



Gender Dynamics. An Introduction to Norbert Elias's Process-Sociological Approach to Gender Relations

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*This particular problem, important as it is, must be
left aside for the time being.*

*Its elucidation demands a description and an exact analysis of the
changes which the structure of the family and the whole relationship of
the sexes have undergone in the course of Western history.*

*It demands, furthermore, a general study of changes in the upbringing
of children and the development of adolescents.*

Elias (2012a [1939], p. 597)

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1 INTRODUCTION¹

Countless discussions, conferences, and papers have dealt with Elias most popular book “On the Process of Civilization” (Elias, 2012a [1939]). Over the over eighty years since its publication, one missing link was a conference and a book on gender and process theory. However, not only the small footnote in the chapter on shame and repugnance that we have chosen as our motto must have been overlooked for a long time, as well as the whole field of process sociology of gender relations studied in long-term historical perspective. Since in Elias’s oeuvre power is neither set absolutely, nor is it just political, there are plenty connecting points to analyse the “structural peculiarity of all human and thus public as well as private relationships that are changeable” (Ernst, 1996, pp. 26–40).

The connection between gender and the power relations has been addressed in many variants of gender and women’s studies (Davis et al., 2006; Kortendiek et al., 2019; Jackson, 2014). Indeed, the problem of power is central particularly to feminist theory: feminist philosophers like Judith Butler (2006), Nancy Fraser (1989), or Iris Marion Young (1990) have shed light on various aspects of gender identity formation, gender inequality, and gender conflict on the one hand, stressing the performative effects of social structures and norms, the contingency of gender-based domination, and the need for empowerment of the weaker by way of social critique. However, the unique feature of Eliasian theory, which is constantly making the connection between psychogenesis and sociogenesis, between habitus formation, state building, and power struggles binding the interactional micro-perspective with a long-term historical macroanalysis, has taken a long time to find its way into Gender Studies.

Even since the late 1980s, when Elias’s seminal insights into gender relations slowly began to grow into a subfield of figurational research with the works of, for example, van Daalen (1988), de Regt (1984), Klein (1992), and Treibel (1993), gender balances and imbalances somehow remained a secondary subject. On the one hand, it was in line with the general penchant of the so-called second wave of historical sociology (Adams et al., 2005), which was highly concerned with states, revolutions, class struggles, and economic processes, and less so with the subtler structures of social differentiation embedded in the apparently perennial

¹Core ideas in this introduction come from Ernst’s German text about Elias and Gender Research (2019).

habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. Elias as a historical sociologist is, indeed, between the waves: he combines the attention to “big structures, large processes and huge comparisons” (Tilly, 1984) with a minute sense of the historical contingency of the seemingly mundane and self-explanatory orders of everyday life. Perhaps it is no wonder that, now that the third wave of historical sociology is on the rise in many regions of the world from which the authors of this book come, Eliasian gender sociology has finally come to the point where it can be presented to the global audience as a comprehensive, multifaceted intellectual enterprise.

Having been toying with this idea for a long time, the idea of this volume emerged at the latest when Stefanie Ernst, whose process theoretical framework bundles together the research on work, organization, and Gender Studies for years (Ernst, 1996, 2003, 2019), participated in a conference at the *German Historical Institute* (DHI) in Paris in January 2022. After the long period of pandemic-induced lockdowns, academic conference life finally took on an analogous form again. Discussions at the lunch table and later in digital continuation of Stefanie’s international colloquium expressed the need to finally focus on the gender-related research paired with the figurational approach. Co-editors were quickly found: Valerie Dahl, researching woman in physics and the bystander phenomenon (2021), and Marta Bucholc, whose work on process sociology has for many years now focused on sociology of law and national habitus (2011, 2024). Together, we have decided to put our plans into action during the 2022 Amsterdam conference commemorating Johan Goudsblom, an eminent Dutch scholar who was instrumental in promoting long-term historical process approach in sociology. It was in many ways symbolic and a next step of a beginning institutionalization, as it was the first Norbert Elias Foundation conference in many years including a separate session dedicated to gender relation. Therefore, the Amsterdam conference in 2022 was making a 25+ years coming link to the first such event ever, which was the 1995 conference “Civilisation of the female Ego” (Klein & Liebsch, 1997) at the University of Hamburg.

When working on this collection from our different perspectives, the three of us discovered that many colleagues all over the world have been using Eliasian insights and concepts to study gender relations for a long time without most of them, with a few significant exceptions, ever being bundled together. Therefore, it is a task long overdue not only in terms of trajectories of sociological theorizing, but also in terms of the economy of academic knowledge production and institutionalization to assemble

gender and process-sociological research, to demonstrate its polyvalence, its diversity, and its explanatory power. This is the aim of the present volume.

On the one hand, the book documents further development of process-oriented gender research with a focus on the present time, in which gender often seems to be relativized as but one more human category of socio-cultural differentiation. On the other hand, it recapitulates gender-related texts written or inspired by Norbert Elias, starting with early works that he supervised in Frankfurt. This book shows for the first time the entire oeuvre of extensive archival research conducted over many years in many private collections as well as in the Elias archive deposited in the *German Literature Archive* (Deutsches Literaturarchiv—DLA) at Marbach am Neckar, Germany. This historical part shows the origins of the figurational sociology of gender, shedding light on its genesis and early thematic array. Thus, we find one more reason to explicitly show the immense importance of the category gender, because whether and however (de-)constructed or not: gender really matters in the working world, in family life, in education, in politics etc., and there are no signs of it losing importance.

To analyse gender relations in their progressive and regressive mutability as a product of interdependent long-term developments of society is relatively seldom in sociology. Elias's figuration and process theory with its relational concept of power offers not only valuable contributions to explicate the dimension of a sociology of gender implicit in it. Moreover, the relational, comparative, long-, middle-, and even short-term analysis of the complex and dynamic socio- and psychogenesis of human gender orders that distinguishes between involvement and detachment can thus close a long overdue research gap.

1.1 *Process-Sociology's Reception in Early Women's Studies*

Although widely received into the circle of "classic sociological texts", Norbert Elias's two-volume book "The Civilizing Process" and related figurational concepts such as the power balance or his take on game models were only hesitantly adopted by Gender Studies. This long-lasting "reception barrier to figuration theory (...) is more than a mere 'taste barrier' directed against the sound of Elias' texts" (Treibel, 2012, p. 97, also Treibel in this book). Early women's studies in particular, and to some extent also current Gender Studies, had or still have difficulties with the

reception of Elias's relational thinking. This is actually surprising, because both his gender sociological approach and the figurational concept of power (balances) can bring in "ideal author(s) for gender theory" (Treibel, 1997, p. 308). For example, historians like Hausen (1976) introduced the concept of "gender character" to analyse an essential polarity of men's and women's worlds in the development of bourgeois societies, whereas Frevert (1995), Frevert et al. (2011) implicitly works with Eliasian ideas reconstructing historical and modern gender differences also in view of its affective elements. Other early feminist studies with their traditional critique of the state, violence, and power focused on the blind spots of process theory and reconstructed the genesis of the dichotomous gender order. Like other theories, figurational and process-sociological theory has not only been accused of ignoring patriarchal, structural violence against women but also of being gender-blind in overseeing decivilizing behaviour. By only describing the "phenomenology of male behaviour" which is constructed differently from women and, moreover, "acts of war [...] appear almost exclusively as male actions", Elias was argued to have overlooked both female complicity and the "failed civilization of men" (Gravenhorst, 1996, pp. 170–172; see also Dekker; Hadas; Dunning et al. and MacIntosh and Hughes in this book).

Elias's relational idea was not particularly attractive for the first or second generation of women researchers who struggled for recognition and autonomy in academic life. Gendered power structures in the academia, in the West as elsewhere, have been a projection of the power balances in broader figurations, in which women consistently occupied subordinate positions. Women had and still have to fight for control over their lives, their minds, and their bodies, for political participation, for reproductive rights, divorce, or equal pay. Men have ever been the dominant force, and gender relations have long been construed in binary terms reflecting this power differential ranging across the figurations, with men and women as complementary, opposite, and competing categories. As a result, the gradual nuances and interactions between men and women in the process of civilization next to the spurts and regressions of power had easily been overlooked at that time. Figurational analysis was instrumental in offering a more reality-congruent view which remained, nonetheless, profoundly critical. A deeper topical examination of the figurational and process-sociological approach against the background of gender relations initially took place in the scholarly vicinity of Elias's students mostly in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and

Germany. Meanwhile the range of process- and figuration-theoretical gender research has developed enormously: Whether it is the “History of Civilization of Dance” (Klein, 1992), the analysis of the sociology of knowledge and power in the academic establishment (Treibel, 1993; Dahl, 2021, also in this book), equality policies in relationships and organizations (Treibel, 1997), or marriage and family in the process of civilization (Ernst, 1996) as well as the gender, stereotype and leadership posts (Ernst, 1999, 2003). More explicitly, with the works of Brinkgreve (1999), de Regt (1984), van Daalen (1988), and Wouters (2004), Dutch figurational sociologists analysed the interplay of cultural imaginaries and social change in view of sports, partnership ideals, and homosexuality (Van Stolk & Wouters, 1983). Feminities and masculinities were increasingly analysed as plural phenomena, for example, in sports (Liston, 2005) and youth development (Goodwin & O’Connor, 2015).

1.2 *Figurational Gender Studies: State of the Art*

Nowadays process-sociological gender research draws on the original Eliasian inspirations while exploring new research fields. Topics are, among others, power relations between the sexes in general (Ernst, 1996; Treibel, 2009), in sports (Liston, 2005; Klein, 1992), or in “sport-related fitness activities” (Mansfield, 2008), as well as the exploration of power relations between the sexes in business, public, and private life (Ernst, 2003, 2022; Dahl, 2021). And recently, the question was raised what “makes it easier for women to engage in strategies of coping with oppression on institutional, symbolic and proxemic level?” (Bucholc, 2011, p. 425). This now broadly accepted approach is thus applied internationally to various fields of gender research. Contemporary gender conflicts are rather asymmetrical and ambiguous and can therefore be connected especially for process-sociological approaches (Treibel, 2012, p. 88). The more complex game and Janus-face of modern gender relationships can thus be reconstructed in many of the described research fields over the medium and long term. Here, gendered outsiders still struggle for equality in many spheres.

More recently, we have witnessed a rise in process-sociological research in (critical) men’s and masculinities studies (Dunning et al.; Dekker; Kossakowski and Szlendak; Gospodarczyk; Hadas in this book). Polish and French researchers apply figurational studies to the control of the female body, for example, by abortion policy, birth, or beauty ideals (Bucholc, 2011; Memmi, 2021; Tillich in this book). Controversial issues

(such as #MeToo and sexism) imply a double-bind effect that is remarkable in terms of knowledge and sociology (Delmotte, 2019). The “transformation of sexual impulses” (Elias, 2012a, p. 459) and the related development of shame and embarrassment are currently particularly explosive topics as well (Klein & Liebsch, 2001; Wouters & Dunning, 2019). Contrary to this elaborated process-sociological gender research, today’s focus of gender research has changed, insofar as most of *deconstructive Gender Studies* surprisingly still reveals a “peculiar indifference” (Klein & Liebsch, 1997, p. 16) towards process and civilization theory.

While Elias’s focus on binary gender construction was criticized in the course of contemporary debates (for an overview, see Ernst, 2003, 2019; Dunning & Hughes, 2013), a closer look at his oeuvre reveals potential for a more differentiated discussion of gender relations in his writing. Figural thinking is about power, not about essences of social groups and identities. As Marta Bucholc and Marta Gospodarczyk recently wrote (2024, p. 146):

[To focus on the power differentials between men and women] does not presage any social ontology based on an assumption that there can be no more than two genders, or that the division into (cis)men and (cis)women is the only sociologically relevant one. In fact, exactly the opposite is true: Eliasian analysis of gender as a figural group characteristic paves way for a useful application of the notion of gender spectrum in studying the effect of gender differences beyond the binary on social inequality and exclusion.

In fact, the assumption that gender relations change over time implies the need to perceive men and women as dynamic social labels which are also subject to change, since all social identity is relational. That said, scientific study of social identities and the consequences of their emergence and rise usually lags behind reality. Figural theory is only now entering the phase of more intensive engagement with multiple gender identities and non-binary gender relations as a conceptual challenge. Therefore, the focus on men and women in this book is not to preclude any other view of gender relations such as they have or may yet emerge and, more importantly, as figural theory comes to be applied to the study of societies and communities whose gender categories, divisions, and gender power differentials may diverge from those observed in the West. In fact, there are already many harbingers of this happening. The application of Elias’s conceptual framework to the study of historical processes involving

LGBTIQ+ people became a feature of figurational sociology early on in the 1980s. Since then, a number of works have explored inequalities and power differentials, as well as the processes of exclusion and inclusion of sexual and gender minorities from the figurational perspective (see, e.g. Bagiński, 2024; Bucholc, 2022; Bybee, 2005; Moore, 2010; Ernst in this book).

1.3 *Foundation of a Theory: Norbert Elias Meets Gender Studies*

The common theme of gender-oriented process-sociological approaches consists in exploring gender relations or interdependencies including the perspective of power and power balances. Process-oriented approaches investigate how these power balances are particularly pronounced in certain social processes and contexts (Klein & Liebsch, 2001, pp. 233–239). In this socio-historical context, power is not set absolutely or just operating in the political system. Being a structural peculiarity of all human relations power characterizes public as well as private relationships and is changeable (Ernst, 1996, pp. 26–31). According to Elias, those who are supposedly *superior* in power also depend on those who are *inferior* in power, resulting in a double-bind between individuals and social groups:

We depend on others; others depend on us. In so far as we are more dependent on others than they are on us, more directed by others than they are by us, they have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them by their use of naked force or by our need to be loved, money, healing, status, a career, or simply for excitement. (Elias, 2012b, p. 93)

The gradual transformation of close-meshed external constraints into self-constraints mentioned in “The Civilizing Process” is not linear but thereby “accompanied by numerous setbacks” (Treibel, 2009, p. 143) and points to the fact that under the surface of civilized behaviour, intrusions are possible at any time. In differentiated societies the

external control is founded on the assumption that every individual is himself or herself regulating his or her behaviour with the utmost exactitude in accordance with the necessities of this network. [...] A constant and highly differentiated regulation of one’s own behaviour is needed for individuals to steer their way through traffic. If the strain of such constant self-control

becomes too much for an individual, this is enough to put him or her, and others, in mortal danger. (Elias, 2012a, p. 406f.)

Therefore, Elias's approach can not only "contribute to making the desideratum of a power theory of the sexes more concrete" (Treibel, 1997, p. 313). The specific orientation of gender relations can be understood even more as a specific product of civilizational development. Power as a structural characteristic of social relationships can preferably be transferred to gender relations (Ernst, 1996; Treibel, 1997, 2012; Hammer, 1997; Klein & Liebsch, 2001). It expresses itself in a variety of ways and is not statically attributed to just one side or the other. However, on the one hand the gender struggle between men and women differs from other conflicts as women's struggle for social equality had started from a relatively outsider position being excluded or marginalized from central resources of power. See, for example, the world of leadership in organizations, where "gender seems to be one of the main dividing and conflicting factors in organizational life" (Ernst, 2003, p. 280). Here, process-theory helps to re-embed the research question in a long-term perspective. Then we realize that although women had been excluded since centuries from the top of these organizations, they are "actors not victims in this unequal balance of power. To understand women's leadership role in the workplace, one [therefore] has to analyse not only gender relations in business life as a whole, but also the long-term processes of exclusion and inclusion. This demands a reconstruction of the long-term process of civilization between men and women. It also means analysing to what extent this implies a change of the power balance in the spheres of organizational life" (Ernst, 2003, p. 279).

On the other hand, men and women are very dependent on each other as individuals as well as social groups (Elias, 2009a, p. 272). Therefore, process-theory is interested in the transformation and dynamics of changes in power relations. Concerning business life, science, or politics, therefore, we can "argue that women in leadership positions have started the process of transition from being outsiders in the scientific and business world to moving towards being established in certain leadership posts" (Ernst, 2003, p. 282).

Throughout his work, Elias consistently stated that gender relations are dynamic, standing for the microcosms of social figurations in general. In his chapter on "shame and repugnance" (Elias, 2012a, pp. 457–463) from "The Civilizing Process", for example, he especially states that the

“transformation of sexual impulses and an advance of shame feelings in the relations of men and women” (Elias, 2012a, p. 459) remains to be shown (Ernst, 1996). He also thought about the idea of “patriarchy” (the supremacy of the fathers) which was intended to capture the traditional male dominance and also to name it in its changeability. As a counter-concept to it, Elias introduced the concept of “andrarchy” in his unpublished manuscripts. Unfortunately, this proposal could not prevail in the gender debate (Klein & Liebsch, 2001, p. 241). Elias himself, on the other hand, was not only impressed by the feminist debates; moreover, in relation to other sociological classics, he very early reflected that a long-term perspective is needed to analyse the civilizational history of family and gender. Besides selected notes found in the *German Literature Archive* (Deutsches Literaturarchiv—DLA), his paper on marriage in ancient Rome, several forewords and passages in the collected works, Elias mostly described the direction of changing gender relations as a process of decreasing power inequalities in favour of women and as wider egalization.

Elias’s essay “The changing balance of power between the sexes” is one of the few original and published writings (see Egen et al. in this book) in which Elias addresses gender dynamics directly, here on the basis of the ancient Roman state. He states that, at least in the long run, the normative diction of physical dominance ideally is weakening and the principle of negotiation between the sexes is increasing. Different spheres of power are thus differentiated, so that “the chains mediating between the legal system and the power structure have today grown longer, in keeping with the greater complexity of society” (Elias, 2012a, p. 266). The different civilization curves of the sexes are not characterized by gradual degradation or progress but by a peculiar ‘more’ or ‘less’ (Elias, 2009c, p. 241). Another theme of this essay is the connection of violence² against women and the laws that enforce it:

In Roman society unmarried women, from early days onwards, were passive objects of a violent act or of a transaction between males of different kin-groups. But in time there occurred a significant change, perhaps after a period of transition. The rough warrior nobles of the earlier Roman period were transformed, thanks to the booty of successful wars and the exploitation

² Especially the topic of violence, diverse forms of masculinities and the rejection of gender equality will be dealt with by Dunning et al., Baginski and Delmotte in this book.

of subjugated peoples, into a small immensely wealthy aristocratic oligarchy that ruled a vast and still expanding empire. (Elias, 2009c, p. 244)

Over time and by changes in law, women became more equal in marriage and relationships in general and thereby, society “reached, over the generations, a higher level of civilisation” (Elias, 2009c, p. 244). It is therefore not surprising that Elias also revisits gender relations and their inherent hierarchies in further essays, albeit sporadically. In his writings on “Some remarks on the problems of work” (Elias, 2009b, p. 234), he refers to work as the main ranking mechanism of people in modern societies (see Brinkgreve & van Daalen; Dahl; Ernst; Kunze in this book). Elias also gives a gendered dimension to these topos, illustrating the dependency of women on working spouses, especially in sole-breadwinner-scenarios:

People’s job, or in some cases at least the occupational work done by the male part of the population, in our type of society to a large extent determines the position of a person or a family in the status hierarchy. (Elias, 2009b, p. 234)

The progressive process of civilization (between the sexes) is also evident in the way people treat each other in both public and private spaces (see Ernst, 2022; Kibel et al.; Gospodarczyk in this book). Especially aspects of (enacting) human sexuality were gradually moved from the public to the private sphere; here, too, Elias observes a processual course of action, talking about an “unarticulated shame among adults concerning their own sexuality” (Elias, 2008a, p. 19):

Particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also before that, among adults human sexuality was increasingly placed behind the scenes of social life. The growing reserve that adults had to impose on interactions with each other became internalised—it became a self-constraint, and also rose like an invisible wall between parents and children. (Elias, 2008a, p. 19)

But not only acts of a sexual nature, but also ordinary everyday practices and actions cannot escape a hierarchization of gender and gender-specific body policies and perceptions (see Wouters; Memmi; Tillich; Connolly in this book), Elias continues in his essay “*L’espace privé*” (2008b):

But in many societies, privatisation not only of the bodily functions but of the body goes so far that any visibility of the body, apart from hands and head, is felt to be shameful, and usually considerably more shameful for women than for men. Note how selective our concept of nakedness is in this regard. (Elias, 2008b, p. 50)

In short, Elias makes clear in his work, albeit in scattered places, that the “particular problem” (Elias, 2012a, p. 497) of gender inequality not only had—and often still has—a strong one-sided focus, but was long overlooked (Ernst, 1996). However, it is both a misconception that power is only ever experienced one-sidedly as superior or inferior and that human beings can live like a “homo clausus” insulated from social structures: For him, the battle of the sexes is different, but:

[w]hat we witness today is quite decidedly a phase in a long-drawn-out power struggle between two different social groups which has some similarity with other power struggles between social groups within a state, and which at the same time also in specific ways differs from other struggles of this kind. In common with many other power struggles, this is a struggle for greater social equality between groups, one of which—women—has in many respects had an outsider position: its members traditionally have been excluded from many social positions monopolised by the other group. At the same time, these groups are dependent on each other in a way no other established and outsider group in society are dependent on each other. (Elias, 2009a, p. 272)

With Elias’s concept of people and the dynamics of social figurations, “neither a ‘naturally’ civilized female ego—in opposition to the male ego—nor a uniform form of civilization to the female ego can be found” (Klein & Liebsch, 1997, p. 28). Rather, the universal sociality of human beings shows that the naturalization of dual genders, analogous to the rationalization of behaviour, can be read as a specific stage and process. It becomes clear that the process-book and the figurational approach is thus widely recognized and used as a thoroughly constructive basis not only for the history of the “civilization of the female ego” (Klein & Liebsch, 1997). Therefore, we as editors think it is time to systematically address the interwoven genesis of the interdependent gender order and gendered forms of civilization to innovate this field with our collection. It documents the next step of further research in gender dynamics and process theory.

1.4 *From Ancient Rome to the Incels: An Overview of the Volume*

In summary, on the one hand Elias's texts remain ambivalent, display several missing links, and sometimes also follow stereotypical ideas prevalent at the time when they were written. On the other, they are open-ended and suggestive of theoretical elaboration, expansion, and correction guided by new social sensitivities and research agendas. In the first section about *Gender Equality and Process Theory*, the reader can find articles that apply selected Eliasian thoughts on gender equality from the first generation of scholars working with his theory, like Christien Brinkgreve, Rineke van Daalen, and Annette Treibel. *Annette Treibel* focusses on ambivalences in the civilization process of the sexes arguing that figuration theory can analyse changes on the microlevel of private and everyday life but needs to be better developed for the study of continuous discrimination, sexism, and violence as the other side of the coin of increased egalitarian structures. *Christien Brinkgreve* and *Rineke van Daalen* unfold the intensified ambiguities and ambivalent phenomenon in the process of increased equality with diminishing contrasts between the sexes. They make it clear that next to continuous structural barriers men and women still struggle with their gendered heritage of internalized gender roles. Moving on to the next section about *Body and Soul*, the reader finds the contributions by Cas Wouters, Dominique Memmi, and Emma Tillich as well as Pawel Bagiński. This section develops the socio- and psychogenetic dimensions of civilizational processes and their gender impact by focusing on two basic concepts: the "integration of sexualisation and erotization since 1880" by *Cas Wouters* and the concept of "close domination" by *Dominique Memmi* as a key to analyse long-term gender relations. Dominique Memmi discusses two regimes of feminine self-control embedded in the process of civilization: the rationalization of biology as, to speak with Cas Wouters, a second nature and a "controlled decontrolling of emotional controls" forming nowadays transformation towards a "third nature".

Emma Tillich's work in this context applies this hidden aspect of informalization theory on biological aspects in the debate of maternity. She studies counselling literature since the 1960s and shows in how far procreative women's self-control cumulates especially in constraints on motherhood. *Pawel Bagiński's* paper deals with the discourse about the concept of sexual harassment in Poland in family life, at the workplace, and in

public life. Hereby the floor is prepared for another essential missing link of process theory: the structural barriers of equalization processes in organizational life. This important but missing meso-link in Elias's oeuvre is picked up by *Stefanie Ernst* with her paper on inherent logics of organization, whereas *Valerie Dahl* draws attention to the situation of men and women in physics. With Goffman's theatre metaphor and Wouters's theory of (in-)formalization in mind, Stefanie Ernst analyses the front and backstage life of public services that have to implement gender equality and diversity politics. She asks for the ambivalences and embeddedness of semantic and organizational changes from gender equality towards diversity politics. Focussing on the opac socio- and psychogenetic aspects of this complex new power play she finds an increased and elaborated gender and diversity knowledge as a result of transformed organizations and processes of informalization empowering social climbers since the 1980s on the one hand; on the other structural conservative organizations through these transformations cause considerable dynamics between intended formal innovations and unplanned side effects in the complex power play of organizational culture. *Valerie Dahl* also uses material from a case study about organizational dynamics between "gendered established-outsider relations" in academia, especially physics. It becomes evident that besides increased social equality between the sexes in physics men still tend to devalue female physicists, which proofs the figurational group dynamics of *praise gossip* and *blame gossip* in this arena.

Moving on to the next section about *Private and Public Spaces*, the first article deals with a case study about Germany. *Jan-Peter Kunze* reconstructs the shifts in the power balances between the sexes concerning empirical data of social-structure analysis. Between 1945 and 2000, there are specific interrelations between the educational and labour market system and income as well as social habitus. *Marta Gospodarczyk* then follows with another case study about the rural and urban division of masculinities in nowadays Poland. In this doctoral research, she positions rural men as outsiders in contrast to urban men as the established and more powerful group in an intra-gender figuration. Focussing on selected political leaders in Poland, she pleads for a relational perspective in the discourse on masculinity. This dimension of local spaces will be extended by the shift towards global spaces as well as comparative figurational theory in the next example about the "gendered nature of the household division of labour" in Germany and Kenya. Moreover, with illustrations from architectural and spatial figurational sociology, *Jochen Kibel*, *Makau Kitata*, and *Nina*

Baur reconstruct the German bourgeois household images and gendered arenas in comparison to Kenyan ones. This important link towards “socio-spatial and material practices” is kept up by *John Connolly* who closes this section with a case study of one of the most important and symbolic public spaces in everyday leisure time: the Irish pub. He shows the increased equality between the sexes in Irish drinking culture since the 1900s. Here, several movements forward and backward reflect power struggles over the social spaces that men and women share and over which they contend.

Formal and legal rights are an important source for more equality in the power structures between the sexes. Therefore, the next session on *Violence and Law* in relation to gender should not be missed. *Florence Delmotte's* article underlines the linkage between male domination and women's emancipation based on transformed sensibilities on the one hand and the critical discussion of the role of state, law, and rights on the other. Gendered aspects are not only underdeveloped in Elias's work but also an important aspect of control agents in the *Process of Civilization* par excellence. In how far Dutch feminism is declining is the moving question in *Mischa Dekker's* work: the Netherlands has been one of the strongest gender egalitarian cultures in Europe with an institutionalized feminism. But the public discourses have changed towards more gender-neutral approaches causing the disappearance of gender-based violence from the public awareness. Here, Elias's and Wouters's theory of informalization helps to understand a specific apprehension of moralizing sexual discrimination.

With this view towards central challenges of full gender equality we enter the penultimate section of our book focussing the other side of the gendered coin: masculinities. *Miklós Hadas* continues the perspective of Dutch gender-culture and reconstructs the long-term changes in Dutch and European aristocratic dispositions. Symbolic practices of distinction show that the lengthening of the chains of interdependencies conditioned the different dispositions of nowadays plural masculinities. This approach is also the starting point for *Radosław Kossakowski* and *Tomasz Szlendak* who add the history of Polish masculinity from the court society up to noble men and soldiers as role models for today's Polish men. They argue that the Western concept of hegemonic masculinity does not fit Polish realities all too well, mostly due to the role of victimhood in the construction of masculinity in the Polish culture that continued well into the Communist era ended in 1989. This brings us to the backward movements in gender equality empowered by antifeminist men's groups

occurring in online spaces like so-called incels. *Michael Dunning*, *Matthew Hart*, and *Georgia Marfob-Hoare* discuss nowadays misogyny and violence, that is, another missing research link about the development of long-term social processes concerning misogynistic rhetoric. Referring especially on the work of Elias and Wouters, the authors try to set out key social processes to contribute to the emergence of this group and the problems associated with it.

Next, *Matt MacIntosh*, *Jason Hughes*, and *Kabryn Hughes* discuss the utility of the concept of hypermasculinity for studies of gender and power relations focussing on the tandem sociogenetic ascendancy of so-called hypermasculine attributes and hypermasculine attributions. With an array of historical sources from American history between 1890–1933 and 1933–1945 (and after) they embed their provisional thoughts into socio- and psychogenetic (rising and falling levels of fear) processes of civilization.

Finally, the last section assembles texts from the *German Literature Archive* (Deutsches Literaturarchiv—DLA) about the genesis of gender-related themes that had been developed under Elias's supervision at his time at the *Frankfurt Institute of Sociology* until 1933 and those that Elias wrote himself. In this closing section, *Adrian Jitschin* and *Marion Keller* studied the doctoral thesis on the society of actors by Ilse Seglow. She was one of Elias's female doctoral students and a member of the first generation of figurational sociologists. This paper gives a captivating impression of the preliminary status of the figurative research program in Frankfurt am Main before exile. *Christoph Egen*, *Hans-Peter Waldhoff*, and *Kathrin Wahnschaffe-Waldhoff* report on their archival studies. They draw attention to Elias's unpublished thoughts on gender relations beside his famous paper on gender relations in Ancient Rome. Since Elias dealt with this topic especially in his later years, this contribution will describe and explain the changes in the balance of power between the sexes in his unpublished works.

1.5 *A Glimpse in the Future of Process-Sociological Gender Studies*

This first collection of international gender-related figuration theory brings together three generations, intellectual more than biographical, in the discontinuous chain of process sociologists. Christien Brinkgreve, Rineke van Daalen, Dominique Memmi, Annette Treibel, and Cas

Wouters, who paved the way for systematic application of process sociology to gender relations, were followed by the next, middle generation, who were and are still working to lay foundation for gender-theoretical and empirical figuration research in their specific fields. Today, the third generation is well under way, a numerous and diverse one, reflecting the growth of gender problematic in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but also the richness of theoretical and philosophical inspirations from which it draws. If this volume is anything to go by—and we very much hope it is—current process-oriented Gender Studies seem to be in a very good shape, and well-adapted to face the challenges of the age. They are informed by the theoretical insights that seem to have withstood the test of time quite well compared to some other sociological classics: the constant need critically to engage with Elias's insights on gender relations bears testimony to their intellectual appeal, but also to their academic productivity.

But process-oriented, figural Gender Studies go beyond further exploring Eliasian motives: they reconnoitre their own, new fields, following the new political, cultural, and economic realities. They are however, in many ways, very true to their common base. Process-oriented, figural Gender Studies are firm in their commitment to historical orientation, though it may take various turns in particular research designs. They tend to be interdisciplinary and to bring various methodologies from, among other things, history, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, to address the difficult task of capturing social process in long-term perspective (Baur & Ernst, 2011). They are open-ended and inclusive, as far from any theoretical dogma as they are from methodological exclusivism. They also are invariably critical of societies and powers that be, today or in the past, and they are sensitive to any form of violence that the powerful use to stabilize the power differentials by which they benefit.

What future lies ahead of process-oriented, figural Gender Studies? We expect it to include even more excellent empirical analyses such as those included in this volume. Apart from the well-established research subjects such as family life, gendered role models and ideals, and their impact on sexual relations, much remains to be done in studying broader figural effects of gender inequalities. Research on the presence of women and of gender and sexual minorities in politics, business, economy, arts, and civil societies would stand to gain a lot by applying figural sociology. However, figural sociology would also stand to gain much by expanding its research agenda. Gender Studies may be instrumental in

bringing this about insofar as it is providing a powerful impulse for revision and innovation coming with insights into spheres of social life, cultural universes, historical paths and geographic areas absent in the foundational works of figurational sociology.

The first and crucial desideratum for the future would be more studies not coming from Western Europe or the Anglo-Saxon world, so from beyond the so-called West or Global South. While both concepts have been intensely disputed and should not be seen as referring to some fixed essentialized entities, they nonetheless serve the goal of problematizing and situating knowledge production, and we use them to this purpose, while remaining faithful to our commitment to contextual and historical understanding of the origins of figurational theory. In this volume, we have made a move beyond the traditional geographic core of figurational sociology, offering comparative studies focusing using data from East Central Europe and Africa. However, figurational gender sociology beyond the Western core seems to be gaining momentum in the Global South rather more slowly than figurational sociology of politics, state, or migration, or studies of diverse forms of inequalities and discrimination in which gender, sex, and sexuality may be one of the intersectional factors, but do not play the main role. What is needed is more diversity of empirical material and more confrontation with data on gender relations that do not follow the Western model or that have been forced to follow it as a result of colonization or authoritarianism, and may diverge from it as a result of decolonization and interplay of indigenous cultures with colonial violence and exploitation, and post-colonial dependence.

We are confident that the increase in the number of scholars using figurational theory in gender studies will contribute to fine-tuning of this theoretical paradigm to the challenges of societies that are in many material respects different from those which provided an impulse for Elias's own theorizing in the first half of the twentieth century. We believe that the established-outsider model, which features in many chapters in this volume, can become a vehicle of increasing the connectivity of figurational Gender Studies both to other paradigms within the Gender Studies and to other areas of research. The heuristic of established and outsiders is particularly well-suited to demonstrate the advantages of the sensitivity to situatedness and positionality of social actors. Therefore, the hope of a meaningful historical and intercultural comparison (which is the basic tenet of figurational sociology) has not to be abandoned. We hope to see more longitudinal, diachronic, and comparative studies to complete the

growing array of case studies of single societies. This would mean a huge step forward for the process-oriented, figurational Gender Studies.

Let us give but three examples of the direction which such new studies characterized by high interdisciplinary and comparative connectivity could take, tackling topics that are important today and that could only be projected back to a certain extent, to a time that had a different horizon of experience than either today or tomorrow. One domain which is blatantly understudied are gender relations in institutionalized religion, in the Global North and beyond, including traditional and indigenous religions. Lack of interest in gender and religion viewed through the figurational lens is probably a far-reaching consequence of the limited interest in religion and religious institutions in Elias's writings combined with a very different context in which religion was studied by the social sciences, but it calls for a remedy. Another under-researched field is the presence of women and gender and sexual minorities in military and warfare, sadly an increasingly topical issue in the second decade of twenty-first century, and one calling out loud for comparative historical imagination. In both institutionalized religion and the military, the intersection of power and violence, education and training, and ostentatious habitus formation should provide an excellent ground on which to vet, refine, and amend Elias's theoretical insights. Finally, in sociology of law, figurational approach to gender, especially using the established-outsiders model, can profitably complement and enhance the achievements of scholars approaching the problem of law and intersectional violence differently, as seminally shown for international relations and human rights by Andrew Linklater (see e.g. 2020), and for sexual and reproductive rights by Bucholc (2024). However, much more work is needed to explore the potential for incorporating the figurational concept of gender in sociology of law.

We are confident that we will see those and many other developments in the years to come. With this volume, we invite our readers to reflect on the gender relations in a way that we believe is highly relatable. By bringing up this first review of the state of research, that is bound to be incomplete, yet it is the most comprehensive ever, we hope to initiate exchange that will make it easier for us to chase the gendered myth of domination, subjugation, superiority, and inferiority more efficiently—wherever and whenever we encounter them.

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