer language of long socio-ecological development, in which human history is traced through anthroposphere expansion, energy regimes, technical control and subsequent attempts to contain it. The nuclear trace introduces a different measure of duration beyond geochronological nomenclature, but also a different

ontological matrix. In this respect, fallout exceeds the dating of the Anthropocene, pointing to the radiological imprint of the nuclear age now dispersed through the atmosphere, oceans, soil and living bodies (Creager, 2022). Monitoring this trace further shows that nuclear technoscience, together with the bomb and its stratigraphic sign, also produced networks of measurement, surveillance and interpretation through which the Earth begins to be read as a contaminated archive of its own militarization (Herran, 2022). When radioactivity appears in bones, local ecosystems or distant traces of accidents and tests, it no longer belongs to a past event, but to a duration that continues to distribute exposure beyond the political time of its origin (Roqué, 2022; Brown, 2022a). The anthroposphere-biosphere nexus thereby changes drastically: human action no longer stands before the biosphere as an external force of management, but returns through materials that circulate, settle, decay and remain measurable, and above all dangerous, long after the political order that produced them has lost its own historical form. This ultimately speaks to the paradoxical longevity of figurations, even though this longevity is no longer tied to institutional stability or, for instance, the articulation of self-control. Rather, the persistence of residues that escape the time of their makers also signals a drastic shrinkage of their control capacities – in which Elias, as a sincere theorist of modernity, placed considerable hope.

Namely, this retreat of control capacities becomes especially legible through the images of apocalypse that accompanied the nuclear age and are now similarly revived in the new climate regime, within the frame of a species exposed to shared vulnerability. Apocalypse certainly has many blind spots. Discussing postwar “bomb ethics”, Bouchard (2025) identifies the bomb precisely as a means of preserving peace and ensuring human survival, while global cohesion was produced through exposure to species-ending danger. The price of such synchronization remains high. Empire, militarism, colonial testing zones, mines, workers and contaminated communities easily disappear from the image of shared ontological exposure. Much the same holds for recourse to the political theology of apocalypse, through which the Anthropocene is likewise made thinkably proximate by an imaginary already shaped by the nuclear age (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2017; Janković, 2022; Latour, 2017; Savransky, 2021). The end of the world, a species facing the possibility of self-annihilation, a planet exposed to technically produced catastrophe – all similarly compress the diffuse and unevenly distributed material traces of the nuclear Anthropocene into a figure of general awe before planetary ending. Yet, as Chakrabarty (2015; 2021) shows, modern climate consciousness took shape during the Cold War, nuclear threat, atmospheric research and the space race. Global warming reactivates Jaspers’s concept of “epochal consciousness”, though in a different Earthly register, reforming the earlier fear of nuclear catastrophe as a precondition of pacification into anxiety before uncontrollable climate uncertainties. Apocalypse therefore becomes less a final horizon than a latent cultural matrix for reading contemporary catastrophe: a performative image that prepares a new form of inhabiting the Earth.

Yet the permanent threat of the miniature figure – kept in silos, far from public view – does not remain only in the apocalyptic imaginary: it has already established a new form of synchronous attachment, in which the “species” is gathered not as the endpoint of “great evolution”, but around the possibility of its own technically produced end. Metaphorically speaking, this language of death is not merely an expression of “technolinguistic capacity” as the outcome of evolutionary phylogenesis. Haraway (1997: 58) notes that “the apparatus for the production and sustenance of high-atomic-weight fissionable materials interpellated diverse peoples into a kind of global species on the ‘whole Earth’ or ‘spaceship Earth’”. The cyborg life form itself, produced by recasting plutonium into nuclear materials through a complex semiotic, technical, political and economic apparatus, had no lesser effect on figurations in unifying the “species” as one in danger. Paradoxically, it operates as a vertical integration of “natural” elements that also changes the contours of power and valencies. These are “earthshaking artificial productions of technoscience whose status as aliens on earth, and indeed in the entire solar system, has changed who we are” (Haraway, 1997: 55). As Haraway further explains, “[t]he transuranic elements have forced humans to recognize their problematic kinship with each other as fragile earthlings at a scale of shared vulnerability and mortality”. Although the now widespread pop-cultural reference to Robert Oppenheimer’s line “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds” is the most striking image of this language of death, it imposes a much broader understanding of finitude within these strange planetary networks of interdependence in the nuclear Anthropocene. “Now a worldwide-disseminated nuclear fuel and one of the deadliest toxic substances ever encountered, plutonium has done more to construct species being for hominids than all the humanist philosophers and evolutionary physical anthropologists put together” (Haraway, 1997: 55).

Conclusion

At first glance, the questions opening *Involvement and Detachment* – why non-human dangers have been successfully contained, and why dangers of social origin have not – can no longer be posed in the same form. Indeed, the nuclear Anthropocene offers a dark image of how socio-ecological products of social figurations begin to operate within domains Elias largely kept ontologically apart as a “level of nature” subject to containment. Now, however, the temporalities and forms of constraint emerging in the new climate regime escape the control of their makers, becoming strange geo-bio-social agents that return as new conditions of interdependence. Does this mean that Elias’s entire project should be “archived” as an epistemic relic, since it provides an increasingly limited analytical apparatus for grasping historical ruptures such as the Anthropocene? The answer cannot be so radical, since Elias himself pointed to the need to seek the limits of knowledge in historically established structures of interdependence. The dilemma of (self-) control that haunts his historical sociology of knowledge should therefore be moved towards its most unsettling consequence: a reassessment of forms of

detached knowledge once conceived as the ultimate epistemological standard, and a search for sociology's new place within such an order. This certainly requires level theory to be rearranged, rather than easily discarded, in a direction that no longer presupposes ontological hierarchy. The earthing of figurational sociology therefore does not mean a break with Elias, but a careful recalibration and a return to his valid intuition: that social processes must be thought through wider physiological, biological and now geological continuities. Figurations must therefore be posed as geo-bio-social arrangements in which detachment does not mean an external view, but the capacity to recognize, from within the very chains of attachment, how the products of human control begin to organize the Earth and then return from it as conditions of future interdependencies.

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Uputstvo za autore

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Primer za navođenje članka: Spasić, I. (2020). Informativno i performativno u polustrukturisanom intervjuu: primer studije teritorijalnog kapitala u Srbiji. *Sociologija* 62(1):83–104.

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