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Abstract	How can we understand the times we live in now in 2020, which for us appear more than ever in the grip of various 'troubles', however unexpected, yet in many ways predictable? The editors' introduction evokes the very particular context of the preparation of this book, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors then return to the ambition that gives the book its unity, beyond the diversity of disciplines and themes: to revisit the theses of Norbert Elias's historical sociology in tackling with some of the thorniest problems of 'our time', such as the rise of populism, the crisis of the rule of law model, the setbacks of democratisation, the transformation of the faces of violence, and the reproduction of 'established–outsiders' figurations. In the end, the contributions thus aim to continue to develop new means of orientation, less ideological and more 'reality-congruent', and which our 'troubled times' need more than ever.	

CHAPTER 1

Troubled Times: Editors' Introduction

Florence Delmotte and Barbara Górnicka

We may or may not welcome the increasing integration of humankind. What is quite certain is that, to begin with, it increases the impotence of the individual in relation to what is happening at the top level of humanity.
—Elias (2010a [1987], 149)

1.1 Our Troubled Times

When we accepted with enthusiasm the title suggested by Tatiana Landini, for this book, *Norbert Elias in Troubled Times*, we had no idea how relevant it would prove to be in the academic year of 2020–2021. Of course, it was already relevant in 2019, when this project was born. We could ask

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'Are not all times "troubled"?' That is why our aim behind this volume was to integrate figurational sociology with the long-term relational perspectives, which make it easier to understand and explain the crucial social and political problems of our times. These include in particular the re-emergence of populisms in the four corners of the globe; a dramatically hesitant, not to say calamitous, management of threats to our ecosystems; the deterioration of the conditions of migration and policies that remain mostly inhuman or have become more and more inhumane; the maintenance or even renewal of a division of the world into nations; the difficulties of democratic transitions or even the effective curbing of the fight against inequalities; the correlated resurgence of exclusion of all kinds and at all levels; and the relative, but undeniable, failure of the domestication of violence by, within, and between states. We could not have imagined in 2019, though, that these themes, both classic and prominently topical as they are, would be brutally relegated to the background of our daily concerns by COVID-19. The pandemic way of life suddenly took up all the space, both in the most intimate sphere and in the public sphere, from the most local level to the most global one.

For obvious reasons of the timing of it all, none of the contributions gathered in this volume deals with the causes and effects of the pandemic, even if some authors managed to touch upon it. At the time when most of the authors of this book were delivering their first drafts, the whole world had only just become aware of the existence of this pandemic. A majority of people living on the planet were about to enter a 'confinement', a physically distanced way of life or 'lockdown' for the months to come, and to learn the 'new rules' of behaviour (Blomert 2020). Those were dictated by the imperative of distancing—incorrectly called '*social* distancing', when it was only meant to be *physical*, even though in reality it was also and above all social—which generated new relations and forms of exclusion. People who until then took for granted living, eating, working, studying, dancing, with each other—as well as hugging each other—and travelling regularly around the world were all of a sudden forced to stay at home, to wear a mask, no longer to touch each other, and to avoid others on the streets. Just like during wartime, politicians started to seriously discuss imposing curfews, which were finally imposed on communities. As we write this, we are still living with the shock and upheaval of the medical, economic, political, and psychological consequences of the 'first wave' of the pandemic and now waiting for the second series of complete

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confinement and lockdowns while still grappling with the most serious side-effects and consequences of the first one.

Yet it is not the first global epidemic. Nor is it as if we were discovering for the first time that humanity could pose a very serious threat to itself, or that a global catastrophe would most probably come 'from within' (Latour 2020b), or that our lifestyles, for decades now, were not without impact on our rights, freedoms, and chances for survival. At the very least, this crisis questions our incomprehension or wilful ignorance of the messages delivered, for example, by the sociologists Ulrich Beck (1992 [1986]) or Bruno Latour (1993 [1991], 2017), by philosophers such as Michel Foucault (1976, 1977 [1975]), or in the novels of Albert Camus (2012 [1947]) and Orwell (1949). We may well think—or pretend—that the world has changed or is changing, that today's epidemics are not yesterday's, that the threats are not the same, that we have more resources—which, despite being true to some extent, does not change the 'bitter truth' that we should have been more and better prepared. Indeed, we are not. We can believe—or still pretend to believe—that Orwell's Big Brother was only intended to portray the Soviet 'enemy' or that 'China' is not 'Europe' and that 'North America' is not 'South America'. It is to ignore a double reality that is nevertheless inescapable. Firstly, the world of today, and the world of tomorrow, necessarily inherits the world of yesterday, the best and the worst. Secondly, we are more than ever interdependent with one another across the surface of the globe; to distinguish between 'us' and 'them' most of the time serves only to provide us with a version of often short-lived comfort at a cheap price. We may also believe that science and medicine will be able to solve *all* our problems and that we will be saved by the famous 'vaccine'. But did history not teach us that science and technology definitely cannot solve everything? Is this not, in other words, another example of the persistence of a 'magical' way of thinking, based on myths and long-established ethoses?

The human sciences are often reluctant to intervene in the face of events (Bensa and Fassin 2002), and this is a first reason why sociologists should probably not be surprised that they are less heard and listened to than virologists and economists. Yet both groups have the understanding and the critical resources to do so differently. The sociology of Elias provides an example of this through its relentless fights against the retreat of the social sciences into the present; against the hyper-specialisation of knowledge; and against the visions sharply distinguishing societies and individuals, which inadvertently and evidently lead to the global social

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welfare and individual liberties and needs being put in direct opposition to each other. This is why it is important for us not only to recall, but also to question, the messages this sociology carries, and for us to use, or even improve, the tools it has bequeathed to us to better apprehend our troubled times.

At the end of the eighteenth century, even the most reactionary thinkers were well aware that a 'return to the world of the past', to the Ancien Régime, was precisely not desirable insofar as this old world itself had directly contributed to its own destruction by the French Revolution. It is at least desirable today that even the most moderate progressives agree that we need to discover all the *mental* 'necessary precautions' (*'gestes barrières'*, in French) that would help us to guard against the return of a 'normality' that is actually as incapable of preventing crises as it is of coping with them (Latour 2020a). From this point of view, Elias's thinking is imbued with the concern to help men and women act in a more 'reality-congruent' and less emotional way. In order to do precisely this, it aims to develop and transmit sociological tools more adapted to the most concrete problems of the time. Paradoxically on the surface, but only on the surface, it almost always begins to take a step back from them, to consider them in a more comprehensive approach, and to put them back into a longer-term perspective.

1.2 Troubles That Are Not Only Ours or of Our Times

> Some of my readers may perhaps wish me to tell only about aspects of humankind's development that are pleasant and hopeful. But such a selection is the true meaning of the *trahison des clercs*. We may or may not welcome the increasing integration of humankind. What is quite certain is that, to begin with, it increases the impotence of the individual in relation to what is happening at the top level of humanity. (Elias 2010a [1987], 149)

This quote is from the late 1980s. More than 30 years later it seems that nothing has happened to contradict the assessment of the increasing integration of humankind as being a major trend or more exactly that 'integration–disintegration' tensions that are part and parcel of the contemporary world. However, we have more difficulties in imagining how it would be possible to see only the 'pleasant and hopeful aspects' of human

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development or even what they finally are. We are less doubtful that Elias was right to wonder whether humankind would survive the violence of our times and whether the civilising processes would outweigh the de-civilising pushes. And to see Elias's theory of the processes of civilisation as a revival of the theories of progress, both optimistic and ethnocentric, even celebrating the triumph of the West, is the result of a fundamental and easily demonstrable misreading (Dunning 2003, 42–43, about Zigmunt Bauman's interpretation of Elias's theory in Modernity and the Holocaust [1989]; see also Dunning and Mennell 1998, 340 ff.). 'The violent disputes between people, which we call wars, have been a part of the fate of human beings, of their conditions of life, for as far back as we can see', wrote Elias in *Humana Conditio* (2010b, 78), in the context of the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War (see Landini 2017, 13). Is it not therefore most probable that the unpredictability of the dangers—first of all due to wars or other violent conflicts, but not only—will once again cause the 'armour of civilised conduct' to crumble (Elias 2012, 576)? Or alternatively, have the most apparently civilised societies not come to terms with 'compartmentalisation', allowing them to keep out of sight their aspects of 'dyscivilisation' (Abram de Swaan 2001), especially in regard to natives in colonial times, and to migrants, in our own?

All of the contributions gathered here are based on the conviction that the processes of civilisation that mark the long-term evolution of human societies refer to tendential transformations of their structures, which affect both the individual and psychic levels and the global level. These tendential transformations include a shift in the balance between constraints by others and self-restrains; the development of a social standard of behaviour and feeling, which generates the emergence of more even, all-round, stable, and differentiated self-restraint; and an increase in the scope of mutual identification between people. But the contributors are as strongly attached to the reality-congruent hypothesis that such long-term processes should never, by definition, be taken for granted and that, on the other hand, they are in most cases 'Janus-faced', two-sided, and ambivalent. If history is therefore not more cyclical than linear, not more inescapably inclined to progress than to decline, our contributors' common assumption is also that the past and the present enlighten each other and finally that the theoretical and the empirical enrich each other. This book thus carries a double ambition, which each chapter helps to achieve and honour. It is a question of testing Elias's proposals facing persistent, if

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not completely new, political and social problems and of nourishing this sociological approach with emerging themes and innovative research fields and methods.

While all the chapters in this volume are thus necessarily marked by a strong coherence, they also show an equally strong and deliberate openness and pluralism, which is also strongly in line with the message delivered by Elias. Not only do the authors from different academic trajectories and continents—sociology, anthropology, history, political science, International Relations, and other disciplinary sub-fields—they are, moreover, often concerned to question this type of division, as well as other cleavages that continue to shape thinking on politics and policy. Above all, with regard to socio-political phenomena and psycho-social transformations, one of these erroneous dichotomies places what is happening in the state domestic or 'internal' or domestic order in opposition to what is happening 'on the international scene' or between survival units beyond their borders. It is not, of course, that national borders no longer exist—on the contrary. Let us rather say, simply, that they are changing and so are the issues at stake. It has never been possible—and no doubt this is even more true in the global era—realistically to think separately about what is happening inside and outside national borders, at the most local and individual scale and at the most international and world-wide scale.

This book thus aims to promote a diversity of views on multiple challenges of our time, illuminating them both in small details and globally, but above all without blinkers. This diversity and the openness are at the same time intended and partly fortuitous. They come from a call for papers that was intended to be as open as possible. The table of contents was then constructed in a 'bottom up' mode, on the basis of the selected proposals. The structure of the book reflects not only both this diversity and this overlap of the themes and approaches, but also a certain coherence of the contributions and their ability to complement each other.

1.3 Renewing Classical Themes

The first part of the book testifies to this diversity of themes. Some of the contributions gathered there are intended to revisit classical themes of Elias-inspired figurational sociology in the light of the challenges of time, which put them to the test, so to speak. That is the case of the second chapter of this book, by Nico Wilterdink, who re-examines the idea that the history of societies is generally marked by a tendency that Elias called

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'functional democratisation'. Wilterdink questions Elias's thesis in the light of the transformations observed from the last quarter of the twentieth century, lending credence to the idea of a 'backtracking' or a reversal of the trend, above all in economic matters. Without denying that de-democratisation has been a dominant trend within Western state-societies during the past few decades, Wilterdink's chapter shows that there are nevertheless tendencies still ongoing for functional democratisation, particularly with regard to 'ethnic' or 'racial', gender and generational relations. In dissecting the figures and breaking down the processes of functional de-democratisation and democratisation into their various aspects, Wilterdink thus aims to de-legitimise an ideological reading that unilaterally conclude in positing an overall backtracking, which would not be of much help in understanding the challenges and threats of the times.

Other chapters rather contribute to diversifying the subjects classically dealt with by the sociology of processes. For some, they explore subjects which, if not totally new, have recently been renewed or brought back to the forefront. The third chapter takes note of the renewed success of populisms after the 2008 crisis, particularly but not only 'right-wing' populisms, of which the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States is just one proof, albeit a paradigmatic one, among others. In this chapter, entitled '*Vox Populi* then and now', Matt Clement gives a good example of how understanding the present and the past are mutually enriching, as he goes back to ancient Rome to better understand, through diachronic comparison, the complexity, springs, dangers, and potentialities of contemporary populisms. It is also a question of getting rid of the misleading idea that populism is only the prerogative of 'sick' societies and of restoring the plural and sometimes innovative character of populism(s). In a sense, it is also a question of 'de-ideologising' a critique of populism which, in the absence of such work, remains of little use in imagining a genuinely democratic way out of the crises of capitalism in the twenty-first century.

The next two chapters take relatively unexplored paths from the sociology of figurations and processes, those relating to the genesis of law and rights and to their transformations. In Chap. 4, Marta Bucholc returns to the long-lasting social process that comes to impose the 'rule of law' model, even in societal contexts that have proved to be relatively reluctant to enforce individual rights. She focuses more specifically on the case of former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Her contribution shows how the sociology of Elias provides a better understanding

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of the development of the model and of the crisis experienced since 2010 in state-societies that have not been able to adopt it over the long term and where political forces are gaining ground or dominating that radically challenge it. Finally, Bucholc suggests that their study from such an approach allows them to be considered as living 'laboratories' and is therefore potentially instructive for other regions of the world facing similar systemic transformations and tensions.

In the following chapter, Ludivine Damay and Florence Delmotte look at human rights and return to the idea that they are only the last utopia of our time, unrelated to the Rights of Man of the eighteenth century, and the thesis that twentieth-century human rights are, on the contrary, a continuation of the latter. After recalling the complicated relationship that classical sociology has with the study of these rights, the authors show the merits of Elias's approach, which once again overcomes frozen oppositions. Indeed, historical sociology makes it possible to understand how human rights were forged in close connection with the development of the state, and yet, in the second half of the twentieth century, they came to question it by giving individuals a new place in a now globalised world, where humanity has no enemy other than itself and is therefore the only true survival unit.

Chapters 6 and 7 for their part explore more radically 'new' topics. In her chapter Adele Bianco investigates the civilising potential of digitalisation. She develops and actualises Elias's reflections on technology in a context which societies are experiencing a whole set of technical and organisational transformations, which invite the whole of society to engage in an adaptation process, based on a necessity for all to learn how to manage new technologies. Such an approach is also helpful in that, here again, it allows going beyond a commonly agreed rhetoric about the digital revolution or the dangers of de-civilisation it represents.

Ecology, through the ecological risk sociology of Ulrich and Elizabeth Beck, is also at stake in the last chapter, by Alexander Mack, of this first part. The author underlines that there has been relatively little engagement between process sociology and risk scholarship, while both share common commitment to understanding and improving 'means of orientation'—a notion that is definitely at core of many contributions gathered in this book. Mack therefore proposes a constructive critique of the Beck's thinking, in order to make the alliance between the sociology of processes and the sociology of risk stronger and better able to study and unravel the dual links in which contemporary societies are caught: not only in

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ecological matters, but also in economic, migration, and health matters; in other words, increasingly intertwined sources of violence inequalities.

1.4 Violence and Faces of the War

The second part of the book is in a way more homogeneous, focused on the more classical theme of violence. Each chapter, however, provides a singular and original angle on the theme. The one by Xavier Rousseaux and Quentin Verreycken casts an historian's eye on the theory of civilising processes. They are interested in its reception by historians, including 'amendments' to it, and point out that the work of Elias is a major reference for historians of violence and criminal justice. In their text, Rousseaux and Verreycken discuss more precisely the articulation that it makes possible between three historical figurations: the long-term decline of homicides in 'pacified' state-societies—associated with the civilising process in the strict sense; the sudden and massive eruptions of extreme violent behaviour that call for the notions of de- or dys-civilisation; and finally transitional or reconstructive justice, as processes that emerge at the end of certain conflicts, which suggests the existence of processes of 're-civilisation'. They also touch on their Belgian case, in which the divisive experience of the Second World War and its aftermath is as interesting and atypical as it is little known.

In their chapter, Dominique Linhardt and Cédric Moreau de Bellaing then tackle the inescapable subject of terror and terrorism, which has regularly dominated the political and scientific debate on contemporary forms of violence. Here too, however, it is a question of shifting the gaze. The authors thus consider the different interpretations that can be made of violent conflicts and their transformation in the context of a discussion, also taken up by Nico Wilterdink in the second chapter, on functional (de-)democratisation. Rather than seeing terrorism or war as a pure 'throwback' to violence of an archaic nature, Linhardt and Moreau de Bellaing argue that 'regressive' violence accompanies and reacts to the process of civilisation, becoming an integral part of it. This could only be understood if Elias's analyses of ideological radicalisation and its impact on the extreme violence of the twentieth century were taken seriously.

The two case studies-based chapters that follow show yet other ways of studying contemporary violence and some other faces of the war. That of Beatriz Rocha Ferreira, Marina Vinha and Veronice Lovato Rossato dissects, based on a historical and ethnographic survey, the physical and

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symbolic violence developed by the Brazilian state against the Kaiowá and Gurarani indigenous peoples, in the *Reserva Indígena de Dourados*, and reconstructs the stages of its development. The authors show how such a socio-historical perspective is useful for considering issues that unfortunately remain highly topical for Brazil today. For its part, the final chapter of this second section, from Delphine Deschaux-Dutard, explores in an original way the domesticated face of violence in the frame of (European) defence studies. It also proves the vitality of process sociology and its ability to enter scientific fields supposed to be highly 'specialised' and a bit hermetic to generalist and comprehensive sociological approaches, and to long-term historical perspectives, such as EU studies and more particularly those which focus on actors and public policies. According to Deschaux-Dutard, since the 1990s the European defence policy constitutes a specific social configuration within the European Union and it is particularly interesting to investigate the way French and German politico-military actors historically shaped it as such. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, this chapter thus also reveals the relevance of the concept of habitus for analysing the recurring strategic divergences that stand in the way of making European defence policy more concrete than a long-lasting but unattainable objective.

1.5 Established–Outsiders Relations and Habitus Issues

Established–outsiders relations and figurations and their transformations logically constitute a major point of interest in Elias's work. It proves to be helpful for apprehending how differentials of power, or very asymmetric power ratios between groups, have been shaped and to what extent they can evolve when contemporary societies seem severely in search for new balances at all levels and subject to uncertain identity reconfigurations. In the third part of this volume, the contributions illustrate the topicality and plasticity of the established and outsiders' dynamics theory in order to highlight very different case studies.

The first chapter of this third part even definitely enlarges our intellectual horizons by proposing a particularly innovative and constructive dialogue. Aurélie Lacassagne and Dana Hickey thus provide a respectful conversation between Elias's theory and Indigenous perspectives, which have indeed much in common. Elias's perspective, although mainly

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focused on Western civilising processes, proves to be open to the richness of outsiders' views and is precious in a context where there can be observed an enduring colonial legacy, discrimination, and violence against the formerly—or still—colonised people. That remains one of the biggest challenges of our time to overcome, for the authors of the chapter. For their part, the Indigenous perspectives, thanks to their particular ways of living and thought experiences, have as much to bring to the understanding of common—but not commonly endured—troubles as to the particular features of the living standards of the established which favour these problems. To take just one example, the contribution of indigenous knowledge is crucial in the current debates on climate issues and the place of ecosystems.

In Chap. 13, Steven Loyal introduces us to the experiences of asylum seekers in Ireland. Building on Bourdieu's and Elias's theories, he analyses the specificities of the radically asymmetric power relations between the Irish State and migrants, for it seems obvious that in terms of 'function', asylum seekers need states and that states do not need asylum seekers. Restating these issues in historical perspective characteristic of the Irish context, his study focuses on the 'Direct Provision and Dispersal' system. That is a key mechanism set up in 2000, under which asylum seekers migrants have to apply seek for satisfying housing and subsistence needs. In Chap. 14, Merle Schatz takes us then to Inner Mongolia and deals with relations between Chinese and Mongolian groups, that she describes both as convinced they are the only rightful established in this autonomous region in Northern China. It is fascinating how observations on law (minority laws and customary) and on daily life interactions and respective expressions of feelings of superiority and inferiority both confirm and enrich Elias's hypotheses of how such kind of relations work. Through the example of 'grassland management' the study reveals that officially authorised practices most often are not compatible with living practices and ideas, and more generally that co-existence between communities have perpetually to be negotiated at the confluence of institutions, convictions, and requisites and habits of the daily life.

The two following chapters deal with generational figurations or relations between generation issues in another region of the world, which is periodically at the centre of attention: Palestine. Here again, the gaze is distanced, in relation to more immediately burning issues or 'troubles', and in this also lies the interest of these two contributions. In his chapter Hendrik Hinrichsen examines the development of a figuration of an

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'established–outsiders' kind between generations in Palestinian society in the West Bank. Hinrichsen bases his discussion not only on the reflection formulated by Elias about figurations of generations in his *Studies on the Germans*, but also on an analysis of changes in relations between classes in the West Bank. His study shows the differential of power between the 'Intifada Generation' in the 1980s, shaped in a context of intense mobilisation, and the 'Oslo generation', by reference to the peace project put in place in the 1990s, which has definitely less power and its members less chances to give their life a meaning. In Chap. 16, Alon Helled then addresses the question of the role of historians in the shaping of the Israeli national habitus, in connection with the construction of the Hebrew state. This is a process in which one can detect both profound changes, since the creation of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (1926–28), and a certain continuity. Historians of the first generation, often trained in Europe, are marked by the paradigm of nation building. After the creation of the Israeli state, historians of the young state are associated with 'civic republicanism' in a context where there is a growing debate about memory and identity. More recently, a third generation that is keen to demystify a certain relationship with the past is openly questioning the work of the older generations. In an ultimately very Eliasian vein, this chapter thus attempts to untangle the threads knotted within Israeli society, politics, and the academic world, which contributes to a better understanding of the processes of habitus formation and reformation.

Finally, the last chapter of this third part comes back to the story of the book first and foremost associated with the theory of relations between established and outsiders. Reinhard Blomert underlines how unachieved and atypical can appear the synchronic study realised by John L. Scotson on Winston Parva communities that formed the basis of the book published under two names, his and Norbert Elias's, at a turning point of Elias's academic career. Discussing the critiques made of the book and notably arguing a problem of authorship, Blomert also proposes a scenario for studying how comparable figurations may develop over time, evoking trajectories of war refugees and their integration process in Germany after 1945.

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1.6 Conclusion: The Need for New Means of Orientation

This volume does not, of course, go through *all* the problems of our time. Fortunately, it has never had this ambition, but rather that of giving an informed and stimulating overview of them, by specialists in each field, and all of them more or less in a figurational sociological perspective, concerned with history and theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary openness. One omission is religion. The question of the religious, though inescapable, is not tackled head-on in this book. It is perhaps not so surprising, for religion 'does not play a prominent role in Norbert Elias's by now classic study *The Civilising Process*', not so much because of an underestimation of its influence, but rather because of the very specific relationship that Elias's work has always had with that of Max Weber (Goudsblom 2003, 24). More surprising maybe is the absence in the present volume of the question of gender, of gender-related power differentials, and of the reconfigurations of identities relating to the transformations of these established–outsiders relations of a particular type. Yet Elias considered that the twentieth century was probably the scene of one of the most important revolutions the Western civilising process had ever known, namely, the access of women, the symbolic second half of humanity, to the recognition of a long-denied identity of their own (Heinich 2000, 16–17). There remains, therefore, the prospect of devoting a future work to the contemporary developments of this 'revolution', and to their genesis, within the framework of this same collection.

In this book, we were interested in the way Elias's thought sheds light on the political problems of our time, problems that are always 'new' but always linked to the past and never only political. We do not think that by doing so we are betraying the ideal of a detached understanding, which is the basis of the ethics of Elias's sociology and which condenses its emancipatory 'message': a message that is necessarily political and even democratic. Stephen Mennell comes back to this in his 'Concluding Reflections': the need for 'new means of orientation' does not dry up, but is indeed growing.

For Andrew Linklater (2020), no one knows whether we are currently just in a phase of transition or what transition it is. What will be the role of global ecological civilising processes? What will be the role of the 'Chinese model'? Will humanity as a whole soon become the frame of reference for developing these new 'means of orientation' on a larger scale? Or does the

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national-populist answer as a 'drag effect of the nationalist loyalties' have a long life ahead of it in facing the increasing powerlessness of individuals? Facing all these questions and problems, what can the social sciences finally do? In the end, one must argue that we simply cannot abandon our role, but rather need to continue to work tirelessly on new ways of thinking, learning, and teaching.

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Uncorrected Proof