

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION'S 56<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION

**GLOBAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND REGIONAL WORLD  
A NEW AGENDA FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

February 18-21, 2015, New Orleans, Louisiana

SA74: Historical Sociology, International Relations, World History

**Norbert Elias's Civilizing Processes Sociology:  
beyond Realism *versus* Cosmopolitanism**  
A Long-term Global Approach to International Relations<sup>1</sup>

Florence Delmotte

F.R.S.-FNRS (Belgian National Scientific Research Fund) Research Associate  
Université Saint-Louis (Saint Louis University), Brussels

Only when these tensions between and within  
states have been mastered can we expect to  
become more truly civilised.  
*On the Process of Civilisation* (1939: 489)

**International relations in Elias's writings**

If we take the study of Elias's (1897-1990) work rather than the study of international relations as our starting point to answer the question of what the former contributes to the latter today, it is tempting to do the opposite and to show what contemporary international relations bring to Elias's sociology. An internationalist reading of his work both sheds light on and complexifies the issues, and it is important to understand why if one wishes to take advantage of the treatment that the author reserves for what goes on 'on the highest level', on the 'most comprehensive' and 'most complex' level of human interdependence. Not only are the texts that treat the matter of international relations explicitly a must if one is to understand Elias's analysis of the political sphere right off the bat; not only is it impossible to consider the political sphere – and thus international politics – to be a dimension separate from the other aspects of human life in an approach that denounces the 'pseudo-specialisation' of science; but in addition, the problem of the development of relations between 'survival units' and what happens 'beyond' the Nation-State affects the heart of the theoretical and ethical ambitions of process sociology. Consequently, we cannot confine ourselves to what Elias says about relations 'between States' to gauge the importance of his contributions to international affairs. This is the angle from which I propose a re-reading of 'The Fishermen in the Maelstrom', (1983, 2007), which covers these matters explicitly, but also the second

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is an amended version of a chapter entitled in French 'Les interdépendances internationales au cœur de la sociologie des processus d'Elias', to be published in 2015 in a collective work under the direction of Guillaume Devin, CNRS Editions.

volume (*State Formation and History*) of his major work, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, 1939 (*On the Process of Civilisation*, 2012), *Die Studien über die Deutschen* (*The Germans*, 1996) and 'Changes in the We-I Balance' (1987), a late text published in *The Society of Individuals* (1991, 2010) that attracted the attention of Guillaume Devin in his founding article, written in French in 1995, on Norbert Elias and international relations.

Social scientists in this field still refer relatively seldom to Elias today, despite the fact that his work has been taken up by political scientists, including in France, since his death. However, in the English-speaking world, the internationalists' interest in Elias's 'historical' or 'constructivist' perspective has been rising steadily since the late 1990s, and it is revealing that the most penetrating sociological, political, and philosophical interpretations of his work are due to internationalists. Here we can refer to Andrew Linklater's writings on the civilization of international relations that reveal the ambiguities in Elias's work or particularly stimulating hesitations. Linklater points to the competing presence, in Elias's vision of IR, of both a 'Hobbesian realism' and a 'Kantian cosmopolitanism' and opens up the question of the proximity between Elias's analysis and those developed by scientific realists and neo-realists in IR. These discussions enable us to delve deeper into the core question, in Elias's writings, of the State as the main player in international relations and its future as such. In what follows I could have concentrated on the State's international role in the socio-historical approach or focused on the just as central topics of violence and conflict. Instead, I have decided to take a chance and honour a 'continuist' and holistic – which does not mean harmonious – vision and tackle these elements all together through the notion of interdependence, for that is what gives Elias's sociology its backbone and unifies it through three joint and several ambitions that I shall now introduce.

The first one is well known. It consists in surmounting the individual/society opposition in favour of a relational approach to the social sphere or 'figurations'. The individual and society are not separate entities, but different points of view in the same reality. The figurations referred to, be they those of a couple, of a State, or of all of humankind, consist of nothing more than connected or interdependent individuals, that is to say, individuals who have reciprocal relations of dependence of various kinds (emotional, economic, and military, for example) with each other. The interdependences and figurations that these relations produce are necessarily processes, not static realities. Hence the second ambition: that of studying jointly the changes in individuals' mental or psychic structures and those in the social structures of the entities that they form together, which, for Elias, necessitates reconnecting with the long-term historical approach that was largely abandoned by the social sciences in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The third aim is to root the objectivity of sociological knowledge in the practice of self-distancing by the researcher, who is necessarily a stakeholder and involved in the relationships and processes that s/he must elucidate. Elias's contribution to thinking about international relations can be understood through the prism of these three ambitions. This is what structures our remarks below.

### **States and relations between States**

When Elias takes up the matter of international relations explicitly, he usually does so in terms of 'relations between States'. He does so in 'The Fishermen in the Maelstrom', a text marked by the Cold War and the risk of a 'drift towards a nuclear war' (Elias, 1983, 2007: 107), an almost obsessive theme in his later works. In this he describes the leaders of the major powers and their allies as prisoners of a vicious circle, of a 'double bind' that is steadily

tightening. Like the two brothers in Edgar Allan Poe's story *A Descent into the Maelstrom*, they find themselves caught in a sort of maelstrom in which weak control over events goes hand in hand with weak self-control, which may prove fatal, since it prevents a rational understanding of the problems at hand. In this text international relations are tackled in direct connection with one of the propositions of Elias's theory of knowledge, the one that stresses the need to distance or detach oneself from one's emotional representations of political and social phenomena in order to be able to understand them better and thus to control them instead of being subjected to them. Sociology in the broad sense participates in such a liberating, even saving, project. However, to be able to carry out its mission, sociology must still be realistic or 'reality congruent', that is to say, it must take a holistic, integrated approach to the social sphere. That means, amongst other things, not 'separat[ing] intra-state problems and inter-state problems conceptually'. In the twentieth century, Elias wrote, 'it is even less possible than ever before to separate what goes on within a state, in particular the internal distribution of power, from what takes place between states, in particular the power relationships between them. Wherever one looks one comes upon the interdependence between intra-state and inter-state processes' (Elias, 1983, 2007: 105-106).

What is more, he presents relations between States and social relations inside States as being two levels of a 'multidimensional model of society that comprises four levels, since it also includes human beings' relations with the forces of nature and the socialised individual's relations with her/himself.

In Elias's view, these four 'levels of relationship' are interdependent in that they interact with and influence each other reciprocally. When it comes to the interdependence between the internalists' area of action and that of the internationalists, Elias nevertheless highlights the sway that relations between States have over the States. To measure this dominance of the international over the national one must bear in mind not only the globalisation of trade and risks, which is constantly increasing (we shall come back to this later), but also the fact that States are first of all 'defensive and offensive survival units'. As such, they are born 'in and for war' and are defined by comparison with other survival units. The same goes for tribes, clans, and seigneuries, which existed as survival units only through the relations that they had with other survival units. That also means that international relations in the narrow sense of the term are no more than a specific, historically situated, case of relations between survival units that bring Nation-States face to face and participate in historical processes of long duration. These relations cannot be grasped without going back to the period before the Treaty of Westphalia. In addition, one cannot understand the sway that international relations have over the courses and characteristics of a Nation-State without going back to this entity's birth, a time when relations between non-State survival units often played a key role.

This idea is illustrated in the second half of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (*On the Process of Civilization*), in the chapters on the emergence of the French State in particular (1939, 2012: 224-399). Another example can be found in *Studien über die Deutschen* (*The Germans*), in which, rather than explaining the rise of Nazism in the inter-war period first and foremost by Germany's defeat in 1918, the consequences of the Treaty of Versailles, or the victors' attitudes, Elias endeavoured to grasp the particularity of the German State's trajectory and its impact on the 'national habitus' (the Germans' social personality) by going back to the origins of the Germanic peoples and their geographic situation, 'caught' between the Latins and the Slavs, which allegedly explains this 'dual habitus' of invading and being invaded, and a warrior ethos that was strengthened by the Holy Roman Empire's degeneration, the 100 Years' War, and a lengthy military autocracy (Elias, 1996: 2-8).

Stephen Mennell adopts the same perspective in his book *The American Civilizing Process* (2007), in which he examines the impacts of territorial elimination struggles from the first colonies until the independence of the United States of America. These struggles were both comparable to and a step removed from those that led to the establishment of Europe's great monarchies, especially as they involved a more diversified range of players. According to Mennell, the Indians, colonial powers, and great trading companies helped to shape a union that was a union in name only before becoming an empire. Going back to the history of the Monroe Doctrine, Mennell shows that, in the long run, the balance of power between the United States and its rivals constantly tipped more and more in the former's favour. Not only did such a development, which is rather seldom seen, make the State's expansion an increasingly plannable and planned process, when most processes of this type are 'blind'. In addition, this quasi-constant rise, the author posits, gave rise to a feeling of superiority in the American habitus that was anchored in an extreme notion of individual sovereignty and very little ability for collective reflexive thinking. As a result of its position, therefore, the United States cannot see itself as the others do, nor can it see itself as just one amongst many nations. On the domestic scene, the result is a society that can only feel itself under constant threat, one in which fears feed phantasmagorical religiousness and belief in God still seems to be widely seen as a condition of morality.

Just as relations of interdependence shape individuals' lives and personalities and define each individual's differentiated room for manoeuvre, thereby enabling individuals to act upon the network to a greater or lesser degree and to shape it in turn (Elias, 2010), international relations shape social entities and political units. That does not mean, for all that, that the figurations that the States form – States that are also conceived of as networks of interdependence – consist of nothing more than changing relations of reciprocal interdependence. In other words, this approach goes beyond the idea of a co-determination between *agency* and *structure*, which upholds the idea of separate entities (Lacassagne, 2012). What goes on between survival units or between other agents – economic ones, for example – is neither shaped nor caused by external elements. And it would be wrong to hypostasize the State, which is merely one of many other protagonists in history. That is why the process approach cannot be in keeping with the idea of characterising international relations once and for all. Elias mentions the barbarity and archaic nature of contemporary international relations (1983, 2007) a number of times, but contests the idea of anarchy or chaos (Elias, 1970, 2006: 71). In his view, the apparent 'disorder' has its own structure; he does not pit it against order, and however blind and unplanned it may be, whilst the process of civilisation in the West 'happened by and large unplanned', 'it did not happen, nevertheless, without a specific type of order', governed by the dictates of people's interdependency (Elias, 1939, 2012: 403).

### **Humankind as the ultimate survival unit**

'[P]resent events illuminate the understanding of the past, and immersion in the past illuminates the present' (Elias, 1939, 2012: 479). To grasp the political integration processes at work in a globalised world, Elias urges us to go far back in the past in order to reconstruct the chains of events that spawned them. In so doing, he intuits that the forces that would explain the obsolescence of the modern State several centuries later were already at work in its genesis. Here, interdependence is expressed primarily by growing competition between survival units leading, through 'elimination struggles', to a tendency to monopolise power

over constantly expanding territories. The construction of the State is a key step in this process, for the monopoly of legitimate violence, which is central to the thinking of Elias and Weber alike, strives to guarantee the pacification of interpersonal relations within the entity's borders, which pacification is made necessary by production patterns, trade, and modes of government that are based on an advanced division of social functions. So, the 'civilisation of manners' is linked to the State through the ever more advanced taming of individuals' drives, especially their aggressive drives, and through the development and refinement of individual self-constraints on behaviour. Whilst this relative pacification and this civilisation of manners are fragile, constantly threatened by war, and doubtless reversible (Elias, 1939, 2012: 488), the shift to social units of integration that are constantly higher and more encompassing is considered to be inevitable and irreversible. From this standpoint, the direction taken by the world has been determined and constant since the end of the feudal period. As Elias put it, 'The only thing that's certain is the direction in which the integration of the modern world is veering' (1939, 2012: 481).

Elias wrote the last pages of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* in London, where he had sought refuge, in the late 1930s. The threatening war merely confirmed in his mind the continuation, for the Nation-State, of the competitive and monopolistic thinking that had led to the birth of States, and Elias 'predicted' the emergence of continental powers or of federation of Nation-States that would have to form closer alliances. At the end of the war, the victory of the two superpowers – the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. – and the construction of the European Community that followed seemed to prove him right, especially as the struggle for hegemony quickly resumed amongst the victors, in particular through the arms race, which, as was noted above, deeply affected the ageing Elias. In his view, the threat of destruction by nuclear weapons would attest to the transition to the last level of interdependence.

So, the Nation-State appeared to be completely outmoded on the level of objective or material interdependence as of the mid-twentieth century: 'The catastrophe of Chernobyl, [and] the large-scale destruction of fish and the pollution of the Rhine after the disorganised attempt to combat a fire in a Swiss chemical works, can serve as limited but instructive example of the fact that nation-state units have in reality already relinquished their function as guarantors of the physical security of their citizens, and thus as survival units, to supranational units' (Elias, 1987, 2010: 195). It nevertheless remains that, according to Elias, the Nation-State continues to have this function 'in the consciousness of most of its members', the vast majority of whom continue to cling to this 'we-unit' that helps to define them as individuals.

For Elias, the problem is not just one of the lag between the true survival unit and the level of political organisation, that is, a gap pointed out by other authors who advocate the development of a democracy beyond the Nation-State, at least on the European level, to make up for the lag between the systemic economic integration that is occurring globally and political integration *per se* (Habermas, 1998: 78). In a more original manner, Elias also raises the problem of the 'tenacity of the structures of personality' that today oppose various forms of post-national political integration. Elias's relational and process analysis thus urges us to distinguish between three desynchronised levels that, once again, challenge the boundary between internalists and internationalists, without ever sundering these levels' ties. The first level, where the functional, material dimension dominates, concerns the 'objective' interdependences that are now globalised. The second one is that of institutions, of integration through politics and law. The third one, which is so often overlooked by political analysis, concerns representations, affects, and subjective affiliations. The underlying idea seems to be that interdependences form a sort of historical driving force to which the forms of

political integration adapt – or must adapt. Collective and individual identities then manage or fail to adapt to this political integration in turn.

The long-term historical approach underlines the recurrent or structural nature of the ‘lag effects’ (Elias, 1987, 2010: 188). Some of the difficulties plaguing European integration thus seem less unexpected when we remember that the State originally corresponded to a certain stage of institutionalisation of the relations of dependence – especially economic and military dependence – between human beings and it sometimes took centuries to give birth to a feeling of belonging shared by a majority of the State’s members: ‘The more complete integration of all citizens into the state in the European multi-party States has really only happened in the course of the twentieth century. Only in conjunction with the parliamentary representation of all classes did all members of the state begin to perceive it more as a we-unit and less as a they-group’ (1987, 2010: 186). However, Elias’s vision of history is neither linear nor cyclical: The future cannot be deduced from the past. The question thus remains that of knowing whether the lags between the actual survival unit, level of political organisation, and definition of ‘we’ will be overcome or not. When it comes to regional integration, for example, that of Europe, the development of a collective identity is conceivable and possible. There remains the risk that it creates along the lines of the – obsolete – model of a wider national patriotism. Above all, the difficult, late consolidation of political intervention on the European level looks like a rear-guard action. As for the ultimate level, Elias writes, ‘only the highest level of integration, membership of humanity, has remained permanent and inescapable’ (1987, 2010: 202). The link with this ‘we-unit’ that encompasses all other units nevertheless appears to be so weak that very few individuals feel it to be a social tie. Amongst other explanations, Elias advances the contention that humanity is threatened by sub-groups of humanity, that it has no enemy other than itself. Self-awareness, on this level, thus cannot rely on the designation of ‘Alter’, of an ‘Other’, as other survival units have done through armed conflicts.

That is yet another reason for not envisioning the development of a self-awareness, of a supranational ‘we’, to be a simple enlargement of national affects of identification. Inside States in the course of the twentieth century the strength and spread of national identity were linked to the narrowing power differentials between social classes and to the enlargement of their rights to political representation and participation. National ideologies nevertheless remained ‘myths’ for all that, and the most dangerous ones of the time (Elias, 1996). That is why, albeit with reservations, Elias ‘the realist’ came to mention the development of global institutions (the United Nations Organisation and the World Bank), whilst adding that it was much too early to evaluate their ability to regulate interdependences on the planetary level at some point in the future. He also mentioned the development of NGOs such as Amnesty International, which allegedly attest to the development, however feeble, of a ‘new worldwide ethos’. Finally, in Elias’s view, careful thought must be given to the multiplication of human rights-related demands. The idea or fact that ‘[a]s a human being, an individual has rights that even the state cannot deny him or her’ corresponds, in his view, to a ‘new spurt of individualisation’ that is fostered by state integration compared with tribal or clan integration, belongs to the extension of the State, and at the same time challenges the State. In particular, ‘freedom from the use and threat of violence may so far have received too little attention as one of the rights which, in the course of time – and contrary to the opposing tendencies of states – will have to be asserted for the individual in the name of humanity’ (1987, 2010: 207-208). Elias’s historical approach thus justifies why sociology should finally take the cosmopolitanism of human rights seriously.

## Civilising international relations

Elias's sociology, his relational approach, helps to deconstruct the State on which it is centred. Elias regretted, moreover, that history still 'largely' took the form of 'chronicles of the States'. Eichmann's trial allegedly illustrates this well, since the memory of the Jews that he murdered appears to have been re-awakened thanks to the State of Israel and its power resources (1996: 302). The long-term historical approach, for its part, reminds us that States did not always exist. They were even invented recently, and there is no reason why they should not disappear one day. In any event, they change, in connection with shifts in the balances of power between the various dominant and dominated groups both within and outside the State. Finally, the theory of the civilising process *stricto sensu* grants a central role to States, where 'the pacification of human relationships – with frequent relapses – has progressed and the level of individual revulsion against the use of physical force has risen correspondingly' (Elias, 1983, 2007: 142-143). However, it also reveals the decivilising processes, delays, and contrasting developments of which the State is just as much a central agent.

The pacification of social relations inside States has indeed been accompanied by a tenfold increase in violence outside the State and, once again, these two phenomena are interdependent: They are the two faces of the State. As was mentioned earlier, the State, like all survival units, emerged in and for war. However, wars and taxes had particularly crucial importance for the construction of the State, including for the subsequent development of national democracy. Wars, like colonisation, it might be added, are thus an integral part of a dynamic in the West that it would be wrong to take to be synonymous with progress. The result is thus the establishment of a 'double standard of civilisation' or a 'duality of the normative codes' between what is permitted, tolerated, encouraged, or prohibited in behaviours inside Nation-States on the one hand and what is permitted, tolerated, encouraged, or prohibited in contexts of armed conflict between the members of what have been identified as 'enemy' survival units. On this level, Elias repeats, nothing or almost nothing has changed since the birth of States, if not the explosion of their destructive power: 'Yet the relationships between states have hardly changed. Basically, they have retained their primal character. Every state can freely use physical violence in its relationships with other states, unless its leaders and citizens are discouraged from using it by another, stronger state' (1983, 2007: 143).

The reason given for this in this passage is simple: 'At this level, no monopoly of physical power, no superior force, exists which can compel even the strongest and most powerful states to keep the peace and to refrain from threatening or using violence in their dealings with other states. There are legal institutions at the inter-state level, too. However, since their rulings cannot be backed by military or police forces which are stronger than those of any possible law-breakers, their effect on inter-state relationships is, at present, rather small' (1983, 2007: 143). Excerpts of this type are legion in Elias's writings, and it is difficult not to see in them a plea in favour of a global State, which is sometimes presented as the only possible outcome. Be that as it may, the prevalence of an unregulated 'law of the strongest' on the international level, or international law that is not guaranteed by the legitimate and effective use of force, which amounts to the same thing, would appear to attest to an inability to take note of the threat of global destruction: 'We live in the age of technological warfare, with weapons that threaten the survival of humanity, as if interstate relations could still be managed as if they were in the time of Peter the Great or Louis XIV, when cannons were the

most intimidating implements of warfare.’ (1987, 2010: 205).

Elias also points to foreign policy as remaining largely free from democratic control: ‘In the inter-state sphere, governments are still to a large extent absolute rulers, with a large measure of freedom of decision...The discrepancy between the functional democratisation of internal affairs and a management of foreign policy that is still in many ways absolutist has far-reaching consequences...’. In particular: ‘A deliberate conditioning of the conscience that presents identification with the single state as the state citizen’s highest duty plays its part in making arms races and the drift into war seem like forces beyond human control...The mass of the population...are not in a position to resist the appeal to their national loyalty. They are thus caught in a vicious circle which inevitably makes measures to secure the survival of their own group appear like measures threatening the survival of the opposing group, and vice versa.’ (1987, 2010: 206).

We shall take care not to caricature the contrasts, in terms of ‘civilizational advances’, between the various levels of human relations. To speak only of violence, it is clear that violence has not at all disappeared inside the State itself. Rather, having been relatively domesticated or ‘restricted to barracks’ (*enkaserniert*), as the German puts it, violence has shifted, been sublimated and suppressed. The State’s monopolisation of legitimate physical force has not only gone hand in hand with the increase in violence between States; it has also contributed to the development of a symbolic violence and, according to Elias, influenced in this by Freud, to the suppression of the individual’s aggressive drives, which are manifested more in struggles ‘within the individual against this supervising part of themselves’ (1939, 2012: 414).

International relations between States and between individuals have not remained totally foreign to the civilising processes that have affected behaviours, sensitivities, and representations within the various boundaries. Over the centuries, Elias argued, the growing chains of interdependence helped to increase revulsion for other people’s suffering and an enhanced ability to put oneself in the shoes of others who were increasingly remote, different, and foreign from oneself. Moreover, such ‘progress’, in the strong sense, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was revealed by the threat of more radical regression than any that preceded it. Elias unveiled this idea, which is capital to understand one of the ethical dimensions of the theory of the civilising process, and its specifically international dimension as well, almost incidentally, in a passage of *The Germans* that discusses the degree of exceptionality of the Nazis’ extermination of the Jews. In refining the idea that any war is a commensurate regression into barbarity, he put forward the idea that most of the wars that shook up modern Europe were only ‘limited’ regressions: ‘Certain minimum rules of civilized conduct were generally still observed even in the treatment of prisoners of war. With a few exceptions, a kernel of self-esteem, which prevents the senseless torturing of enemies and allows identification with one’s enemy in the last instance as a human being, together with compassion for his suffering, did not entirely lapse. In the attitude of the National Socialists towards the Jews none of this survived. At least on a conscious level, the torment, suffering and death of Jews did not appear to mean more to them than that of flies’ (Elias 1996: 309).

Whatever its detractors may say, Elias’s theory is not exactly one of blind optimism. What is more, it would be a mistake to believe that his treatment of international relations was included there only to give a somewhat forced proof of the clairvoyance of a theory ‘of civilisation’ that was poorly named or put forward at a very inappropriate moment in the middle of the twentieth century. ‘It is usual,’ Elias wrote, ‘to ask how is it possible that people



within a society can physically strike or kill others – how, for example, can they become terrorists?’ Now, the truly ‘surprising and unique’ thing is actually the ‘relatively high degree of non-violence that characterises social organisations today’ (1996: 174). That is why the most comprehensive level is the one that counts the most, why ‘it is ultimately the dynamics of inter-state relationships which give the lead’ (1987, 2007: 147), despite or, on the contrary, by virtue of this international dynamic’s ‘lag’, which reminds the sociologist of the magnitude of the ‘unveiling’ work to which s/he must contribute. The epistemological, political, and ethical stakes riding on Elias’s sociology – and on sociology according to Elias – may not be separated from each other easily, and this interdependence – yet again – amongst the three levels of his discourse shows up particularly clearly in his historical sociology of international relations and politics.

### **Concluding with unanswered questions**

The treatment of international relations in Norbert Elias’s writings appears to be marked by a paradox, if not a contradiction, typical of the paradoxes and contradictions that stud his work and help make it so interesting and stimulating. On the one hand, it rejects the artificial separation between what goes on inside States and that which concerns relations between States or extends beyond survival units. On the other hand, process sociology reserves a totally specific treatment for relations between and beyond States, perhaps because international relations provide, in a way, proof of the unfinished nature or paradoxical evolution of the civilising process. This contradiction is unravelled in part when one considers the notion of interdependence, which, when it is deployed in human time and space, signifies a continuity, a gradualness, and a complexification, all at the same time, of social relations and processes on different interconnected levels from the most comprehensive to the most intimate.

The notion of interdependence, which we might be tempted to call functional and materialistic, forces one to take an interest in – and indeed, Elias’s writings do so abundantly – everything that it influences, even determines, but seems to leave aside beforehand, *i.e.*, the players’ feelings, experiences, visions of social and political structures, fears, and blockages; everything that gives the figurations their historical depth, their subjective and irrational dimension, which is often predominant on the highest, and least controlled, level of interdependence and planetary risk. For Norbert Elias, the ‘realistic’ approach to which he was so attached is, at the end of the day, the one that examines the representations that are not what they claim to be, led by the one that continues to consider the Nation-State to be an effective survival unit today. And we might add that the ‘non-normative’ sociology that he advocated probably entailed taking on, even if implicitly or in dubs and dabs, its share of normativity. It is in this respect that Elias’s analysis of international relations, with its criticism of nationalism and the demand for a mission for sociology that it comprises, is an indispensable key for deciphering Elias’s work, even though showing that was not the purpose of this text.

Elias’s disenchanted cosmopolitan plea stresses the fear that is stoked by all ideological discourse, a fear that is fundamental in the Cold War and war on terrorism alike. And he speaks of it not as an element of stability for keeping tensions in balance, which refers in turn to the central role of a balance of power, but rather as an element that is constantly threatening an embryonic civilising process when it comes to international relations. In this respect, we might think that in Elias’s thinking ‘diplomatic politeness’ does not at all attest to the

derailing of true politics founded on the friend and enemy, as Carl Schmitt held in *The Concept of the Political*. Rather, it evokes a courteous game that refers back to a predemocratic phase in the western civilising process that took its mark in the absolutist State. The specifically international civilising processes are still only just beginning. They remain marked by the state model and the need to define in its wake new centres of power that are better able to guarantee our survival in a global age. However, they also challenge in an unprecedented way the critical resources, legal advances, and promises of cooperation of an international society of individuals.

## References

- Guillaume Devin, 1995, 'Norbert Elias et l'analyse des relations internationales', *Revue française de science politique*, 45(2): 305-327.
- Delmotte, Florence, 2002, 'Norbert Elias et l'intégration postnationale', *Swiss Political Science Review*, 8(1): 3-26.
- Delmotte, Florence, 2007, *Norbert Elias: la civilisation et l'Etat. Enjeux épistémologiques et politiques d'une sociologie historique*, Bruxelles, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.
- Delmotte, Florence, 2012, 'About Post-National Integration in Norbert Elias's Work: Towards a Socio-Historical Approach', *Human Figurations*, 1(2), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0001.209>.
- De Swaan, Abram, 2005, 'Widening Circles of Identification: Emotional Concerns in Sociogenetic Perspective', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 12(2): 25-39.
- Elias, Norbert, 1996, *The Germans. Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1989), translated from the German and with a Preface by Eric Dunning and Stephen Mennell, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Elias, Norbert, 2006, *What is Sociology?* (1970), Collected Works Vol. 6, Dublin, University College Dublin Press.
- Elias, Norbert, 2007, 'The Fishermen in the Maelstrom' (1983), *Involvement and Detachment*, Collected Works Volume 8, Dublin, University College Dublin Press: 105-178.
- Elias, Norbert, 2010, *The Society of Individuals* (1991), Collected Works Vol. 10, Dublin, University College Dublin Press: 7-62.
- Elias, Norbert, 2010, 'Changes in the We-I Balance' (1987), *The Society of Individuals*, Collected Works Vol. 10, Dublin: University College Dublin Press: 137-208.
- Elias, Norbert, 2012, *On the Process of Civilisation. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (1939) (Previous editions published under the title *The Civilizing Process*), Collected Works Vol. 3, Dublin, University College Dublin Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen, 1998, *L'intégration républicaine*, translated from German by R. Rochlitz, Paris, Fayard.
- Lacassagne, Aurélie, 2012, 'Cultures of Anarchy as Figurations: Reflections on Wendt, Elias and the English School', *Human Figurations* 1(2) <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0001.207>.
- Linklater, Andrew, 2004, 'Norbert Elias, The "Civilizing Process" and the Sociology of International Relations', *International Politics* 41: 3-35.
- Linklater, Andrew, 2011, 'Process sociology and international relations', *The Sociological Review* 59: 48-64.
- Mennell, Stephen, 2007, *The American Civilizing Process*, Cambridge, Polity Press.