Norbert Elias, The ‘Civilizing Process’ and the Sociology of International Relations

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Norbert Elias’s sociological analysis of ‘the civilizing process’ — the process by which modern European societies have been pacified over the last five centuries and emotional identification between the inhabitants of each society has increased — has much to contribute to historical–sociological approaches to International Relations. Elias analysed dominant attitudes towards cruelty and suffering in different phases of human history in his study of the civilizing process, his central purpose being to demonstrate the existence of a long-term trend to lower the ‘threshold of repugnance’ against public acts of violence within modern states. His observations about international relations were principally Hobbesian in nature, although Grotian and Kantian themes also permeated his writings. The latter are evident in his reflections on whether cosmopolitan emotions are stronger in the modern era than in earlier epochs. An empirical analysis of dominant global attitudes towards cruelty in world politics and an investigation of levels of emotional identification between different societies can extend Elias’s study of the civilizing process. This form of inquiry can also contribute to the development of Martin Wight’s pioneering essays on the sociology of states-systems and enlarge the English School’s analysis of ‘civility’ and the ‘civilizing process’ in international relations. More broadly, new linkages between historical sociology and International Relations can be developed around an investigation of the dominant responses to cruelty and suffering — and levels of cosmopolitan identification — in different states-systems.

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‘Things that were once permitted are now forbidden’²

Introduction

Efforts to build connections between historical sociology, analyses of world history and the study of long-term processes of change in global politics are at the forefront of current scholarship in International Relations (Buzan and Little, 2000; Denmark *et al.*, 2000; Hobden and Hobson, 2002). Norbert

Elias's sociological analysis of 'the civilizing process' — the process by which modern European societies have become pacified over the last four centuries and emotional identification between the members of each society has increased — has much to contribute to historical–sociological approaches to International Relations. However, Elias's writings have been largely neglected by Anglo-American students of International Relations,³ and there has been no detailed examination to date of the importance of his work for attempts to strengthen links with historical sociology.⁴

Among sociologists of his generation, Elias was unusual in recognizing the importance of international relations for the wider social sciences, but he did not write extensively on world politics or display an acquaintance with the central literature.⁵ Many of his comments on relations between states will be familiar to students of international relations. This is especially true of his realist observation that 'elimination contests' will dominate world politics as long as independent political communities are locked in the struggle for power and security in the condition of anarchy. But it is important to look beyond such Hobbesian themes in Elias's thought to his comments about dominant attitudes towards cruelty, violence and human suffering in different eras for insights that can enrich historical–sociological approaches to international relations. Elias raised the question of whether the civilizing process had influenced the evolution of the modern international system. This was an underdeveloped area of his research, and one that can obviously profit from engaging with the academic study of international relations, and especially with English School, constructivist and legal approaches to principles and norms in world politics, which echo Elias's principal sociological concerns.⁶ This paper concentrates on the significance of Elias's analysis of the civilizing process for efforts to develop the sociology of systems of states that Wight outlined in his pioneering essays in this area (see Wight, 1979). Attention will be paid to Hobbesian and Grotian themes in Elias's writings, but the most important resources for future developments in this area will be found in the Kantian dimensions of his thought.

The discussion begins by drawing attention to the importance of 'civility' and the 'civilizing process' for the English School's reflections on international society. There are clear but neglected parallels between this mode of analysis and Elias's account of the development of the modern European state. Each approach can profit from the other, and it is important to begin to bring their respective strengths within a more comprehensive analysis of the development of human society. Elias's theory of the civilizing process in both its domestic and international domains will then be discussed prior to providing a brief overview of his broad generalizations about whether Ancient Greek international relations differed from the modern states-system in the extent of its toleration of cruelty to foreigners and in its attitudes to human suffering. The

discussion concludes by outlining ways in which a sociology of states-systems can profit from engaging with Elias's analysis of long-term patterns of change in modern European societies, and specifically from his reflections on changing attitudes towards harm (Linklater, 2002a). A typology of forms of harm is introduced to show how elements from Wight and Elias's complementary perspectives can be combined to prepare the foundations of a new empirical research programme that compares civilizing processes in different international systems. An analysis of dominant attitudes towards human cruelty and other forms of bodily and mental harm in different states-systems — and specifically of the extent to which cosmopolitan emotions influenced the long-term development of these forms of world political organisation — is central to this proposed field of investigation.

The English School, Civility and International Order

Evidence that the idea of civility remains important for the analysis of the development of modern social systems can be found in a recent collection of essays, which builds on the historical writings of Sir Keith Thomas (Williams, 1976, 48–50; Burke *et al.*, 2000). Civility refers to social conventions, manners or habits and related psychological traits and emotional dispositions that bring order and harmony to human affairs.⁷ Of course, the part that moral and legal conventions and psychological orientations play in preserving international order is the English School's main point of departure; however, the literature on its development has largely overlooked the ways in which its members have occasionally used the ideas of civility and the civilizing process to understand order between independent political communities (see, however, Sharp, 2003). Important examples of the latter are Butterfield's claim that global political stability needs to be understood in conjunction with 'the whole civilizing process', which underpins international order (Butterfield, 1953, chapter 7). Checks on egotistical behaviour and curbs on aggressive impulses and threatening behaviour are core elements of the civilizing process as Butterfield described it.⁸ Butterfield believed — along with Wight — that all societies of states evolved within particular regional civilizations where notions of moral or religious unity were harnessed to build international order. His definition of civilization is broadly similar to Elias's use of the civilizing process. Butterfield maintained that civilization refers to 'patterns of behaviour which emerge over time through the experience of people who are capable of empathy with others and capable of denying themselves short-term gains for the long-term goal of maintaining ordered relations' (quoted in Sharp, 2001, 11; Sharp, 2003). Butterfield's stress on empathy was mainly concerned with the role of the diplomatic community in preserving order, while Elias was interested in long-

term patterns of social and political change, including the development of empathetic emotions, within European states. Each approach can contribute to understanding whether, or to what extent, 'cosmopolitan emotions' have influenced world politics (see Nussbaum, 2002). It will be argued later in this paper that Wight's comments on whether commitments to visions of a universal moral community have influenced the development of international societies can be taken further by engaging with, and building on, Elias's interest in changing levels of emotional identification within European different political communities over the past five centuries.

Several more recent works by members of the English School have used the ideas of civility and civilization to analyse the moral, cultural and emotional foundations of international order. Watson (1997, 20) has described the 'diplomatic dialogue' as '*a civilized process* based on awareness and respect for other people's point of view; and *a civilizing one* also, because the continuous exchange of ideas, and the attempts to find mutually acceptable solutions to conflicts of interest, increase that awareness and respect' (italics added). Jackson's claim that the modern society of states is the most successful form of world political organization thus devised for promoting 'mutual intelligibility, recognition, communication, and interaction between people of different civilizations' emphasizes the importance of 'civility' in bridging competing accounts of civilized conduct (Jackson, 2000, 408). Jackson (*ibid.*) argues that 'civility' is to be preferred to 'civilization' because it is not burdened with egocentric perceptions that societies can be arranged hierarchically in terms of their moral and political development (and usually in recent centuries to claim superiority for the West). Civility for Jackson has a vital role to play in understanding the modern 'global covenant'. Like Butterfield, he maintains that mutual understanding, tolerance and self-constraint are central to how political entities with divergent or discordant world-views learn to coexist.

The more general point to make at this stage is that Butterfield, Watson and Jackson use the notion of civility or civilization in world politics without derogatory connotations to describe shared understandings about the need for constraints on force and for sensitivity to the cultural preferences and political interests of others.⁹ (There is a parallel with Elias, who claimed he did not use the idea of a civilizing process in a pejorative manner to denote the superiority of Western civilization). Of course, members of the English School are well aware that European states in the 19th century used 'the standard of civilization' to justify excluding non-Western peoples from the society of states and to describe the changes they had to undergo to become equal members (Gong, 1984). Indeed, their interest in the nature of Europe's professed civilizational identity and in the impact it had on other societies can be usefully linked with Elias's analysis of how Europeans understood their civilizing project to include a global civilizing mission. The English School's analysis of

how Europe distinguished between civilized, barbaric and savage societies runs parallel to Elias's reflections on how distinctions between 'established' social groups and 'outsiders' have been constructed and amended in the course of the civilizing process (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Members of the English School have argued that the idea of civilization was part of the self-understanding of states involved in the creation of an international society that excluded 'uncivilized' peoples. They have also argued that the development of a global civilizing process that defends the virtues of civility (Jackson, 2000) has made it possible for culturally diverse European and non-European political communities to come together as at least notional equals in the first universal society of states. Butterfield's stress on the importance of empathy for international order is relevant for understanding the expansion of international society, since that process could not have occurred without profound changes in emotional responses to Europe's treatment of colonial peoples (see below, 23 and also Crawford, 2001).

English School references to civility and civilizing processes emphasize that international order cannot be reduced to the fact that the balance of power places external constraints on state behaviour.¹⁰ They stress that order depends on internalized constraints, including a common desire to place restraints on violence, a shared willingness not to exploit the weaknesses of others, an ability to empathize with others' fears and interests and a moral outlook that prefers compromise and accommodation to egotism, self-righteousness and mutual recrimination. Exactly the same stress on the importance of internalized constraints on violence and self-control is central to Elias's account of the civilizing process.

A key difference between the approaches is that Elias focused on how these internalized constraints developed within territorial states, whereas the English School considers civility and civilizing processes in anarchical societies. Bull and Watson (1984, 9) argued that those phenomena reveal that 'international political life, including its normative or institutional dimension, has its own logic, and is not to be understood simply as the reflection of economic interests or productive processes'. They recognized, in other words, that civility in international society is interconnected with civility in the constituent parts, although they did not examine the connections in order to assess the relative importance of endogenous and exogenous influences.¹¹ The opposite bias is found in Elias's approach. But just as the English School is aware that global civility is not cut off from domestic civility, so was Elias clear that the long-term patterns of social change with which he was concerned had to be viewed in conjunction with international politics and with large-scale patterns of social and political change that affected humanity as a whole (Elias, 1991, 139; see also Elias, 1987a, 82).¹² It will be argued that Elias devoted more attention than members of the English School to the relationship between these different

levels, and specifically to relations between domestic and international attitudes towards cruelty and suffering. This is one of the main respects in which his perspective can contribute to the 'sociology of states-systems' envisaged in Wight's essays.¹³

Civilization and its Discontents

Contemporary social and political theories — post-structuralist and post-colonial perspectives in particular — are understandably suspicious when descriptions of modern societies make reference to civilization because this language has so often promoted binary oppositions between 'advanced' and 'backward' stages of human development. Elias's choice of terms was unfortunate if the idea of the civilizing process did not have the normative task of defending the progressive nature of Western modernity. The first issue to discuss in considering the significance of his writings for International Relations is whether his account of the civilizing process was free from such Eurocentric overtones.

Elias and writers influenced by him have been emphatic that modern European societies are not alone in undergoing a civilizing process. A recurrent claim is that there is 'no zero point of civilizing processes, no point at which human beings are uncivilized and begin to be civilized' (Elias, 1992, 146). His central point was that all societies have to socialize their members into shared understandings about the importance of observing constraints on violence; and all need to equip them with skills in adapting behaviour to the legitimate needs of others. Elias makes this point most forcefully in a crucial claim for the argument of this paper, namely that all societies confront 'the problem of how people can manage to satisfy their elementary animalic needs in their life together, without reciprocally destroying, frustrating, demeaning or in other ways harming each other time and time again in their search for this satisfaction — in other words, without fulfilment of the elementary needs of one person or group of people being achieved at the cost of those of another person or group' (Elias, 1996, 31).¹⁴ In short, civilizing processes are universal features of human society, and a sociology that endeavours to understand them can embrace all times and places without pejorative connotations (see Mennell, 1996a).¹⁵ A central sociological task is to compare 'social patterns of individual self-restraint and the manner in which they are built into the individual person in the form of what one now calls 'conscience' or perhaps 'reason' (Elias, 1992, 146). An analysis of civilizing processes could therefore compare 'different stages of the same society' or 'different societies' without assuming that the modern phase of European history is superior to all others (Elias, 1995, 8–9).¹⁶ To avoid misunderstanding, it is crucial to remember his claim that his research

had 'not been guided ... by the idea that our civilized mode of behaviour is the most advanced of all humanly possible modes of behaviour' (Elias, 1998b, 44).

Elias's most celebrated claim is that over recent centuries, Western societies have developed constraints on aggressive or violent behaviour, which surpass functional equivalents in the Middle Ages and possibly in Ancient Greece. This formulation immediately raises the question of how such a claim can be made non-pejoratively — that is, without assuming the West is more civilized than at least those two historical epochs.¹⁷ Elias maintained that empirical statements about the lower threshold of revulsion against wounding and killing in the Ancient World were not designed to 'cast a slur' on Greek civilization. In Ancient Greece, greater tolerance of physical violence coexisted with very high levels of artistic, philosophical and scientific achievement. Comparative judgements about civilizing processes in different eras were not 'ethnocentric value-judgments' bred from the assumption that 'we are good' and 'they are bad' (Elias, 1986, 133–134). Sociological analysis could not begin with the observation that other societies 'had been free to choose between *their* standards and *their* norms and ours, and having had this choice, had taken the wrong decision' (Elias, 1986, 135).¹⁸ Crucially, such comparisons would reveal that the lower threshold of revulsion against violence in modern Europe is neither irreversible nor free from major social and political dangers and problems.

Three points need to be made in this context. The first is that Elias repeatedly claimed that the modern civilizing process has had little influence on interstate relations.¹⁹ Constraints on force between members of the same society have long been accompanied by a high tolerance of force in relations with other societies, one consequence being that a major contradiction exists at the heart of modern civilization. Elias did not leave matters there, but a more detailed account of how Grotian and Kantian themes moderated his Hobbesian position must be postponed to later in the discussion.

A second point is that the civilizing process, although usually 'unplanned', has often been advanced by social groups that used invidious distinctions between the 'established' and the 'outsider' to promote their political ends (see Mennell, 1996b, 126). A crucial theme in Elias's writings is that violent tendencies or 'decivilizing processes' (sometimes anchored in hierarchical representations of human differences) *always* attend the civilizing process. A complacent reading of Western modernity was expressly ruled out by his statement that 'civilizing processes go along with decivilizing processes', and by the supporting observation that the key 'question is to what extent one of the two directions is dominant' (quoted in Fletcher, 1987, 83). The members of modern societies might regard constraints on physical violence as evidence of progress along at least one axis of social development, but sociological inquiry

had to stress the other side of the civilizing process that undermines notions of modern Europe's superior social and political achievements.

Elias's distinction between civilization as a 'condition' and civilization as a 'process' is helpful for the purpose of unpacking this last comment. The point of this distinction was to stress the dangers that were inherent in the temptation to which Europeans succumbed in the 19th century, namely the belief that civilization is evidence of 'inborn superiority' rather than the product of a complex historical process requiring 'constant effort'. The delusion that Western civilization was a natural condition, a conceit that began in the Napoleonic era, led Europeans to claim a natural right to civilize savage or barbaric peoples (Elias, 2000, 43). The collective myth that their civilized condition could be taken for granted had disastrous political consequences in the 20th century because it left many in Europe 'ill-prepared' for the rise of Fascism and for genocide (Elias, 1997, 314). One illusion of the epoch was that genocide belonged to a primitive phase of human development in which states and empires wallowed in cruelty and violence without regard for sympathy and compassion (see Fletcher, 1997, 158). Many came to believe that cruelty of this magnitude was simply impossible in modern Europe. A central objective of Elias's study, *The Germans*, was to explain how the Nazis destroyed this belief by unleashing decivilizing processes that altered the Europe's course of social and political development over the past five centuries. The Nazi era demonstrated that ostensibly civilized states were not immune from the barbarism deemed characteristic of earlier stages of human history and typical of the allegedly uncivilized regions of the world.²⁰

Along with Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) and Bauman (1989) in more recent times, Elias set out to understand what it is about modern Western 'civilization which make for barbarities of this kind'; he sought to explain why 'such an outbreak of savagery and barbarism' as occurred in Nazi Germany 'might stem directly from tendencies inherent in the structure of modern industrial societies' (Fletcher, 1997, 158ff, 168ff; Elias, 1996, 303). Part of his answer was that the development of modern territorial states created new levels of personal security and enabled high levels of social interdependence to develop. The 'paradoxical effect' of this process was the emergence of unusually high levels of social isolation and detachment (Smith, 2001, 21). As we shall see, Elias believed that the importance of external constraints on individual behaviour declined in importance over five centuries; atomized individuals became increasingly responsible for placing constraints on their aggressive inclinations; public acts of violence and cruelty became less necessary for social integration, and what is now widely regarded as disgusting and distasteful (not only punishment but also the slaughter of animals and death itself) began to be screened from public view.²¹ Elias proceeded to argue that these social and political developments were crucial for understanding

how genocide was possible in a modern European society. The broad pattern of Elias's argument appears to agree with Bauman's claim that greater social distance between individuals made modern forms of bureaucratic violence possible.²² Large numbers of those who participated in the Holocaust were not active participants in public acts of cruelty, and indeed they did not encounter the victims of genocide in their everyday lives. On this argument, many were only required to play what they may have regarded as insignificant roles in the bureaucratic apparatus of industrialized killing.²³ Modern structures of bureaucratic power checked the development of collective guilt or the sense of personal responsibility for human suffering in the context of unusually high levels of social detachment or isolation that have been created by the civilizing process (see Mennell, 1998, 248). This specific point about the violent tendencies that reside in the structure of modern industrial societies resonates with Arendt's influential discussion of the 'banality of evil' and with analyses of the 'bystander' whose conscience is not scarred by acts of cruelty that are largely hidden from view (Arendt, 1994; Barnett, 2000; Smith, 2001, 26).²⁴ For Elias, then, as for Foucault, the civilizing process has placed constraints on some forms of public power but makes new forms of control and domination possible. This was why Elias insisted that civilizing processes always have decivilizing possibilities and effects.

The Modern Civilizing Process

Having argued that Elias was not committed to some version of Western triumphalism, we must now turn to the main features of his account of the civilizing process. As noted earlier, Elias used the idea of the civilizing process to describe complex patterns of social and political change in Europe, which can be traced back to the 15th century. Social controls on violence and constraints on impulsive behaviour constituted its 'most basic elements', but they were not all of it. Like Butterfield or Watson, whose comments on global civilizing processes were mentioned earlier, Elias (1996, 109) believed 'the extent and depth of people's mutual identification with each other and, accordingly, the depth and extent of their ability to empathize and capacity to feel for and sympathize with other people in their relationships with them' were 'central criteria of a civilizing process'.²⁵ A possible weakness in his position is that he does not show how this claim is consistent with his emphasis on increasing detachment between individuals, but we must pass over this matter here.²⁶ Suffice it to note that Elias set out to understand long-term patterns of change in European societies that affected the organization of economic and political life and the emotional lives of their members. This desire to understand the relationship between social and political structures (the

sociogenetic) and the emotional lives of individuals, including their perceptions of guilt, shame and so forth (the psychogenetic) is a striking and original feature of Elias's perspective of immense significance for the study of international relations. On these foundations, Elias developed his argument that the inhabitants of modern societies have come to enjoy levels of physical security that are rare when viewed in the broadest historical context.

To account for this development, Elias argued that the rise of stable monopolies of power (in the form of absolutist states) promoted internal pacification that allowed modern populations to evolve a lengthening network of social interdependence, which required greater self-discipline and higher levels of emotional identification with other members of their society. In the initial stages, absolutist states placed external constraints on the behaviour of the knights, but in the succeeding centuries 'the self-restraint apparatus (became) stronger relative to external constraints' and to 'the direct fear of others'. These processes were first evident in the court societies of early modern Europe, but they spread in a largely unplanned fashion to shape what Elias and Bourdieu called the 'habitus' of modern life. Over the five centuries under Elias's investigation, individuals came 'to identify more readily with other people as such, regardless of social origins' as a result of a 'long-term civilizing trend towards more even and more thorough control over the emotions' (Elias, 1978, 155). Greater 'self-control in the harmonization of people to each other's activities became something more taken for granted' and necessary for the social integration of individuals performing highly specialized tasks (Elias, 1996, 34; 2000, 367; 2001a, 136). The analysis of how external checks on aggressive impulses were gradually replaced by internalized constraints on human behaviour drew attention to the development of the modern conscience and to profound changes in 'attitudes with regard to the perpetration of violent acts causing harm to other people, animals or even property in Western societies' (Fletcher, 1997, 19; Elias, 1996, 335; 2000, 161ff). Over time, modern societies developed a lower 'threshold of repugnance' to public acts of cruelty that set them apart from the medieval era.

It is seldom 'realized', Elias (2001b, 48) argued that, 'physical security from violence by other people is not so great in all societies as in our own'. The historical evidence revealed that 'the scope of identification' is wider in modern Europe than it was in earlier centuries. As a result of the civilizing process, most of the inhabitants of European societies 'no longer regard it as a Sunday entertainment to see people hanged, quartered, broken on the wheel ... As compared with antiquity, our identification with other people, our sharing in their suffering and death, has increased' (Elias, 2001b, 2–3). In the preface to *The Civilizing Process*, Elias (2000, ix) maintained that if the 'members of present-day Western civilized society were to find themselves suddenly transported into a past epoch of their own society, such as the medieval–

feudal period, they would find there much that they esteem 'uncivilized' in other societies today ... They would, depending on their situation and inclinations, be either attracted by the wilder, more unrestrained and adventurous life of the upper classes in this society, or repulsed by the 'barbaric' customs, the squalor and coarseness ... encountered there'. They would discover a very different social world in which public displays of extreme emotional responses were commonplace: 'in warrior society, the individual could use physical violence if he was strong and powerful enough; he could openly indulge his inclinations in many directions that have subsequently been closed by social prohibitions. But he paid for this greater opportunity of direct pleasure with a greater chance of direct fear Both joy and pain were discharged more freely' (quoted in Smith, 2001, 111; see also Elias, 1992, 147). Contrasts between 'great kindness' and 'naked cruelty' were 'sharper' than in modern societies where 'anything distasteful' or repugnant has been gradually moved 'behind the scenes' (Elias, 2000, 102; 2001b, 15).²⁷

We have seen that Elias stressed the coexistence of civilizing and decivilizing processes in his account of how the Nazi era was possible in Western Europe, and this raises the question of how far modern constraints on violence can resist political efforts to weaken them or are easily dissolved. Elias (1996, 196) maintained that, in the case of 'state violence in the Hitler era', 'the long build-up period which preceded the great acts of barbarism' was 'hardly visible' at first, but then 'became more obvious as though they had sprung from nowhere'. Turning to relations between states, the two world wars revealed that 'the sensitivity towards killing, towards dying people and death clearly evaporated quite quickly in the majority of people' when they confronted growing insecurity (Elias, 2001b, 51). But a strong theme in Elias's writings is that the 'process of brutalization and dehumanization ... in relatively civilized societies always requires considerable time'. For reasons given earlier, the violence of the Nazi era may well confirm his argument about changing attitudes to public cruelty over recent centuries, although more empirical research is probably required to decide whether Elias's account of European modernity is essentially correct — see also Spierenburg (1991, chapter 7) and Garland (1990, chapter 10).²⁸ Certainly, as Elias argued, the Nazi persecution of the Jews did not diminish the widespread revulsion against cruelty, which is a principal feature of European modernity as he understands it.²⁹ At least this feature of the evolution of modern societies has not been, and cannot be, easily reversed if Elias's analysis is broadly correct (see Fletcher, 1997, 24).³⁰ In these comments about general responses to the violence of the Nazi era, Elias argues that the civilizing process has not been confined to social and political relations in modern European societies, but has had some influence on the development of human society and on the conduct of international relations. This observation has great importance for the sociology of states-system, but it is

necessary to turn to the relationship between Hobbesian, Grotian and Kantian themes in Elias's occasional comments about world politics before considering this theme in more detail.

A Global Civilizing Process?

The last few comments raise several questions about the relevance of Elias's project for the study of international relations. To what extent has the civilizing process that Elias identified in the relations between states and citizens, men and women, parents and children and in the treatment of non-human species also influenced relations between political communities?³¹ Is there a global civilizing process that weakens the sovereign state's capacity to behave violently towards its own people and that demands greater compliance with the humanitarian laws of war?³² To what extent has the economic and technological integration of the human race contributed to a global civilizing process in which the members of different political communities come to identify more closely with one another? Are emotional responses to human suffering changing so that growing numbers of citizens believe that they have moral and political responsibilities to the world at large? Is the modern era witnessing fundamental changes then in the ways in which human beings are bound together, and separated from one another, in world politics?³³

The Hobbesian response that Elias often gives to these questions is that international politics have persistently lagged behind developments within modern states with the result that 'a curious split runs through our civilization' (Elias, 1996, 177). He drew on Bergson's writings to argue that, throughout human history, most societies have possessed moral codes that condone, and often actively encourage, acts of violence towards other peoples that are proscribed in relations within the group.³⁴ Elias used the expression, 'the duality of nation-states' normative codes', to describe this condition in the modern world (see Elias, 1996, 154ff, 461). He added that the formation of stable monopolies of power was crucial to the pacification of modern societies, and maintained that the absence of a global monopoly of power has meant that relations between states have mainly consisted of 'elimination contests' in which political actors respond to what Elias (1996, 176–177; 1978, 30) called the 'double-bind process' — or to the security dilemma as it is known in International Relations.³⁵ 'On this level', Elias (1996, 176) argued, 'we are basically still living exactly as our forefathers did in the period of their so-called "barbarism"' (see also Elias, 1987a, 74). He added that the 'vicious circle' of 'mutual distrust between human groups', and 'unbridled use of violence' when leaders 'expected an advantage and were not afraid of retaliation', has been almost 'normal throughout the ages'. Only rarely has this condition of endemic

distrust and conflict been 'tempered' by the 'fear of retaliation by superhuman agencies' (Elias, 1996, 137–138); only rarely have societies recognized 'that if they want to live without fear of each other ... they can only do so by imposing certain common rules of conduct and the corresponding restraints upon themselves' (*ibid.*).³⁶ Just as formerly each tribe was a constant danger for the other tribes, so nowadays each state represents a constant danger for other states'. Moreover, war is one social practice that remains largely free from human control.³⁷ Clearly, all these comments are unambiguously realist.³⁸

Of course, many approaches to international politics — realism and neo-realism aside — will quarrel with this general interpretation. Members of the English School will be struck by the failure to recognize that anarchical societies have developed legal and moral mechanisms that constrain the use of force; many will emphasize that the modern society of states has made substantial progress in promoting respect for the principle that all persons should be free from human rights violations and spared 'unnecessary suffering' in war. As noted earlier, they have explicitly stated that an international society is the site for the development of civilizing processes and forms of civility that are not as developed as their domestic counterparts, yet strong enough to influence how sovereign communities behave.³⁹ From this vantage-point, Elias's approach is too committed to the Hobbesian view that civilizing processes cannot develop in the absence of a stable monopoly of power.

Despite his essential realism, Elias was often sympathetic to the Grotian interpretation of world politics. He maintained that societies have not constructed the duality of normative codes with its emphasis on the priority of duties to citizens over duties to humanity in uniformly stark ways (Elias, 1996, 154ff). The 19th century German political thinkers invariably stressed 'the incompatibility of the two codes' of morality, whereas their British counterparts were more inclined to search for a compromise between these ethical positions (Elias, 1996, 160ff). This reference to the British zest for compromise immediately brings to mind Wight's view that the Grotian approach represents the *via media* between the Hobbesian and Kantian approaches to international relations (see Wight, 1991, 15). Elias (1996, 134ff) came close to the Grotian view that states can at least moderate the Hobbesian dynamic when he maintained that aristocratic internationalism upheld interstate rules of conduct in the 19th century. In an argument that is familiar to readers of Carr (1945) and Morgenthau (1973), he stated that the aristocratic code of honour and chivalry applied the same standards of morality to domestic and international politics.⁴⁰ Later changes in the European class structure made their own mark on relations between states. The bourgeoisie invoked 'a code of rules in the form of a morality regarded as valid for all people' in its struggle against the aristocracy, and its support for an egalitarian and universalistic moral code enabled nation-states to create some

measure of civility in world affairs. Such comments suggest that Elias transcended the limitations of the Hobbesian position by recognizing that political communities have become involved in a global civilizing process, but his comment that the bourgeoisie succumbed to the conflictual interpretation of international relations that dominated earlier eras indicates that there were no guarantees in this view that this process would survive (Elias, 1996, 143). Indeed, Elias went further by arguing that multi-state systems seem destined to be destroyed by force and replaced by empire (see Mennell, 1990, 364). Here, Elias is at one with Wight (1979, chapter 1) and broadly shared the latter's belief that international politics is 'the realm of recurrence and repetition', the sphere of human interaction that is most resistant to change (Wight, 1966a). In Wight's terms, Elias's views about international politics are best placed at that point on the theoretical spectrum where the Hobbesian and Grotian traditions intersect.

Although Elias did not develop the implications of these remarks, he was unusual among sociologists of his time in lamenting Sociology's neglect of international relations.⁴¹ He insisted that sociologists could no longer close their 'eyes to the fact that in our time, in place of the individual states, humanity split up into states is increasingly...the framework of reference, as a social unit, of many developmental processes and structural changes' (Elias, 2001a, 163). Goudsblom (1990, 174) suggests that the analysis of the civilizing process was not an account of parallel national histories and that Elias inclined to the view that 'humanity at large should be the unit of investigation'. Mennell (1990, 364) adds that this interest was essentially Hobbesian: the focus on 'the globalization of society as a very long-term social process' was grounded in the observation that 'competition between states (is) a force for globalization'.⁴² However, a deeper issue emerges in Elias's comments on globalization, namely whether widening emotional identification between all members of the human race may yet turn out to be its most lasting political effect.

These are issues to come back to in the next section. Suffice it to note that it would be curious if the civilizing process with its constraints on violence that are anchored in the emotional life did not have some influence on international relations, and indeed Elias provided several examples of its effects. The barbarism of the Nazi years was widely regarded as a disastrous departure from European codes of conduct: 'Up till then ... European wars had always been relatively 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 another human being together with compassion for his suffering, did not entirely lapse' (Elias, 1998e, 114). It was important to remember not only the 'spontaneous repugnance' towards the violence of the Nazi era but also the

decision by the victorious powers to readmit Germany into the society of states (Elias, 1996, 16 and 445; see also Mennell, 1998, 57ff). These comments invite questions about whether the modern states-system is unusual in developing constraints on violence and in witnessing the rise of cosmopolitan emotions, including empathy for suffering populations in other societies.

Recent works on international relations that analyse the delegitimation of colonialism in the 20th century, or changing emotional responses towards ethnic homogenization, or public expectations that governments will protect noncombatants from unnecessary suffering in war have explored this important area of inquiry (Crawford, 2002; Rae, 2002; Thomas, 2001; Wheeler, 2002),⁴³ but these remain unusual works in the field. What is striking is that there is no intellectual tradition of inquiry that provides a comparative analysis of levels of cruelty and compassion in states-systems, no systematic examination of long-term trends with respect to global civilizing processes in these unusual forms of world political organization and little methodical analysis of whether cosmopolitan emotional responses to human suffering are stronger in the modern society of states than in earlier times. The works mentioned earlier in this paragraph are excellent examples of how analyses of the themes that were central to Elias's sociological approach can advance the study of international relations. Of special importance is their focus not only on interests and norms but also on the emotional life, and specifically on public attitudes to cruelty, harm and suffering (Scheff, 1994). However, to create stronger linkages between these forms of analysis and to build on them, it is useful to take account of Elias's substantial writings on these topics and to note how his work can contribute to the task of creating a sociology of states-systems, which considers the role of 'cosmopolitan emotions' in world politics. This is the aspect of Elias's project that addresses Kantian as opposed to the Grotian or Hobbesian dimensions of international relations; it is the principle respect in which his vision can extend Wight's achievement in carving out the sociology of states-systems as a new and distinctive area of intellectual inquiry.

Cosmopolitan Emotions, Modernity and the Sociology of States-Systems

Elias's writings contain intriguing observations about levels of emotional identification between the members of different societies, and about attitudes to cruelty and compassion, in different phases in the history of the modern states-system. The 'wars of the seventeenth century', it was argued, 'were cruel in a somewhat different sense to those of today. The army had, as far as possible, to feed itself when on foreign soil. Plunder and rapine were not merely permitted, but were demanded by military technique. To torment the subjugated inhabitants of occupied territories ... was, as well as a means of

satisfying lust, a deliberate means of collecting war contributions and bringing to light concealed treasure. Soldiers were supposed to behave like robbers. It was a banditry exacted and organized by the army commanders' (Elias, 1998f, 22–23; 2000, 162–164). Similar contrasts separated the modern states-system from even earlier times, as the following passage suggests: 'The ancient Greeks ... who are so often held up to us as models of civilized behaviour, considered it quite a matter of course to commit acts of mass destruction, not quite identical to those of the National Socialists but, nevertheless, similar to them in several respects. The Athenian popular assembly decided to wipe out the entire population of Melos, because the city did not want to join the Athenian colonial empire. There were dozens of other examples in antiquity of what we now call genocide' (Elias, 1996, 445).⁴⁴ In that phase of human history, 'the level of 'moral' repugnance against what we now call 'genocide' and, more generally, the level of internalized inhibitions against physical violence, were decidedly lower, the feelings of guilt or shame associated with such inhibitions decidedly weaker, than they are in the relatively developed nation-states of the 20th century. Perhaps they were entirely lacking' (Elias, 1986, 145).

Elias (*ibid.*) observed that the 'difference between this and the attempted genocide in the 1930s and 1940s is at first glance not easy to grasp. Nevertheless it is quite clear. In the period of Greek antiquity, this warlike behaviour was considered normal. It conformed to the standard'. The tolerance of excessive violence in international affairs simply reflected the greater tolerance of violence in domestic affairs.⁴⁵ The relationship between emotional responses to violence in these two spheres was a central theme in Elias and Dunning's sociology of sport (Elias and Dunning, 1986). Sport, they argued, is one sphere of human activity that frequently encapsulates prevailing attitudes towards violence towards others, not least because it has often been a training ground for developing warrior skills (see also Liverani, 2001, chapter 12). Elias (1986, 136ff) claimed the Greek *pancratation*, a form of ground wrestling in which it was perfectly legitimate for adversaries to kill one another, indicated that 'the threshold of sensitivity with regard to the infliction of physical injuries and even to killing in a game-contest' was very different from what it is today, not only in domestic but also in international politics (Elias, 1986, 137). Such remarks were designed to establish that modern Europe is separated not only from the Middle Ages but also from Ancient Greece by higher levels of repugnance towards public violence.

Was Elias right that acceptance of violence was greater in the Greek polis and in ancient Greek international relations than it is today? Such questions about the relations between domestic and international violence and civility have not been the subject of much scholarly interest in International Relations, although it is worth noting that Wight drew a similar contrast between Greek and modern international relations. Commenting on Churchill's reaction to

Stalin's suggestion that the entire German General Staff should be liquidated at the end of the Second World War, Wight (1966b, 126) maintained it may be that 'modern Europe has acquired a moral sensitiveness, and an awareness of the complexities, denied to simpler civilizations. The Greeks and Romans gave small thought to political ethics, still less to international ethics'.⁴⁶ Perhaps this is a correct judgement but, as already noted, a closer analysis of the international relations of that epoch is needed in the light of more recent scholarship. Although Elias offers a plausible account of changing attitudes towards cruelty and violence in recent centuries, Fletcher (1997, 19) is undoubtedly right that his core thesis requires 'further empirical corroboration', minor correction and possibly substantial revision (see also Krieken, 1998, 131).⁴⁷ Whether recent scholarship corroborates Elias's generalization about the extent to which cruelty in war was greater in the Ancient World than in the present era is the kind of question that a comparative sociology of states-systems, which develops Wight's interest in degrees of 'moral sensitiveness', must try to answer.⁴⁸ These are large issues that must be left for another occasion. The crucial point is that Elias raises important questions about cruelty and emotional identification in international relations that provide new directions for the sociology of states-systems, questions that lay the foundations for an empirical research programme that analyses the part that domestic and international factors play in shaping levels of 'moral sensitiveness' in different states-systems. This is one way of developing the account of civility and civilizing processes present in English School writings on international relations.

The final task of this paper is to explain in more detail how Elias's approach can contribute to the sociology of states-systems as set out in Wight's essays on this subject.⁴⁹ Wight (1979, chapter 1) was principally interested in the moral, cultural and institutional underpinnings of order between political communities in the Ancient Chinese, Hellenic-Hellenistic and modern systems of states. He was mainly concerned with civility in international relations. His focus was predominantly state-centred, but he also considered the extent to which visions of a community of humankind have had a civilizing role in different systems, and also a decivilizing one when used to dominate or exterminate allegedly inferior peoples (Wight, 1991, chapter 4). His comments on ancient Greek attitudes towards cruelty in war addressed the question of different degrees of 'moral sensitiveness' in international systems. There are important parallels between Wight's remarks on this subject and Elias's comparison of attitudes to violence and levels of emotional identification in antiquity, the Middle Ages and the modern European world. Wight's references to prevalent attitudes to violence in warfare can be taken further in a sociological project with two primary ambitions: to examine the extent to which different states-systems tried to prevent or minimize the harm that

separate political communities and other actors can inflict on each other's populations; and to consider whether or not the modern states-system is unusually committed to the ethical view that its constituent parts should regard unnecessary suffering as a moral problem that all societies, individually and collectively, should attempt to solve (see Linklater, 2001, 2002a, b).

An appropriate point of departure is how different states-systems address 'the problem of harm in world politics' (Linklater, 2002a). The question of harm has long been central to the Grotian approach to international society. As Donelan (1990, chapter 4) has argued, one of the main principles of the approach is that states have a responsibility to minimize injury to one another. Illustrating the point, Jackson (2000, 20) defends the importance of prudence in world affairs, this being the 'political virtue' that requires human beings 'to take care not to harm others'. Moreover, Bull's claim that all societies have developed means of protecting members from 'violence resulting in death or bodily *harm*' (Bull, 1977, 4–5) brings to mind Elias's statement that the civilizing process is designed to solve the problem of how human beings can satisfy their needs without 'destroying, frustrating, demeaning or in other ways *harming* each other' in their attempts to satisfy them (see p. 8; italics added). To take this further we need a more complex notion of what constitutes harm than either Elias or members of the English School have provided; we also need to be conscious that the deliberate attempt to cause mental or bodily harm is not the only form of harm that raises moral problems for the structure of world politics. A sociology of global civilizing processes should address at least the following seven forms of harm:⁵⁰

- deliberate harm to the members of another political community where a state attempts to maximize the suffering of combatants and non-combatants in times of war, deliberately causes economic hardship or promotes representations of other peoples who are designed to degrade them and cause emotional pain.
- deliberate harm where a government harms its own citizens through unlawful arrest and imprisonment, torture, degrading representations and other abuses of human rights.
- deliberate harm caused by non-state actors where, for example, terrorist groups use violence against civilians, transnational corporations take advantage of vulnerable communities and criminal organizations engage in the traffic of women and children or participate in the global drugs trade.
- unintended harm where, for example, a government or business enterprise unknowingly damages the physical environment of another society.
- negligence where a state or private organization knowingly submits others to the risk of harm (by failing, for example, to ensure that those involved in hazardous industries have adequate health and safety provision).

- harm through unjust enrichment where the members of affluent societies benefit unfairly (but not intentionally) from the rules of global commerce or the vulnerability of foreign producers.
- harm through acts of omission where a community fails to take measures to alleviate the suffering of others in circumstances where there is no or little cost to itself.⁵¹

This typology attempts to capture the complexities of the civilizing process, as Elias defines it. It is constructed in the light of his claim that the civilizing process has led to constraints on the human capacity to cause physical injury to others and the development of the 'capacity to feel for and sympathize with other people' (see above, p. 13) who suffer the consequences of unintended harm. The upshot is that a sociology of global civilizing processes should focus on the extent to which efforts to prevent physical cruelty — and forms of emotional identification that embody the willingness to protect all human beings from unintended harm, negligence, unjust enrichment and from harm to self-esteem that results from the failure to rescue endangered peoples — developed in different states-systems. Such a typology raises two sets of questions about the extent to which cosmopolitan emotions shaped the long-term development of different states-systems:

- To what extent have the members of different states-systems collaborated to ensure that military personnel and civilian populations, and especially women and children, are protected from unnecessary suffering in war? To what extent has the sense of a common moral responsibility to protect individuals from violence perpetrated by their governments developed in all or most societies of states? To what extent have different states-systems developed universal obligations to protect the vulnerable from violence, domination and exploitation caused by non-state actors (pirates, mercenaries, merchant groups and so forth)?
- To what extent have the members of different states-systems acted to reduce or eliminate unintended harm and the adverse effects of negligent behaviour? To what extent have they sought to protect all human beings from unjust enrichment or from the consequences of acts of omission?

These questions form the basis of an empirical research programme that has two main purposes: first, to understand how far global civilizing processes, which demonstrated in Hegel's phrase, 'anxiety for the well-being of humankind' (quoted in Elias, 1996, 262), have developed in all states-systems; and second, to consider whether or not a global conscience or cosmopolitan moral emotions have greater influence in the modern states-system than in earlier epochs. Such questions, which are partly the result of engaging with

Elias's reflections on European modernity, represent an attempt to take the sociology of states-systems in new directions.⁵²

We should not look to Elias for a definitive assessment of how far the modern states-system differs from its predecessors; however, his writings did raise important issues that deserve further attention. One issue arises from his claim that the transition from peace to war is more difficult for the citizens of modern states than it was for the subjects of medieval kingdoms or principalities, his explanation being that the former have internalized constraints on aggressive impulses that did not exist five centuries ago when 'social prohibitions' were much weaker (see above, 15; Elias, 1987a, 80–81; 1996, 210; see also Verkamp, 1993). Some evidence of a global civilizing process that reveals changing attitudes towards physical cruelty was provided by competition between the superpowers to 'protect the individual against laws of his own state that they regard as inhumane' (Elias, 1991, 140). Perhaps their rivalry represented 'the early stage of a long process in the course of which humankind as the highest level of integration may gain equality' with the state (*ibid.*). The emergence of regional associations might permit ethical commitments to the welfare of all human beings to break free from the constraints of the nation-state (see also the discussion of the European Union in Smith, 2001, 130–131, 141).⁵³

Elias addressed what may be the most important question of all to ask about globalization, namely whether its primary effect may be to extend emotional identification between the members of different societies. More cosmopolitan emotions might develop as the lengthening chains of human interconnectedness presented diverse societies with the challenge of finding new ways of living together.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the civilizing role of globalization could well be accompanied by a powerful 'decivilizing counter thrust' in which groups reacted aggressively to the encroachment of alien values and to the insecurities that attend greater interdependence (Elias, 1995, 36; 2001a, 222; see also Fletcher, 1997, 79–80. Elias also noted that globalization means that more people than ever before are aware 'that an enormously large part of humanity live their entire lives on the verge of starvation' (Elias, 1996, 26). Although 'relatively little is done' to solve this problem, the 'feeling of responsibility which people have for each other' has probably 'increased' (*ibid.*).⁵⁵

Concerns about human poverty suggested that a global civilizing process involving changes in the 'conscience' of modern peoples had emerged from long-term patterns of change within many European states, but clearly it remained at an early and precarious stage of development.⁵⁶ The current phase of human history could be placed in perspective by imagining how it might appear to future generations, if 'humanity can survive the violence of our age'. Should 'our descendants' deliberately promote a global civilizing process that strengthens constraints on force, improves the protection of individual human

rights and reduces starvation, they would be justified in regarding modern peoples as 'late barbarians' (Elias, 1991, 146–147). In this alluring formulation, Elias summarized the achievements as well as the limitations of the civilizing process in the modern age.

Conclusion

Elias's analysis of the civilizing process described the rise of monopoly powers, the appearance of internal constraints on violence and the widening of emotional identification between the citizens of modern European states. Elias did not believe that the civilizing process had made much impression on international politics, although Kantian themes existed alongside Hobbesian themes in his writings. These Kantian emphases are evident in his stress on the modern antipathy towards genocide and related moral commitments to basic humanitarian rules of war. Elias suggested that cosmopolitan emotions had strengthened in recent times, and whether this was a correct judgement is an important subject for the analysis of cruelty and compassion in different systems of states. Wight's interest in how far commitments to a universal moral community influenced long-term developments in states-systems led him to reflect on levels of 'moral sensitiveness' in Ancient Greece and in modern international relations. However, Wight did not explore this theme in detail; nor have more recent members of the English School developed this area of inquiry. A serious engagement with Elias's account of European modernity, and specifically with his analysis of levels of repugnance towards violence and emotional identification between the members of separate societies, can contribute significantly to the development of the sociology of states-systems outlined in Wight's pioneering essays.

Larger matters are at stake for those who lament the existence of the continuing disciplinary division between International Relations and Sociology. Significantly, the analysis of the civilizing process was not simply or even primarily concerned with developments within separate states: it considered long-term patterns of change that affected humanity as a whole and the global order to which all societies belong. Elias's explorations of the relationship between the civilizing process in different spheres of social and political life did not pay sufficient attention to the academic literature on international relations. Greater familiarity with this literature would have enlarged his analysis of the connections between domestic and global politics. Nonetheless, the study of civilizing processes contains valuable resources that can be employed to build new bridges between Sociology and International Relations. An analysis of degrees of emotional identification between the members of separate political communities, which considers levels of tolerance for, and

repugnance against, cruelty and violence, can provide new directions for the sociology of states-systems; within that context it can examine the specific question of whether the modern states-system is the site for unusual — and possibly unique — developments in cosmopolitan moral emotions.

Notes

- ¹ I am grateful to Ian Clark, Toni Erskine, Stephen Mennell, Nick Wheeler and several anonymous referees for their advice and comments on earlier versions of this paper.
- ² Quoted by Elias (1998a, 235). The comment is derived from Caxton's late 15th century, *Book of Curtesye* (*ibid.*, p. 273).
- ³ See, however, the application of Elias's writings to the analysis of the nuclear age in van Benthem van den Bergh (1992). I am grateful to Stephen Mennell for drawing this work to my attention.
- ⁴ Elias was born in 1897 and died in 1990. For biographical details, see Elias (1994), Goudsblom (1990) and Brown (1987).
- ⁵ Haferkamp (1987, 546) suggests that there is a greater stress on inter-state processes in Elias's writings from the 1980s onwards, whereas Mennell (1987) maintains that Elias's work is consistent in regarding them as important for the study of civilizing processes.
- ⁶ This paper is not concerned with possible connections between Elias's perspective and constructivism, but it is worth noting that both are concerned with who is granted and who 'is denied recognition as a rightful participant in social and political life' (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998, 286). Various constructivist studies of 'human rights and the use of violence (and) the relationship between humans and nature' deals with the 'normative structures that define modern international society and which shape the actions of both individuals and states' (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998, 287). These studies complement the English School's analysis of international society and they are relevant to reflections on how Elias's arguments about world politics can be taken further. What Elias can bring to the English School and constructivist analysis of 'normative structures' is a stronger emphasis on the relationship between political structures and emotional responses to cruelty and suffering. See, however, the discussion of how global norms concerning the forced expulsion of peoples have changed over the last five centuries in Rae (2002).
- ⁷ Elias (1986, 21) suggests that the new term, civility, which gave rise to the notion of civilization, was 'launched' by Erasmus of Rotterdam.
- ⁸ This is not to suggest that Elias influenced Butterfield's thinking about civilizations.
- ⁹ This comment applies to the concluding sentence of Wight's lectures at the London School of Economics in which he claims that the Grotian or rationalist tradition has been 'a civilizing factor' in world politics (Wight, 1991, 268). Recent publications by members of the English School maintain that the normative development of international society depends above all else on the extent to which states are a 'civilizing force' in world politics (Wheeler, 1996; Dunne, 1998, xiv).
- ¹⁰ On the civilizing function of the balance of power, see van Benthem van den Bergh (1992, 35ff).
- ¹¹ Bull's analysis of the incorporation of non-Western peoples into a Western-dominated society of states noted that the former did not only have to adapt their foreign policy behaviour to Western principles of international relations. Their incorporation within international society could not have taken place 'except as the consequence of processes of cultural change within the countries concerned'. See Bull (1984).
- ¹² There is a parallel to be drawn here between 'systemic constructivism', as attributed to Wendt, and 'holistic constructivism', as attributed to Kratochwil and Ruggie. The first approach 'accepts the neorealist penchant for systemic theory, while the latter adopts a more encompassing

perspective that seeks to incorporate domestic and international phenomena.' See Price and Reus-Smit (1998, 268ff). Wight's support for such a holistic approach is evident in his belief that principles of international legitimacy are 'the region of approximation between international and domestic politics' (see Wight, 1979, 153). Elias's own holistic approach to international norms is discussed on p. 14ff below.

- ¹³ The English School's analysis of civility and civilizing processes in international society is the most obvious counterpart to Elias's sociological project, but with the exception of Robertson (1992, 213). Interpretations of Elias's work have not attempted to integrate these parallel research projects. Robertson (1992) draws on the writings of Bull (1977), Bull and Watson (1984) and Gong (1984).
- ¹⁴ 'Animalic needs' refer to the basic physical and psychological needs that all humans beings have as members of the same species.
- ¹⁵ See Mennell (1996b) on applying the notion of the civilizing process to the study of Asian societies, and Mennell and Rundell (1998) on the extent to which a broadening of the analysis of civilizing processes will reveal how far Eurocentrism pervades Elias's analysis.
- ¹⁶ Elias's non-pejorative use of civilizing process is highlighted in interpretations that emphasize his primary interest in comprehending long-term patterns of social change, which first emerged in Europe during the 15th century. His main aim was to understand the transition from the medieval to the modern world, and to comprehend the contrast between the high levels of violence in everyday life during the Middle Ages as well as the more pacified character of contemporary social existence — but, as we have seen, his perspective has a much broader historical compass.
- ¹⁷ Krieken (1998, 66) argues that Elias rejected theories of social progress but believed that the resulting failure to analyse long-term social developments revealed that 'the baby has been thrown out with the bathwater'. Elias believed that 'overall, humanity was in fact progressing'. As the civilizing process was unfinished and unfinishable as well as reversible, Elias had 'an ambiguous attitude to progress' (see Krieken, 1998, 69). Elias believed that 'the conscious, planned concern with improvement of the social order and human living conditions has never been greater than it is today'. But civilizing tendencies are 'always linked to counter-trends' that may always gain the 'upper hand' (Elias, as quoted in Krieken, 1998, 69–70). See also Elias (1997).
- ¹⁸ On the face of it, this claim suggests that ethical comparisons between different phases of human history are pointless. On the other hand, Elias (1978, 154) maintained that 'there has been a progressive reduction in inequality between and within countries since the end of the 18th century', but not one that was 'consciously planned'. Elias (1996, 25) argued that the 'power gradient' decreased during the 20th century in relations between men and women, parents and children, the European societies and the former colonies and, 'with qualifications', in the relations between rulers and the ruled. Elias's comparisons between ancient and modern attitudes to genocide are also relevant in this context (see below, pp. 24–25).
- ¹⁹ Modern societies are different from Greek city-states but 'in a period of incessant violence in inter-state affairs, these internalized defences against impulses to violence inevitably remain unstable and brittle' (Elias, 1986, 133).
- ²⁰ As Dunning and Mennell state in their preface to Elias (1996, xv) *The Civilizing Process* was 'written against the background of the Third Reich in Elias's country of birth'. They quote the following statement from that work: 'The armour of civilized conduct would crumble very rapidly if, through a change in society, the degree of insecurity that existed earlier were to break in upon us again, and if danger became as incalculable as once it was. Corresponding fears would soon burst the limits set to them today'. This is one of several examples of Elias's belief in the fragility of the civilizing process and its heavy dependence on social stability underpinned by secure state monopolies of power.

- ²¹ Parallels with Foucault's analysis of the changing nature of governmentality will be apparent although this is not the occasion to discuss them in detail (Foucault, 1979). See Note 30, however, for additional comments. Smith (2001) provides useful comparisons between Elias and Foucault.
- ²² This is not the place to compare Elias and Bauman on the Holocaust. On this subject, see Tester (1997, 77–80) and Smith (2001, chapter 6).
- ²³ Debates about how much the German population as a whole was aware of the Holocaust and approved of it need not detain us here. Relevant works include the controversial thesis found in Goldhagen (1996) and the recent work by Gellately (2001).
- ²⁴ Elias did not regard such phenomena as incompatible with his general theme about the lowering of the threshold of repugnance against public acts of cruelty in modern societies — and there is no reason why he should have done. It is important to add that he argued that modern societies made new forms of bureaucratized violence possible; it did not make them inevitable. To understand the course of German history in the first part of the 20th century, it was necessary to take many forces into account including the history of militarist attitudes and, of course, anti-Semitism. See Elias (1996) on the multiple forces that led to genocide. Whether Nazi Germany illustrated the pathologies of the civilizing process or was an example of a society that did not follow the same process as, for example, Britain and France, need not concern us, but clearly this has immense significance for an assessment of his analysis of the development of Europe over the past five centuries.
- ²⁵ Elias (1996, 460) resists reducing civilization simply to 'the non-violent coexistence of humans'. More 'positive characteristics' are also involved. Elsewhere, Elias (1994, 140) refers to the capacity to think 'from the standpoint of the multiplicity of people', an idea that may have been derived from Kant (see Bohman, 1997).
- ²⁶ The central question perhaps is how two dimensions of contemporary societies — increased emotional identification with other human beings and high levels of social detachment and disinterest in the suffering of others — interact. Whether progress in mutual identification with other human beings *qua* human beings might become linked with assistance to the suffering is an important question raised by Elias's comments about attitudes to global poverty (see below, 32). For an intriguing account of relevant issues, see Cohen (2001) and also Moeller (1999) and Sontag (2003).
- ²⁷ Note here Elias's debt to Huizinga (1955, chapter 1). For intriguing discussions of punishment that are relevant to this account of moving violence behind the scenes, see Garland (1996) and Sarat (2001). Garland (1996, 223) notes that, for Elias, violence moves behind the scenes and is not necessarily wholly eliminated. Its reappearance in full public view can never be discounted.
- ²⁸ On the fact that civilization has subdued the 'joy in killing and destruction' in war, see Elias (2000, 161 and 170). This theme was central to his sociology of sport. In a comment on foxhunting, Elias (1986, 163) claimed that 'one can see (the) growing internalization of the social prohibition against violence and the advance in the threshold of revulsion against violence, especially against killing and even against seeing it done, if one considers that, in its heyday, the ritual of English fox-hunting, which prohibited any direct human participation in the killing, represented a civilizing spurt. It was an advance in people's revulsion against doing violence, while today, in accordance with the continued advance of the threshold of sensitivity, not a few people find even this representative of an earlier civilizing spurt distasteful and would like to see it abolished'. Elias adds that 'increasing restraints upon the use of physical force and particularly upon killing ... can be observed as symptoms of a civilizing spurt in many other spheres of human activity'. See also Dunning (1986, 229–230).
- ²⁹ The literature on the Holocaust is significant here, not least Lifton (2000) as noted in Fletcher (1997, 196).

- ³⁰ Elias's general thesis finds support from different quarters. See, for example, Sznajder (2001, 4) on the 'broad social movement' of moral change and refinement in the 19th century as exemplified by 'campaigns of compassion' including the struggle to abolish slavery and torture, to promote prison and hospital reform, to improve the lives of children and to abolish cruelty towards animals. Sznajder (*ibid.*, p. 9) adds: 'Public compassion was initially the fight against cruelty, understood as the unjustifiable affliction of pain. Modern humanitarianism protests against such suffering and pain'. Sznajder (*ibid.*, p. 81) takes issue with Foucault's account of modernity because it underestimates the importance of humanitarian movements in modern societies and the significance of bottom-up struggles for freedom from violence as against top-down impositions of discipline and control. Of course, Foucault argued that the humanitarianism that Sznajder describes effectively gave rise to new forms of power and control, whereas Elias believed that changes in the emotional constitution of modern societies cannot be reduced to the play of power but set important normative limits to its exercise. Their narratives are complimentary in many ways — in arguing that modern societies no longer celebrate (or require) public acts of violence, that they rely on high levels of self-monitoring and self-control, that they have moved the distasteful behind the scenes (to prisons and asylums, for example, according to Foucault) and that their 'civilizing' traits do not lay 'decivilizing processes' to rest. Elias's discussion of the effects of changing emotional responses to cruelty and suffering may well have the advantage over Foucault's narrative, for the reasons Sznajder gives, but Foucauldians may not be convinced. Other writings that consider the significance of changing attitudes to cruelty in modern societies include Thomas (1984), Gay (1994) and Burke *et al.* (2000). Smith (2001) provides a useful account of Elias's and Foucault's interpretations of modernity.
- ³¹ On changing attitudes towards violence to animals including violence in sport, see Dunning and Elias (1986). On changing attitudes towards violence to women, see Elias (1996, 176). For a discussion of the changing relationship between parents and children in Western modernity, see Elias (1998c, 190ff). On this last topic, the following comment is especially interesting: 'In ancient Greece and Rome we hear time and time again of infants thrown onto dunghoops or in rivers ... Until the late nineteenth century there was no law against infanticide. Public opinion in antiquity also regarded the killing of infants or the sale of children — if they were pretty, to brothels, otherwise as slaves — as self-evident. The threshold of sensibility among people in antiquity — like those of Europeans in the Middle Ages and the early modern period — was quite different from that of the present day, particularly in relation to the use of physical violence. People assumed that they were violent to each other, they were attuned to it. No one noticed that children required special treatment' (Elias, 1998c, 192–193). See also Elias (1998c, 207) on the fact that the 'heightening of the taboos against violence in relations between parents and children ... is one of many examples of the complexity of the civilizing movement in our time'.
- ³² On how the 19th-century 'campaigns of compassion' eroded supposedly natural rights to use violence in the private domain, see Sznajder (2001, 36 and 53).
- ³³ 'What changes is the way in which people are bonded to each other', see Elias (2000, 402). Elias (1996, 160) refers to 'the integrating tendency (which is) also a disintegrating tendency, at least as long as humanity as a whole is not (the) effective frame of reference'. This is a central theme in Elias's emphasis on one of the main processes in human history, which is the development of monopolies of power over larger areas of the planet (see Mennell, 1990). Elias (2000, 254) maintains: 'We may surmise that with continuing integration even larger units will gradually be assembled under a stable government and internally pacified, and that they in their turn will turn their weapons outwards against human aggregates of the same size until, with a further integration, a still greater reduction of distances, they too gradually grow together and world society is pacified'. Throughout this process, one witnesses the 'quite different bonding of individuals' (Elias, 2000, 255). Mennell (1990, 364) notes Elias's pessimism about the future of

world society. For a different approach that develops Elias's writings, see van Benthem van den Bergh (1992) on how the balance of power, great power responsibility and the global nuclear regime can act as 'the functional equivalent for a central monopoly of violence' and underpin 'pacification processes' in world politics. See, in particular, Chapter 6 and p. 35ff.

³⁴ See also Elias (1996, 461).

³⁵ See also Elias (2001b, 82) on the continuing danger of catastrophic interstate war. He adds that 'free competition between states' in the absence of 'a monopoly mechanism ... plays a decisive role in 'the drift towards war'. It is suggested in Elias (1996, 3–4) that it is 'possible that today humankind is approaching the end of elimination contests in the form of wars, but one cannot yet be certain of that'. Mennell (1990, 364) notes that Elias believed that there was no case in human history where the gradual destruction of the smaller powers did not result in violent conflict between the remaining great powers. There is a parallel here with Wight (1979, chapter 1).

³⁶ In connection with the danger of nuclear war, Elias (1992, 163) argued that 'the danger is that the present civilizing spurt has not reached the state where individual self-restraint takes precedence over restraint by others'. See also the reference to the need for 'a common code of norms' as opposed to a global monopoly of power in Elias (1996, 143). An interesting question for Elias is how far the increasing interdependence of the human species that has been caused by the rise of larger monopolies of power and the revolution in transport and communication will globalize the self-constraints accumulated in the earlier course of the civilizing process. On this point, see Elias (1987a, 11xxii) and Mennell (1998, 101ff). Of course, very useful connections can be developed between Elias's perspective and studies of the part that international regimes can play in promoting national self-restraint.

³⁷ At this point, it is worth noting Elias's conviction that one of the central purposes of sociology is to cast light on the possibilities for expanding human control over previously unplanned social processes: 'So far, the civilizing of human beings and the standards of civilization have developed completely unplanned and in a haphazard manner. It is necessary to form a theory so that, in the future, we may be able to judge more closely what kind of restraints are required for complicated societies to function and what type of restraints have been merely built into us to bolster up the authority of certain ruling groups.' See Elias (1978, 153–154; 1998d, 145). Parallels with Frankfurt School critical theory may suggest themselves, on which subject see (Bogner, 1987). In *The Loneliness of the Dying*, Elias (7, 81–82) states that the inhabitants of modern societies enjoy very high levels of protection from sudden death but have still to bring several unplanned social processes under their collective control, war being an obvious example. Mennell (1998, 66 and 171) notes that Elias was interested in immanent social developments but not in partisan inquiry.

³⁸ This leads Haferkamp (1987) to argue that Elias cannot explain modern concerns about human rights, apartheid and genocide, although he did take account of global civilizing processes as Goudsblom (1990), Mennell (1987, 1990) and others have argued.

³⁹ Mennell (1990, 367) notes that nuclear weapons had a civilizing effect on the superpowers in the sense of requiring self-restraint on their part. For a more extensive discussion of this theme, see van Benthem van den Bergh (1992). This is an important point but it is best to consider it in connection with the longer-term civilizing role of the practices of the modern society of states analysed by the English School. As noted earlier, the importance of the English School for Elias's project is considered by Robertson (1992). For an interesting Eliasian account of international relations as a site for the development of 'meeting behaviour', which pacifies the struggle for power, prestige and wealth ... at continental and global levels', see Van Vree (1999, especially chapter 8).

⁴⁰ The aristocratic ethical code 'tempered' to some extent the use of violence and deception in the relations between princes. See Elias (1996, 139).

⁴¹ Writing about Germany, Elias (1996, 179) wrote that one cannot 'understand the development of Germany' without considering its 'position in the inter-state framework and correspondingly in

the power and status hierarchies of states. It is impossible here to separate inter-state and intra-state lines of development; from a sociological standpoint, intra-state and inter-state structures are inseparable even though the sociological tradition up till now has involved a concentration mainly, and quite often exclusively, on the former. The development of Germany shows particularly clearly how processes within and between states are indissolubly interwoven'. See also Elias's references to the fact that his own work begins to expand 'the field of vision' from 'the level of intra-state relationships to that of humankind' cited in Goudsblom and Mennell (1998, 256 and 259) and the related discussion in Elias (1991, 138ff). On the obsolescence of the 'theoretical distinction' between endogenous accounts of social change and foreign policy or external relations, see Elias (1978, 168).

⁴² Elias (1987b, 266 and 244) refers to his interest in 'long-term social processes' that involve 'in the last resort, the development of humanity' understood as the 'totality of human societies'.

⁴³ Crawford's recent discussion of the collapse of the moral defence of colonialism is an important correction to Elias's more Hobbesian claims and an interesting reflection on how Western attitudes to cruelty and suffering in the colonies changed over several centuries. She analyses the part that moral and religious reformers played in highlighting the cruelty of forced labour and slavery and in drawing attention to the injustices of colonial exploitation. Those groups succeeded in changing emotional responses to acts of cruelty to colonized peoples — they challenged notions of 'European superiority' that made violence towards the colonized acceptable in the eyes of the colonizers; they 'harnessed the emotions of embarrassment and shame' to challenge colonial domination; and they called for greater emotional identification with, and compassion for, the victims of imperial rule (Crawford, 2002, 387ff). Crawford does not discuss Elias's account of Western modernity but her analysis is Eliasian in form and can certainly be read as an example of how his ideas can be extended to include global political developments. The study of changing attitudes to colonial rule in the Western world is one of the most promising ways of building bridges between Elias's perspective and the study of international relations. Crawford's analysis of the importance of emotions or 'passions' in world politics is also worth noting in this context (see Crawford, 2001).

⁴⁴ In *Quest for Excitement*, Elias (1986, 144) notes that although records remain incomplete, 'the wholesale massacre of enemies' occurred frequently in antiquity and may have 'aroused pity' but not 'widespread condemnation'. Elias refers to the destruction of the Sybarites by the citizens of Croton under Milon, the destruction of Argos on the command of the Spartan general, Cleomenes, and to the massacre of the population of Melos. Elias referred to the high level of cruelty in antiquity, not simply in Ancient Greece. Recent literature offers a more complex picture, and further investigation is needed to decide how far Elias was right in his assessment of the Ancient World. Shipley (1995) for example argues that 'annihilation was rare and usually exemplary' given the Greeks' overriding interest in exacting tribute from defeated enemies. For supporting discussions, see Bauslaugh (1991), Dillon and Garland (1994, and especially chapter 12 on the sacred truce establishing the rights of participants in the Eleusinian Mysteries), Garland (1976), Hanson (1998, especially 117), Kern (1999) and Kozak (2001). Important conceptual issues arise here. Elias's comment about the frequency of genocide in the Ancient World is more plausible if genocide is taken to mean the partial or complete destruction of a people, which is the meaning given in the United Nations Convention on Genocide. It is less plausible where genocide is taken to mean complete annihilation. Katz (1994, chapter 4) provides a useful discussion of the conceptual issues, and adds that mass violence in Antiquity did not constitute genocide in the stronger sense of this term Katz (*ibid.*, 91–92).

⁴⁵ Elias (1996, 51) maintains that in 'all warrior societies (including, for example, ancient Athens), proving oneself in physical combat against other people, being victorious over them, and if necessary murdering them, played an integral part in establishing a man's standing. The present-

day military tradition seeks to limit training in the use of physical violence as far as possible to violence against people who do not belong to one's own state-society'.

⁴⁶ Wight (1979, 51) states that Thucydides' great work on the Peloponnesian War seemed almost intended to show that 'the customs of war were minimal' and 'the only restraints on savagery were not accepted custom nor agreed law, but a dim fear of committing impiety on the part of the conservatives, and prudential calculations on the part of the progressives'. For an interesting account of the limited role of pity in the Ancient World more generally, see Konstan (2001).

⁴⁷ Significant here is Evans' (1997) study of the development of capital punishment in Germany that takes issue with Elias's observations about the greater cruelty of early modern European societies. See especially Chapter 3.

⁴⁸ Crucial here is Hans-Peter Duerr's critique of Elias as discussed by Krieken (1998, 119–124). This critique revolves around the question of 'whether human psychology today is so different from that of earlier historical epochs'. A related issue is whether Elias overdid the contrasts between the violence of the Middle Ages and the Ancient World and the pacified nature of modern societies.

⁴⁹ Elias does not refer to states-systems as such. He noted that political communities 'form part of another less highly organized, less well-integrated system' such as the 'balance of power system' in the modern world. He added that 'whatever form it may take, that system in the hierarchy of systems which constitutes the highest level of integration and organized power is also the system which has the highest capacity to regulate its own course'. See Elias (1987a, 30).

⁵⁰ This list is a development of the argument in Linklater (2002a).

⁵¹ This is the most complex and controversial of the forms of harm described above. Here it is worth noting that legal systems take different positions on the extent to which individuals should be punished for failing to rescue others. As Feinberg (1984) explains, the Anglo-American legal tradition is in general more lenient of 'Bad Samaritanism' than its continental European counterpart. Turning to international relations, the complexities arise in a dramatic fashion if we ask whether the failure to intervene to prevent genocide in another country can be said to harm its members. Some will deny that the failure to rescue constitutes harm; others will argue that inaction in the face of human suffering, assuming the possibility of humanitarian assistance without great personal cost, harms others by indicating that the question of whether they survive does not matter to them. It is arguable that the failure to rescue causes harm for the reason given earlier — because it indicates to them that they have no claims against political communities that are able to help them. For further discussion, see Linklater (2004).

⁵² The development of an appropriate methodology for realizing these purposes must be left for another occasion. Suffice it to note that the growing literature on the role of emotions in social life, and especially Stearns and Stearns (1985) discussion of 'emotionology' is of paramount importance — see also the pioneering work of Lucien Febvre in Burke (1973), Elias (1987b) on emotions and long-term patterns of change and the rich discussion in De Swaan (1995). Stearns and Stearns define emotionology as the study of 'the attitudes or standards that society or a definable group within a society, maintains towards basic emotions and their appropriate expression'. An example of this form of inquiry is Harris (2001) on the control of rage and anger in the Ancient World. The sociology of states-systems outlined here has a specific interest in 'standards' governing emotional responses to human suffering, particularly cruelty and compassion. The focus is on dominant understandings about permissible and proscribed forms of harm (Linklater, 2001), a focus that belongs to the larger study of standards of legitimacy in international relations (Wight, 1979, chapter 6).

⁵³ See Elias (2001a, 164–165) on the possibility that the species may be entering an era in which 'it will no longer be individual states but unions of states which will serve mankind as the dominant social unit'. Elias immediately added that 'the immense process of integration' that the species is undergoing could easily give way to a 'dominant disintegration process'. See also Elias (*ibid.*,

- p. 218). Goudsblom (1990, 172) draws attention to Elias's interest in organizations such as Amnesty International.
- ⁵⁴ For more recent discussions of this theme, see Cohen (2001), Moeller (1999) and Sontag (2003).
- ⁵⁵ Further comments on the growth of a sense of responsibility on the part of individuals 'for the fate of others far beyond the frontiers of their own country or continent' can be found in Elias (2001b, 167 and 232). But see also Elias (*ibid.*, 202–203).
- ⁵⁶ 'If one remembers that we, too still live at an early stage in the development of humanity, one should probably think of it as humankind's prehistory where humans are still unable to understand and to control the social dynamics which (threaten) to drive rulers of different states towards settling their conflicts through the use of force' Elias (1992, 156).

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