'Testing' Elias: Aspects of Violence Viewed in Long-Term Perspective*

Eric Dunning
University of Leicester
University of Chester
ed15@leicester.ac.uk

Abstract

This 'polemical' paper is concerned with 'testing' key elements of Elias's theory of 'civilising processes' in a non-positivistic sense. More particularly, Elias's undifferentiated concept of violence is broken down into ten categories, some of which are then used to shed light on war, genocide, crime, punishment and sport seen in long-term perspective. The work of a range of authors who are more or less critical of Elias is next considered and the conclusion reached that, contrary to a common opinion, far from being falsified by their arguments and evidence, Elias's work is vindicated in most major respects. It, thus, represents what he himself regarded as a breakthrough.

Keywords: affective (emotional) – rational violence scale; aggression; civilizing; de-civilizing and dys-civilizing processes; violence as play.

Resum. *«Provant» Elias: aspectes de la violència en una perspectiva a llarg termini*

Aquest article «polèmic» es dedica a «posar a prova» els elements centrals de la teoria dels «processos de civilització» d'Elias en un sentit no positivista. Més concretament, el seu concepte genèric de violència es divideix en deu categories, algunes de les quals ajuden a entendre millor la guerra, el genocidi, el crim, el càstig i l'esport des d'una perspectiva a llarg termini. La presa en consideració de l'obra per part d'una sèrie d'autors, poc o molt crítics amb Elias, permet d'arribar a la conclusió que, en contra d'allò que s'ha dit sovint, les argumentacions i les proves aportades no «falsen» en absolut l'obra d'Elias, sinó que en reivindiquen la validesa en la majoria dels seus aspectes centrals. Es constata, doncs, que les aportacions d'Elias en relació a la violència permet un «trencament epistemològic» amb el sentit comú en aquest àmbit.

Paraules clau: escala de violència afectiva (emocional) – racional; agressió; processos civilitzadors, des-civilitzadors i dis-civilitzadors; violència com a joc.

1. Introduction

This is a polemical paper. It is based mainly on secondary sources and divided into what are in some respects only loosely related parts. In the first part, some conceptual issues connected with the thorny problem of defining 'violence' and the related term, 'aggression', are explored. In the second part, the discussion becomes more concrete and involves a theoretical-empirical application of some of the conceptual distinctions introduced in the first part, especially those concerned with the affective dimensions of violence and the issue of violence as play. More particularly, these distinctions are used to shed light on aspects of the histories of war, 'genocide', violent crime, punishment, and sport-and leisure-related violence[1]. Extensive use is made in this connection of quotations from the secondary sources used. This is to enable readers to judge for themselves whether or not the sources have been interpreted correctly.

It is important to insert two caveats at the beginning. The first is that, whilst war, 'genocide', violent crime and sport have historically been mainly male activities, females have sometimes been centrally involved as well. Lack of space, however, precludes an exploration of the gender dimensions of violence in this context[2]. The second caveat is that this list of activities may seem to some people like a rag-bag which posesses a mixture of unrelated or only partly related issues. I shall seek to show, however, that there are similarities and perhaps connections between some of them which have not always been recognised and which will become clearer if:

1. An obvious omission from this collection of topics are the various forms of terrorism. A case could also be made for discussing long-term changes in patterns of violence against children. Indeed, mass media representations of violence and their effects perhaps also ought to have been included.

2. Just to mention one horrifically infamous example, some 150 women were among the guards at the Auschwitz death camp. One of them, Ilse Greser, was particularly noted for her sadism and was hanged after the war.

   (i)   The issues are viewed from a long-term perspective;

 (ii) The emotional/affective levels and dimensions and not just the rational/cognitive ones are explored;

(iii) The existence of what are for some kinds of people under specific conditions playful and pleasurable forms of violence and aggression at the levels of both fact and fantasy is acknowledged more explicitly than has often been done by contributors to the field of violence studies in the past; and

(iv) The technological dimensions of violence and their social and psychological ramifications as parts of a social field are explicitly brought out.

Throughout, the paper will be concerned with the implications of the issues discussed for sociological theory, especially for Elias's theory of 'civilizing processes' (Elias, 1939; 2000). That theory and the basic premises on which it rests will inform most of the discussion. Indeed, as the title implies, the paper can be viewed as a 'test' of Elias's theory in a non-positivistic sense. I shall begin by looking at a deeply rooted contemporary belief.

2. A Deeply Rooted Contemporary Belief

It is widely believed that we are living today in one of history's most violent periods. Indeed, it is probably fair to say that, in Western societies at least, the fear that we may be currently undergoing a process of 'de-civilization', above all of mounting violence, is deeply imprinted in the contemporary *Zeitgeist*, one of the dominant beliefs of our times. In the opening chapter of their recently published *International Handbook of Violence Research* (2003: 5), for example, the editors Heitmeyer and Hagan wrote that: 'In Western societies, the dream of a non-violent modern age clashes with a reality that is massively overshadowed, if not totally plunged into darkness by overt acts of violence and the potential for destruction …' Consistently with this, the following was reported in *The Observer* newspaper on Sunday 13 November 2005:

> A culture of violence in Britain is to blame for an epidemic of school bullying that is devastating the lives of millions of children, according to … one of the country's leading experts on young people. In his first major interview as the new Children's Commissioner for England, Al Aynsley Green … said: 'I have no doubt that children are being brought up in a society where violence is the norm in many ways. I include in this the violence on television, in the workplace and in the home.'

Similar beliefs have been around since at least the 1970s. For example, the psychologists Eysenck and Nias wrote in 1978 of 'a number of acknowledged facts' which, they claimed, 'have helped to persuade many people that the civilization in which we live may be in danger of being submerged under a deluge of crime and violence' (Eysenck and Nias, 1978: 17). From a figurational standpoint, of course, 'civilization' is *always* faced potentially with the danger of collapse. 'Civilizing controls' are learned and never more than a

relatively thin shell. That is why figurational sociologists lay stress on increasing the understanding, not only of 'civilizing processes', but of 'de-civilizing' and 'dys-civilizing' processes as well[3].

Arguing from a psychological perspective different from that of Eysenck and Nias, Peter Marsh contended, also in the late 1970s, that then-recent social developments in Britain had led to a decline in opportunities for 'socially constructive ritual violence', what he called 'aggro', with the consequence that uncontrolled and destructive violence had increased. Using a variation on Erich Fromm's distinction between 'benign' and 'malignant' aggression (Fromm, 1977), Marsh argued that there had taken place a 'drift from "good" violence into "bad" violence'. People, he said, are 'about as aggressive as they always were but aggression, as its expression becomes less orderly, has more blood as its consequence' (Marsh, 1978a: 142). How it is possible without historical study to reach the conclusion that aggressiveness is an historically fixed quantum is something that Marsh fails to tell us. Clearly he descended with at least this aspect of his case from science into ideology.

A similar dose of scare-mongering ideology recurred in a judgement about sport made by Australian journalist Don Atyeo in 1979. Atyeo detected strong parallels between trends in modern sport and trends in their counterparts in Ancient Rome. He argued that a self-destructive trend towards escalating violence is occurring in modern sport, principally as a result of the demands of sensation-seeking spectators. What he wrote remains one of the clearest expressions of a still commonly held belief. It is, on that account, worth citing. Atyeo expressed his apocalyptic vision thus:

> The future of violent sports seems assured. Games will grow harder and bloodier to feed the rising appetite of an audience which will grow increasingly more jaded and satiated with violence, and increasingly more violent itself, until, perhaps, something happens to bring it all crashing down. This time around, though, the likelihood is that it won't be the barbarian hordes banging on the gates outside which will destroy the Coliseum. This time the violence will be of sport's own making and will come from within the walls of the Coliseum itself (Atyeo, 1979: 377).

It will be one of my contentions in this paper that, while a worldwide trend towards increasing violence is undoubtedly currently occurring both in sport and elsewhere, diagnoses such as those of Eysenck, Nias, Marsh, Atyeo and

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3. The concept of a 'de-civilizing process' refers to a civilizing process that goes into reverse. That of a 'dys-civilizing process' refers to a ''civilized' regime which creates and maintains compartments of destruction and barbarism in meticulous isolation, almost invisible and well-nigh unmentionable. It is as if the civilizing process continues with the same means, but with a different turn: in one word, it has become a *dyscivilizing process.'* (de Swaan, 2003:141). In short, this concept is designed to recognize the fact that state-formation does not necessarily produce civilizing consequences and that state monopolies of violence can be used in the pursuit of 'barbaric', 'uncivilized' ends.

Aynsley involve greater or lesser elements of sensationalism and exaggerate the extent and seriousness of the trend to a greater or lesser degree. A discussion of some conceptual and theoretical issues will hopefully help to prepare the way for showing why that is the case.

3. Towards a Typology of Human Violence

The types of violence engaged in by humans are diverse and complex. De Haan and Spierenburg have recently argued for approaches to the subject which see 'violence', respectively, as 'an essentially contested concept' (De Haan, 2005), but one which should be restricted solely to 'physical attacks' and is probably not applicable to non-human animals (Spierenburg, 2005). That residual elements of metaphysical 'mind-body' dualism enter into both of their approaches can arguably be seen from the fact that De Haan distinguishes in his conclusion between 'physical' and 'non-physical' violence, whilst Spierenburg tells us that he is 'pleading for a restrictive definition of violence, which essentially limits it to the encroachment upon a person's physical integrity'. Although both authors would probably seek to deny it, arguably inherent in their approaches and much modern thinking in this area is the idea that phenomena such as 'verbal violence', 'symbolic violence' and 'mental cruelty' are somehow 'non-physical'. This raises the question of where they are supposed to reside? In a 'realm of spirit'? In 'heaven' as in Plato's theory of forms? In the ether? Viewed scientifically, of course, our so-called 'minds' and 'emotions' are functions of our physical bodies. Moreover, physical processes are involved in the production and hearing of sounds, and the 'rational' and 'emotional' experiences of individuals are 'embodied' and therefore 'physical', too.

Although Elias used the concepts of violence and *Gewalt* in a general and undifferentiated way, I want to suggest that a thoroughgoing application of his process-sociological or figurational approach which is concerned with dynamic balances, gradations and degrees and does not fall foul of 'mind-body dualism' can help us to gain a greater purchase on the issues involved than is possible through searching for a single, universal definition of violence or a narrow range of contested definitions. More particularly, a move towards a more comprehensive understanding of violence will arguably be achievable if distinctions are drawn among separable forms and dimensions of violence in terms of criteria such as the following:

 (i) The means employed;
 (ii) The actors' motives and values;
(iii) The actors' psychological states, especially their levels of psycho-physical emotional arousal and the degrees of intentionality, rationality and control involved in their actions; and
(iv) The social parameters within which the violence takes place. These parameters include: the norms, value-dispositions and ideologies characteristic of particular groups and which are operative in particular social set-

tings; the size, character and degrees of integration and organization of the social fields within which the violence occurs, and finally, the degree to which an effective monopoly of physical force has been established at a societal level. In the 'real', that is the experienced or empirical social world, these analytically separable forms and dimensions of violence tend to fuse and overlap. They are neither totally distinct nor 'pure'. It follows from this that, in most if not all cases, they are questions of gradations or degrees rather than of simple dichotomies. Seen in these terms, at least the following ten distinctions can be provisionally made among the forms and dimensions of human violence:

1. Whether violence is 'actual'/'real' or 'symbolic', that is, whether it takes the form of a direct and overt assault or simply takes a verbal form or a gestural/facial posturing form which intentionally or unintentionally increases the fear of the recipients or victims. It is worth noting that physical assaults, e.g. in robberies or wars, are often accompanied by verbal violence, shouting and/or screaming and contorted faces on the part of the aggressors. Recurrently engage-in facial expressions can also become embodied at the level of habitus as Elias showed in the case of medieval warriors (Elias, 2000:161ff). Of course, in such cases as terrorist bombings, suicide bombings and forms of violent crime such as bank robberies, the perpetrators usually have to exercise a high degree of self-control over their own anxieties and to seek to mask their violent intentions until the moment comes to strike. They are not, that is to say, usually noisily and overtly physically aggressive. Violent physical assaults can also be accompanied by the facial and other physio-psychological signs of pleasure and arousal. The degree to which a physical and/or verbal assault is experienced as violent also depends to some extent on the age, physique and subjectivity of the victim(s). That is because people's tolerance of physical pain, verbal violence and anxiety varies from person to person and through the life-course. For example, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that, *ceteris paribus*, infants and old people and people who are otherwise physically weak and/or have weak egos will tend to be more liable than physically stronger, more self-confident people to experience verbal and not only 'physical' onslaughts as painful, intrusive and destructive.

2. Whether the violence takes a 'play' or 'mock' form or whether it is 'serious' or 'real'. This dimension clearly overlaps with dimension (1). It might also be captured by the distinction between 'ritual violence' and 'non-ritual violence' introduced by Peter Marsh and his colleagues (1978b), though it has to be noted that, *pace* what they argue, ritual and play can both be seriously violent in intent and content. Core football hooligans, for example, the groups who Marsh *et al* had principally in mind, invariably seek physically to hurt their opponents and not infrequently succeed.

3. Whether or not a weapon or weapons are used and where they are, the level of technological knowledge and expertise that was involved in their

manufacture, e.g. swords and bows and arrows in contrast to rocket-propelled nuclear weapons.

4. Where weapons are used, whether or not the combatants come directly into contact. Related to this dimension is the degree of physical distance between combatants who are not in direct contact, and especially whether they are able to see and/or hear each other or not.

5. Whether animals are involved in the violence either as targets/victims of the human perpetrators or as trained helpers of the latter. In foxhunting, for example, foxes are the targets/victims whilst hounds are the killers trained by their human masters. Similarly in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern warfare, horses and in some cases camels and elephants played a crucial part.

6. Whether the violence is planned and intentional or the accidental consequence of an action sequence that was not intentionally violent at the outset. For example, if pacifying gestures and language are not swiftly offered, an accidental collision between two people walking along a street or playing in a football match may spark a physically and verbally violent exchange.

7. Whether one is dealing with violence initiated without provocation or with a retaliatory response to an intentionally or unintentionally violent act or perhaps to a real or perceived insult, an aggressive facial expression or a menacing bodily posture.

8. Whether the violence is legitimate in the sense of being in accordance with a set of socially prescribed rules, norms and values, or whether it is non-normative or illegitimate in the sense of involving the contravention of accepted social standards. A subcategory of this dimension involves the illegitimate use of violence by agents who have been officially licensed by a state, e.g. the use of violence by police or military personnel in a democratic state to obtain information or a confession.

8. Whether the violence takes a more 'rational' or a more 'affective' form, that is whether it is rationally chosen as a means for helping to secure the achievement of a given end or goal, or engaged in as an emotionally arousing, pleasurable and satisfying 'end in itself'. Another way of conceptualizing this dimension would be to distinguish between violence in its more 'instrumental' and more 'expressive' forms.

9. Whilst violence can be inflicted by persons on themselves whether they are alone or in company, most violence is directed at others and takes place in the context of a social field characterized by chains or networks of interdependence that vary in terms of their length, density, degrees of organization and the balance within them between centripetal and centrifugal pressures[4].

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4. Even when people are alone they are usually parts of a social field. They may, for example, live on their own but have neighbours; or they may spend time on their own in their bedroom but be in a house and neighbourhood with others. The only partial exceptions are provided by people such as hermits who successfully manage completely to eschew the company of others. Degrees of individualization/aloneness such as are involved in having one's own bedroom are, in fact, one of the variable properties of all social fields.

Following Max Weber, some sociologists would call these distinctions 'ideal types' but it is preferable from a figurational standpoint to conceptualize them in terms of interconnected polarities and balances. Let me briefly discuss the concept of aggression.

4. A Figurational 'Take' on the Concept of Aggression

'Aggression' is a term which comes out of psychology and it is possible to use it in a constructive sense, whereas 'violence' is a popular term which is invariably used with negative connotations. Examples both of which I have mentioned already are Fromm's distinction between 'benign' and 'malignant' aggression and Marsh's derivation of 'aggro' from 'aggression' to refer to violence, e.g. that of football hooligans, that he regards as ritualized and socially constructive. I am less concerned here about terminological niceties, though. I want rather to discuss the idea of writers such as Freud (1932) and Lorenz (1963) that humans have an 'aggressive drive' or 'instinct'. Elias (1988) wrote persuasively on this issue from a sociological and accordingly more reality-congruent standpoint. The idea that humans have an innate aggressive drive which structurally resembles the sex and hunger drives, Elias said, is a false way of posing the problem. What we do have is an 'innate potential to shift (our) whole physical apparatus to a different gear if (we) feel endangered'. This is the so-called 'fight-flight mechanism' through which the human body reacts to danger by an automatic adjustment which prepares the way for 'intensive movement of the skeletal muscles, as in combat or flight'. According to Elias, however, human 'drives' such as the hunger or sex drive are released physiologically, 'relatively independently of the actual situation' in which people find themselves. By contrast, the shifting of the body economy 'to combat-or flight-readiness is conditioned to a greater extent by a specific situation whether present or remembered'. Such situations can be 'natural', for example being attacked by a wild animal, or social, especially conflict[5]. However, in conscious opposition to Freud, Lorenz and others who ascribe an aggression drive to people on the model of the sex drive, it is not, said Elias, 'aggressiveness' that triggers conflicts but conflicts that 'trigger aggressiveness' (Elias in Keane, 1988:177-8).

There was, of course, a degree of rhetorical exaggeration in this. Elias would not have denied that some conflicts result from the disruptiveness of aggressive individuals. He also stressed the interdependence of different human drives (Elias, 1939; 2000:161). In other words, he was aware of the interconnectedness of the sex, hunger and thirst drives and aggression, particularly if the former are frustrated. What he wanted above all to do was

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5. It is, of course 'natural' for humans to be 'social'. That is to say, we evolved biologically as a species that is dependent on social artefacts such as language and with built-in aids to sociability such as smiling and laughing. Adults can, of course, learn to use smiling and laughing and language as well in what we call 'anti-social' ways but these, too, are a variety of 'social facts'.

to counter the crude psychological reductionism involved in the notion of an 'aggressive instinct'. Summing up, it was Elias's contention that whether the 'fight-flight mechanism' is directed into fighting or fleeing is fundamentally a question of culture and social learning. More particularly, it is a question of the degree to which the values of the society or group into which one is born or of which one later becomes a member, e.g. through immigration, lay stress on the violent as opposed to the peaceful end of the continuum between extremely violent and wholly peaceful means of handling tensions and conflicts. Applying some of the sorts of conceptual distinctions I have been discussing, let me now turn to the issue of war seen in long-term perspective.

5. Some Sociological Reflections on Warfare Viewed in Long-term Perspective

I propose to examine four main arguments and issues in this context:

1. The argument put forward most explicitly in recent years by Hans Joas (2003) that Elias's theory of 'civilizing processes' is subject to two contradictory interpretations;
2. The old contention which has resurfaced in sociology, anthropology and archaeology since the in 1960s that it is misleading to write, as Elias does, of 'civilizing processes' as involving 'pacification' because the opposite is true. According to the supporters of this view, far from being conducive to pacification, civilizations are one of the major causes, if not *the major* cause of violence and war;
3. The more reality-congruent view of 'primitive' warfare, especially among the native American Cheyenne, put forward by Bryan Turner (2003) in his essay on 'warrior charisma', a context in which he also proposes a largely constructive critique of Elias; and
4. The idea that the undoubtedly extreme violence of modern warfare also refutes Elias's theory.

6. Interpreting Elias: Hans Joas's War and Modernity

Arguably in all respects save one, Hans Joas's *War and Modernity* (2003) makes important contributions to the field of violence studies. The exception relates to his interpretation of Elias. Joas argues persuasively that 'war and violence are parts of modernity and not just its prehistory' (Joas: 43). This, of course, runs counter to the belief of early sociological figures such as Comte and Spencer. It is Joas's contention further to this that the belief in modernity as peaceful did not die with these so-called 'founding fathers' but continues to be held more or less explicitly by contemporary advocates of 'modernization theory'. He writes:

> Modernization theory first of all assumes more or less implicitly that modernity is peaceful. The transition from violent struggle to a peaceful way

of dealing with conflicts within societies has been essential to this definition of modern societies. But not only the peaceful resolution of major conflicts within states by way of non-violent political procedures is considered modern; individual crime is also said to have changed from spontaneous acts of violence to emotionally controlled forms, for example in property-related crimes[6]. Norbert Elias's theory of civilization, with its claim that an increase in the control of the emotions has coincided with a growth in the complexity of social relations is a case in point (Joas, 2003: 45).

This involves a common mis-representation of part of Elias's case. What the latter actually suggested on the basis of the comparative study of a substantial body of cross-national data, is that, in the first instance, members of the secular upper classes in what had become by the early twentieth century the dominant societies of Western Europe — England, France and Germany — experienced increasing social pressure to exercise stricter, more even and more continuous self-control over their feelings and behaviour as their societies changed from feudal states, through dynastic states into urban-industrial nation-states. Later these pressures began to spread, more or less unevenly, down the social scale. Joas goes on to signal that he is to some extent aware of the problematic nature of the above aspect of his case by adding in a footnote that:

> I am well aware of the fact that, contrary to my strong emphasis on the linearity in Elias's assumptions about an increasing complexity of social relations and an increasing control of the emotions, there are interpretations that focus on the international constellations and their contingency in Elias's work (Joas 2003: 202).

A focus on international constellations and 'contingency' in the sense of 'blind processes' the outcomes of which cannot, at least at the present level of understanding, be predicted but which can be explained retrospectively was *always* a part of Elias's case (1978: 158ff; 2000: 436ff). Any interpretation which argues otherwise is simply wrong. Later in his main text, Joas changes tack and informs us that Elias's

> […] classical early work on the civilizing process had asserted a linear process of the monopolization of violence and the increase of affectual control in the structure of personality. However, his later work allows for a very different interpretation since it moves in the direction of a reflexivity of the civilizing process, the replacement of mere inner compulsion by responsibility and reflexivity (Joas, 2003: 167).

It is entirely reasonable to suppose that Elias's thinking would have matured or at least changed as he grew older. However, if it did, any changes which occurred after the initial publication of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*

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6. Joas is referring here to the work of whom? quién? aquí falta algo

in 1939 were relatively marginal. Elias was in his 40s when he wrote that book, so it was far from being a piece of 'early' or 'youthful' work in the sense that Joas can be taken to imply. Moreover, the first and second accounts by Joas cited above lack any reference to violence-control and state-formation, whilst his third lacks any reference to 'structural complexity' or, more properly, to the lengthening and growing density and complexity of interdependency chains. Both   pacification under the aegis of increasingly powerful states, and the correlative lengthening and growing density and complexity of chains of interdependence which increasingly took on monetary as well as other forms are held by Elias to have contributed powerfully to changes at the level of 'personality structure' (usually *Habitus* in Elias's original German) that were experienced as 'civilizing' and 'rationalizing' in the sense of involving growing social pressure on people to exercise foresight and self-control. However, whilst he thought of these 'blind processes' as unintentionally 'directional' in the sense, for example, of involving changes towards greater or lesser levels of 'civilization' or greater or lesser levels of structural complexity, Elias did not think of them as 'linear' and certainly not as 'unilinear', at least in any simple and constantly 'progressive' sense. In the present context, it must be enough to use a single example to show how that was so.

In *The Civilizing Process,* Elias wrote what he called an 'Excursus on Some Differences in the Paths of Development of England, France and Germany' (2000: 261-268). This seems not to have been noticed by commentators such as Joas but is enough on its own to show that Elias thought in multilinear terms. It is one of Elias's contentions in this 'Excursus' that the large territory occupied by the German-speaking peoples and the size and socio-cultural diversity of their population led them to encounter greater difficulties regarding state-centralization and unification than the English and the French, the sizes of whose territories and populations were smaller. This led to stronger centrifugal tendencies and a more discontinuous pattern of history and social development in the German case. One consequence of this for what they originally called the 'Holy Roman' or 'German Roman Empire' (*Reich*) was that no 'court society' such as emerged in France, and no 'great Society' such as grew up in England centred on London and parliament could arise and 'courtize', 'tame' and 'democratize' the German aristocracy. As a result, for longer than the aristocracies of France and England, the German aristocracy retained a militaristic ethos. The latter also excluded the middle classes from their scattered courts, ensuring that Germany's middle class elites obtained little experience of participation in the business of ruling. According to Elias, this was one of the roots of the originally humanistic ethos of the German middle classes, groups who became to a degree militarized themselves when the militaristic Prussians succeeded in unifying the country nationally in the 1870s (Elias, 1996).

This discussion must be enough for present purposes to show that, *pace* Joas, Elias's thinking was already multilinear when he wrote *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*. Interestingly, Joas's sociological perspective is in some ways surprisingly close to that of Elias. Like Joas, the latter berated the dominant

paradigms for their neglect of violence, war and international relations. Like Joas, Elias was severely critical of 'modernization' theories. However, he went further, questioning not only the adequacy of the concept of 'modernization' *per se* but also stressing the multilinear, multidimensional and multilevelled character of long-term social processes. Both scholars also lay stress on the need for a balance between 'commitment'/'involvement' (*Engagement*) and 'detachment' (*Distanzierung*) in sociological research and theory (Elias, 1987; Joas, 2003: 85). Like Joas, moreover, Elias repeatedly referred to what the former called 'the historical blindness of many writings emanating from empirical social research and the lack of theory in many historical analyses …' (Joas, 2003: 89, Elias, 1969) The similarities and convergences by no means end there. Let me turn now to a critical examination of what one might call the 'Rousseauian' as opposed to the 'Hobbesian' view of primitive warfare.

7. The Myth of the 'Peaceful Savage'

I referred earlier to an argument which has resurfaced in some sociological, anthropological and archaeological circles in recent years. This is that it is misleading to talk, as Elias does, of 'civilizing processes' as involving pacification. According to the supporters of this view, far from being conducive to pacification, civilizations and states are in fact one of the major causes of violence and war if not *the major* causes. Elias, it is implied, takes a 'Hobbesian' stance, whereas a 'Rousseauian' standpoint is more 'object-adequate'. According to subscribers to the latter view, in the societies that present-day Westerners tend to label as 'primitive', 'savage', or 'uncivilized', that is, the 'structurally simpler', 'pre-literate', 'non-literate', 'tribal' or 'pre-state' societies of yesterday and today war is or was a non-existent, rare or trivial occurrence, a ritualized and quasi-sport-like affair in which few people were hurt or lost their lives. American sociologist William Sumner appears to have been one of the first to adopt such a 'Rousseauian' stance. Thus he wrote in 1911 that 'primitive man might be described as a peaceful animal" who "dreads" war' (cited in Keeley, 1996: 8). More recently, such a view received powerful support from English social psychologist, Peter Marsh, in the book *Aggro* (1978a) which I cited earlier. It is a book in which he tells us about what he thinks is the character of warfare among a warrior people, the Dani of New Guinea.

Marsh's exposition of the 'Rousseauian' case is expressed with crystal clarity. It is hence worth citing at length. The fact that the Dani think of themselves as warriors, Marsh implies, adds strength to his case. Wars among the Dani are frequent, he tells us, and they start in the morning with the warriors of one tribe issuing a challenge to the warriors of another. Such challenges are usually taken up but they will not be if the warriors think it is likely to rain or if there is not time to eat the ritual sweet potatoes which are central to the Dani warrior tradition.

When they do accept a challenge, the Dani warriors paint themselves and put on their war head-dresses. Then, in a state of mounting excitement, they advance

to the pre-arranged battleground. When they reach it, the two groups stop at a distance from each other of some 500 yards. Then each advances in a stop-go fashion until they are at a distance from each other of some 50 or so paces. At this point, they throw their spears at each other and retreat. Arrows are fired as well but they have no flights, a fact which Marsh construes as resulting, not from technological ignorance but as a primitive form of arms control. Marsh also likens the Dani warriors to present-day English football hooligans[7].

According to Marsh, the death toll from a year of such fighting is usually between 10 and 20 warriors on each side. 'In tribes where fighting provides a major focus of activities', he writes, … 'where battles are essential to the maintenance of their entire social fabric; more people die from the common cold than from the spears and arrows of rival warriors' (Marsh, 1978a: 49). 'Evidence' of this kind leads Marsh to reach the conclusion that it is misleading to talk of 'warfare' among the New Guinea plains warriors because

> … these battles are not warfare in the sense we know it today. They are more like 'skirmishes' or 'raids' … Violence of this kind does not have the terrifying rationality associated with the struggle for survival in a world of scarcity and need. It arises as a solution to the problem of aggression, the thing which binds together a tribe because it is directed outwards. By channelling the competitive hostility outwards towards the tribe on the other side of the hill, social bonds within one's own group are reaffirmed and maintained. Demonstrations of character on the battlefield are converted into the tangible rewards offered by a community in which exhibitions of courage and solidarity are held in esteem. The warrior finds favour within the dominance hierarchy that is firmly sustained as part of the social fabric in which he lives out his life. The framework may seem illogical but it works. And it copes more effectively with the aggression of men than the seemingly more civilized social structures we find in our own society. Aggression is recognised and managed   and that is a rational approach (Marsh, 1978: 49, 50).

I am not totally opposed to the argument Marsh puts forward here. The pattern of 'in-group/out-group', 'we-group/they-group' or 'us/them' bonding (Elias, 1978) that he describes is a common pattern in societies at all levels of social development (in the sense of levels of structural complexity). What I do find problematic is how Marsh explicitly compares Dani warfare to modern football hooliganism, arguing that both are socially constructive outlets for male aggression. The supposedly 'primitive' Dani, Marsh implies, are wiser than we are in the modern West because they *recognize* and *manage* aggression. Westerners allegedly deny it and try to stamp it out, partly, Marsh argues, as a result of feminist misunderstandings. What Marsh misses in this connection is arguably twofold: (i) the fact that 'primitive' peoples   or better, the members of structurally simpler societies   such as the Dani account for their warfare in magical-mythical terms, i.e. in terms of gods and spirits, not rationally as

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7. See Eric Dunning, *Sport Matters* (1999) for s systematic discussion of this issue.

Marsh implies; and (ii) he fails to appreciate that it is not football hooliganism but sports such as football which, if the rules are followed and enforced, take on the character of a mock-fight and which have developed in 'modern' societies as major means of channelling aggression[8]. Although it can contain elements of ritual in Marsh's sense, football hooliganism is a potentially dangerous and destructive superimposition on what really do involve forms of ritualized aggression, namely highly regulated 'modern' sports *per se*.

To my knowledge, one of the first to attempt to counter such a Rousseauian view was the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski who wrote in 1941 that 'anthropology has done more harm than good in confusing the issue by … depicting human ancestry as living in a golden age of perpetual peace' (cited in Keeley, 1996: 8). The data-based arguments of Wrangham and Peterson (1997) and Keeley (1996), however, are considerably more damaging to Marsh's case than this or my own earlier suggestions. Wrangham and Peterson, for example, cite a 'global assessment' of the ethnographies of 31 hunter-gatherer societies which found that '64% of them engaged in warfare once every two years, 26% fought wars less often, and only 10% were considered to fight wars rarely or never' (Ember, 1978, cited in Wrangham and Peterson [1997:75]). Wrangham and Peterson also inform us that:

> Anthropologists have occasionally been able to gather statistics on warfare among independent peoples uninhibited by intervention from more powerful tribes or governments. Violence accounted for the deaths of about 19.5% of adult men among the Huli of highland New Guinea; for the Mae Enga and the Dugum Dani, also of highland New Guinea, warfare produced adult male mortality rates of 25% and 28.5%, respectively. For the Murngin of Australia, the figure was 28% (Chagnon, 1988: 986; and Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989: 417; both cited in Wrangham and Peterson, 1997: 77).

As I suggested earlier, Lawrence Keeley's arguments are also seriously damaging to Marsh's case. Keeley firstly argues that, while the loss of 20 people per year in war may seem a very small number to, for example, the British who have a population of some 60 million, it is a substantial number some 7-10% of the total in a tribal group of some two to three hundred. It is also necessary, according to Keeley, to take note of the fact that large-scale formal battles of the kind which play a part in the wars of 'civilized' peoples, tend to take place less frequently in 'primitive' war than small raids and ambushes. These, says Keeley,

> … have usually involved having a handful of men sneak into enemy territory to kill one or a few people on an encounter basis or by means of some more elaborate ambush. Women and children have been commonly killed in such

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8.   According to Elias, magical-mythical ideas tend to remain as a substratum in human thinking even in more developed societies and to resurface in seriously critical situations.

> raids … One common raiding technique (favoured by groups as diverse as the Bering Straits Eskimo and the Mae Enga of New Guinea) consisted of quietly surrounding enemy houses just before dawn and killing the occupants by thrusting spears through the flimsy walls, shooting arrows through doorways and smoke holes, or firing as the victims emerged after the structure had been set afire (Keeley, 1996: 65).

Of course, the simple demonstration that primitive warfare is more openly ferocious and, in a quantitative sense, more deadly than subscribers to the Rousseauian view hold it to be, does not prove anything regarding the contention that it is their contact with Western civilization that has made the so-called 'primitive' peoples warlike and violent. 'Barbarization' as a result of contact with the West has, of course, in all probability happened not infrequently. However, despite this evident fact, not only have Chagnon, Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Wrangham and Peterson cast doubt on it as shown in my earlier discussion but Keeley has, in my opinion, decisively refuted it. He has done so because, as an archaeologist, he has succeeded in proving conclusively that pre-state tribal peoples from all over the world engaged in violent warfare before both the modern era and contact with the West. He also shows conclusively that, whilst it may not be/have been totally universal, violent warfare has frequently occurred amongst members of our species since the earliest times. In the context of this paper, it must be enough to illustrate this by quoting from Keeley's conclusion. 'The facts recovered by ethnographers and archaeologists', he writes:

> … indicate unequivocally that primitive and prehistoric warfare was just as terrible and effective as the historical and civilized version. War is hell whether it is fought with wooden spears or napalm. Peaceful pre-state societies were very rare; warfare between them was very frequent, and most adult men in such groups saw combat repeatedly in a lifetime … (T)he very deadly raids, ambushes, and surprise attacks on settlements were the forms of combat preferred by tribal warriors to the less deadly but much more complicated battles so important in civilized warfare. In fact, primitive warfare was much more deadly than that conducted between civilized states because of the greater frequency of combat and the more merciless way it was conducted … At the tactical level, primitive warfare and its cousin, guerrilla warfare, have also been superior to the civilized variety. It is civilized warfare that is stylized, ritualized and relatively less dangerous. When soldiers clash with warriors (or guerrillas), it is precisely these 'decorative' civilized tactics and paraphernalia that must be abandoned by the former if they are to defeat the latter (Keeley, 1996: 174-175).

This reference to the need to abandon 'civilized norms' and 'civilized' forms of warfare in order to combat guerrilla fighters ties in with the American experience in Vietnam, and more recently, with that of the Americans, British and their allies in Iraq. But how, if 'primitive' and guerrilla warfare really are as deadly and effective as Keeley maintains, have peoples who consider

themselves to be 'civilized' managed regularly to conquer and colonize the pre-state and tribal peoples whom they perceive as 'barbaric' and 'primitive'? According to Keeley, the answer is that, although they may lose particular battles, the economic surpluses, population sizes, transportation technologies, and the planning and logistical capabilities of 'civilized' peoples enable them to win the war. In a word, 'civilized' peoples may become less good as fighters but 'civilization' gives them the men, material and overall wherewithal to fight long and sustained campaigns. Let me turn now to Bryan Turner's (2003) essay on 'warrior charisma'.

8. Warrior Charisma and the Spiritualization of Violence

Bryan Turner's stimulating and original essay is concerned in the first instance with demonstrating that, in his study of 'civilizing processes', Norbert Elias 'almost completely neglected the historical and comparative nature of religious culture, the sacred, the priesthood and the Church in the history of western society' (Turner, 2003: 96). The idea that Elias neglected religion is not a new one. Franz Borkenau (1937, 1939) made basically the same point in his reviews of the first two German volumes of *The Civilizing Process*, as did Martin Albrow (1969) in his review of the first English translation of Volume I. This recurring contention is not, of course, entirely wrong. However, it is not so much the case that Elias *neglected* religion as that he treated the beliefs of the adherents to its various forms as one power resource among others and as a major 'means of ruling in the priest-dominated first civilizations with their low levels of reality-congruent, scientific understanding relative to our own' (Goudsblom in Goudsblom, Jones and Mennell, 1989). Elias also conceptualized religion as a 'means of orientation' and dealt with it in *Involvement and Detachment* (1987) as one of the major forms of 'magical-mythical' thinking, i.e. of thinking with a relatively high affective content, coupled with a relatively low level of 'object adequacy' or 'reality congruence'. Nevertheless, he never sought to deny the power and significance of religious institutions and beliefs.

More important for present purposes, however, is the fact that Bryan Turner seems to be unaware of Johan Goudsblom's (2003) important distinction between the 'Augustinian' and the 'Lucretian' traditions of approaching the understanding of religion. According to Goudsblom:

> The Augustinian and the Lucretian traditions view the civilizing process from opposite angles. This leads to different impressions, with different emphases. If the Augustinian tradition overestimates the importance of religion in the civilizing process, the Lucretian tradition contains an anti-clerical sting that may bring about underestimation. There can be no doubt that what we now classify as religious forces have at times exerted a strong pressure towards socially induced self-restraint. That pressure should be seen, however, in the context of wider social and ecological pressures. Whatever influence religion

has had was always subject to historical circumstances. Religion was never the sole civilizing factor. And in many instances it gave impetus to decivilizing spurts such as crusades, persecutions, civil war and, as it has come to be called in our own days, 'ethnic cleansing' (Goudsblom, 2003: 36).

The fact that Bryan Turner seems to be unfamiliar with Goudsblom's measured and balanced case does not, in my opinion, detract from the force of his (Turner's) data-based central argument. This is concerned with the implications of the warrior practices of the American 'Plains Indians', especially the Cheyenne, for Elias's theory. The first thing worthy of note in this connection is that Turner does not fall for the 'myth of the peaceful savage' but presents instead an open and honest account of Plains Indian warrior charisma and warrior violence in all their, seen from the standpoint of the hegemonic 'civilized' values of present-day Western societies, 'ferocity, 'savagery' and raw lack of 'civilized decorum'. Turner phrases his problems thus:

> Among the American Plains Indians, … warrior charisma was associated with transitions to manhood status where tribal rites of passage produced experiences of possession, trance and vision. Charisma erupts into human society, albeit in the context of religious rituals and institutions of liminal transition. The historical transformation of warrior charisma is thus an important challenge to the general validity of the thesis of a civilizing process. While the training of the knight inculcates norms of bodily deportment, uprightness and chivalrous dispositions, shaking, convulsive and vibrating bodies mark the presence of charisma. Do the civilizing process and the elimination of the warrior require the suppression of such primitive forms of psychogenesis? (Turner, 2003: 99).

Whilst I would cavil at this latter-day functionalist reification which conceptualizes a 'blind process' as having a 'requirement', my answer to this question is an emphatic 'yes': the suppression of warriors by means of 'courtization' (*Verhöflichung*) and in other ways, and the long-term subjection of warriors to civilian control, processes which can be, of course, and invariably are, reversed for greater or lesser periods of time, are important components of a 'civilizing process'. In raising this question and drawing attention to warrior charisma, Bryan Turner has pointed to ways in which Elias's studies of the warriors of medieval Europe and their transformations could be usefully supplemented. I think, too, that Turner adds to our understanding of 'civilizing processes' in the USA when he refers to Rojek's (2001) study of 'celebrity'. According to Turner, the 'extraordinary' Plains Indian warriors of the 1870s,

> … Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, Little Big Man and Dull Knife became legends of the encounter between civilization and savagery. As a result, the Cheyenne and Sioux were rapidly drawn into the emerging entertainment culture of modern society. Warriors who had terrified white settlers in the 1870s became figures in popular culture by the 1880s. We might say that warrior charisma was eventually transformed by photography, the stage and film, into celebrity (Turner, 2003: 102).

I have only one more criticism to offer. This is that Turner fails to mention the part played by the use of tobacco and other drugs in Native American ritual and warfare (Hughes, 2003). Let me turn now to the subject of modern war.

9. Some Figurational Reflections on Modern War

The first thing worthy of note in this connection is that Norbert Elias shared the largely left-wing hatred of and horror over war. However, he also expressed revulsion regarding those on the left who glorify 'revolution' because, he said, 'revolutions' are a kind of war. That is, they, too, tend to involve people killing each other and lead to multiple unintended and often violent consequences. However, Elias was not by any means a pacifist. Violence, he argued, is necessary when, for example, a ruling group or 'establishment' and an ascendant group such as a class, ethnic group or hitherto subordinate gender become trapped in a 'frozen clinch' because the ruling group refuses to make concessions (Elias, 1969).

There is also at least one sense in which the belief that the twentieth century witnessed a trend towards growing violence is based on solid foundations. More particularly, as an accompaniment of the increasing pace and scope of global social change, the 20th century was the first in which wars that were literally 'world wars' took place. It was also a century in which the violence and effectiveness of the technology of mass destruction increased to hitherto unprecedented levels, a fact evidenced above all in nuclear weapons and the weaponry of chemical and germ warfare. The capacity to produce and deliver such weapons is, of course, a consequence of the application of advancing scientific knowledge and that, in its turn, is arguably in part a consequence of a 'civilizing process'. More particularly, one aspect of a 'civilizing process' involves an advance in people's capacity for self-distanciation (Elias, 1984) and this enables them to move beyond highly involved, magical-mythical views of the world towards perspectives that are more detached, more 'reality-congruent' and facilitate greater control. In order to appreciate this, of course, a relatively detached approach is required of the reader.

The ability to exercise a high level of self-control, another consequence of a 'civilizing process', is also necessary in order to use many complex modern weapons. Further to this, a lot of modern warfare involves killing at a distance through the firing of rockets and the dropping of bombs on people whom one cannot see or hear. People who consider themselves to be 'civilized', do not, for the most part, like the blood and gore of face-to-face battles and have to undergo training that amounts to a process of 'decivilizing' in order to be prepared for battle. Such individuals and those who are 'de-civilized' by the direct experience of war, often represent a threat to their societies of some magnitude when peace returns. The problems caused by Korean and Vietnam veterans in the USA are one example (Joas, 2003: 111ff).

It is also important to note that there have been numerous violent and destructive wars since 1945. However, they have been, for the most part, local in scope, restricted, with the recent exceptions of the wars associated with the

break-up of former Yugoslavia and the former USSR, mainly to Third World, formerly colonial countries. Without for one moment wishing to detract from the tragic reality of these wars for the people most directly involved, to say nothing of the often horrific aftermath of, for example, unexploded landmines, it is nevertheless arguably relevant to point out that many areas of the world, particularly in the West, have enjoyed hitherto unprecedented levels of peace and prosperity since the end of World War Two. Such peace and prosperity cannot, of course, be understood independently of the forms of neo-colonial domination and exploitation that derive from the power differentials that are inherent in our rapidly globalizing world. Writing in the late 1980s, just before the end of the 'Cold War', Norbert Elias commented on this peace, though not the prosperity, as follows: He wrote:

> When the problem of physical violence is examined it is often asked how it is possible that people strike or kill others so that they become, for example, male or female terrorists. It would be more … productive, if the question were posed differently. It should go: How is it possible that so many people can normally live together peacefully without fear of being struck or killed by stronger parties as peacefully as is generally the case in the great state-regulated societies of contemporary Europe, America, China or Russia? It is often forgotten that never before in the development of humankind have so many millions of people lived together so peacefully   that is, with the considerable elimination of physical violence   as in the large states and cities of our time. This becomes evident only when one realizes how much more violent and how much higher in risk of physical attacks were earlier epochs of human development (Elias, in Keane, 1988: 178).

Elias wrote this years before the so-called 'war on terror' declared by the second President Bush. The 'male or female terrorists' he (Elias) primarily had in mind were groups such as the 'Red Brigade' and the 'Baader-Meinhof' group. They saw themselves as anti-fascist and cannot be understood independently of the culture, politics and tensions of the 'Cold War' era. Bush's 'war on terror' was post-Cold War, more international and partly rooted, firstly in the 'First World/Third World' division and the First World's dependency on and greed for oil, and secondly, in a latter-day flaring up of the Christianity-Islam conflict that started in the Middle Ages. That is, the combatants on both sides, and more particularly some of their leaders, are adherents to monotheistic forms of magical-mythical thinking, though one side   the Christian side   is generally more powerful, somewhat more secular and more technically advanced. Bush's 'war on terror' was also arguably based more on a politically and mass-media driven mis-reading and highly emotional perceptual magnification of the levels of danger involved than it was on a massive escalation of the levels of violence and danger *per se*. Of course, this might well change if the 'terrorists' and religious fundamentalists, whether Christian or Moslem, from the West or from the East, were to succeed in getting their hands on weapons of mass destruction. That is because the present indications are that

they would not hesitate to use them[9]. I am thinking of Bush and Blair and those under their command in this connection and not simply of Moslem terrorists or of their more direct counterparts in the West such as the Baader-Meinhof group or the Irish Republican Army.

A world state with a legitimacy comparable to that of the most successful Western nation-states and based, like them, on interdependent monopolies of violence and taxation has not yet emerged and perhaps never will. That is because nuclear and germ weapons, with their immense destructive power, presumably spell an end to processes of state-formation involving violent elimination struggles of the kind which Elias showed were involved in the 'civilizing' of Western Europe. If such weapons were to be used all-out, humanity would destroy itself or at least propel us into some kind of post-nuclear dark ages. If that happened, 'post-modernity' in a literal sense would really well and truly have arrived! In a word, the formation of a world state, *if* it occurs, is likely to be both more long-term and more peaceful in the sense of not involving direct recourse to the use of the most destructive weapons except as a threat. If these weapons do not remain 'confined to barracks', it may spell the end of humankind. Assuming that such a version of 'Armageddon' does not occur, perhaps what is happening in Europe at the moment with the development of the EU may be a precedent for what may happen on a world level in the future? To express it metaphorically and metaphysically, 'only time will tell'. Let me turn now to the subject of genocide.

10. Genocide in the Process of Civilization

The first thing worthy of note in this connection is the fact that 'genocide' has come in recent years to be a contested and perhaps overused concept. That is why I have enclosed the term in inverted commas in this essay. What it literally refers to is an attempt, usually by a more powerful group, intentionally to eradicate entirely a group of less powerful people whom they socially define as a 'race'. For example, even though in this case an attempt to control and exploit was arguably more consciously involved than an attempt to exterminate, D.E. Stannard (1992) has referred to the large-scale wiping out of 'Native Americans' in the course of the conquest of the 'New Word' by people of European descent as not only a 'genocide' but also as 'the American Holocaust'. This latter usage is debatable. Another contested example is the definition as a 'genocide' of the massacre of one and a half million Armenians by Turks in the course of the First World War and the break-up of the Ottoman Empire (Brannigan and Cassis in Levinson (ed.), Vol 1, 2002: 769-76). Perhaps also problematic is the definition as a 'genocide' of the killing of some two million opponents by Pol Pot and the

9.   President George W. Bush and some of his associates, perhaps including Tony Blair, might be described as 'religious fundamentalists'. It follows that, if what I have written in this paper has any substance, they would probably be less hesitant about using nuclear weapons than many of their predecessors were.

Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in the 1970s (Power, 2002: 86-154). Both of these cases involved 'massacres' but they were politically/ideologically motivated and whether they involved racial and exterminationist intent is dubious. So would be application of the term 'genocide' to the millions who died as a more or less direct consequence of Stalin's policies in the former Soviet Union.

The killing in Rwanda in April 1994 of some 800,000 people of mainly Tutsi descent by Hutus, as well as several earlier comparable events in the country and its colonial predecessors, was far less unambiguously a 'genocide'. It was, that is to say, an intentional, racism-motivated massacre aimed at eliminating an entire group (Power, 2002: 328-389). Another involving tribal peoples and in which Western colonists were only indirectly involved, if at all, might be the extermination of the Owugeo tribe by the Cheyenne which Moore (1999: 113, cited in Turner, 2003: 102) described as a 'tribal genocide'. Two more relatively unambiguous examples which Alison Palmer (1994) described as 'colonial genocides' were the killing off of 'Aborigines' in Queensland, Australia by people of British descent, and the racist massacre by German soldiers during the First World War of the Hereroes of South West Africa (see also Richard J. Evans, 2003: 12).

However, without doubt the most unambiguous 'genocide' of modern times has been the Nazi 'Holocaust'. It is certainly the best documented and, despite the malignant efforts of the so-called 'Holocaust deniers' (Lipstadt, 1993), there can be no reasonable doubt about it having occurred or having been a 'genocide', that is, an attempt to eradicate entirely a whole group of people (the Jews) whom the Nazis socially defined as a 'race' in the sense of attributing to them a constellation of bio-genetically determined traits.

It is arguably fair to say that a widespread attribute in the twentieth century to the unspeakably horrific fact of 'genocide' involves the idea that it is specifically and entirely modern as a social phenomenon. A more sophisticated version of the same belief is the idea that the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews was specifically modern because it was dependent on such features of 'modernity' as bureaucratic organization and industrial technology, an idea most recently propounded by Zygmunt Bauman (1984)[10]. From a figurational standpoint, however, although 'modernity' has probably helped to increase the scale and efficiency of 'genocides', it is not so much 'genocide' *per se* that is specifically modern as the growth of revulsion against it. That, at any rate, was the view of Norbert Elias. Writing not only of the Holocaust but also of the more general violence of the Germans toward conquered groups during the Second World War, he suggested that, in the twentieth century:

> … the mass slaughter of conquered groups by the German Nazis … aroused almost world-wide revulsion … The shock was all the greater because many people had lived under the illusion that, in the twentieth century, such

10. From an 'Eliasian' standpoint, the concept of 'modernity' is a blanket term which obscures many of the differences regarding content, trajectories and timing that are detectable in the emergence of urban-industrial-nation-states.

barbarities could no longer happen. They tacitly assumed that men had become more 'civilized', that they had become 'morally better' as part of their nature. They had taken pride in being less savage than their forefathers or than other peoples … without ever facing up to the problem which their own relatively more civilized behaviour posed   to the problem of why … their behaviour and their feelings had become a little more civilized. The Nazi episode served as a kind of warning; it was a reminder that the restraints against violence are not symptoms of the superiority of the nature of 'civilized' nations, not eternal characteristics of their racial or ethnic make-up, but aspects of a specific type of social development which has resulted in more differentiated and stable social control of the means of violence and in a corresponding type of conscience-formation. Evidently, this type of social development can be reversed … (Elias in Dunning [ed.] 1971: 106-107; and in Elias and Dunning, 1986: 143)

Elias went on to contend that the almost universal feeling of repugnance against 'genocide' witnessed in the twentieth century indicates that human societies have undergone a 'civilizing process', including a widening in the range of peoples' identification as fellow humans of groups who are linguistically, culturally and phenotypically different from themselves, 'however limited in scope and unstable' the results of this process turn out to be. This is shown among other ways, he suggested, by comparison with the Ancient world. More particularly, according to Elias:

In Greek and Roman antiquity, the massacre of the whole male population of a defeated and conquered city and the sale into slavery of its women and children, though they might have aroused pity, did not arouse widespread condemnation. Our sources are incomplete but, they show that cases of mass slaughter recurred with fair regularity through the whole period. Sometimes the battle fury of a long threatened or frustrated army played its part in the wholesale massacre of enemies. The destruction of all the Sybarites they could lay their hands on by the citizens of Croton under the leadership of Milon, the famous wrestler, is a case in point. Sometimes, 'genocide' was a calculated act aimed at destroying the military power of a rival state. The wholesale destruction of all men of Argos as a potential rival of Sparta is an example. The massacre of the male population of Melos by order of the Athenian Assembly of citizens in 415 … resulted from a configuration very similar to that which led to the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 … (T)he Athenians killed the men, sold the women and children into slavery, and settled the island with Athenian colonists. Some Greeks regarded war as the normal relationship between city-states. It could be interrupted by treaties of limited duration. Gods, through the mouths of their priests and writers, might disapprove of massacres of this kind. But 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 industrial nation-states of the twentieth century. (Elias in Dunning (ed.), 1971: 107f; and in Elias and Dunning, 1986: 144-f).

It would not, I think, be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that the historical record, not only of the Ancient world but also before and since, is littered with examples of massacres and 'genocides'. In fact, the killing of people perceived as enemies, whether on realistic grounds or not, could even be said to involve a kind and degree of 'rationality' as far as peoples living at or near a subsistence step and without a money economy are concerned. Elias suggested as much when he wrote of the ruling class in early feudal Europe that:

> Outbursts of cruelty did not exclude one from social life. … The pleasure in killing and torturing others … was a socially permitted pleasure. To a certain extent, the social structure even pushed its members in this direction, making it seem necessary and practically advantageous to behave in this way. What, for example, ought to be done with prisoners? There was little money in this society. With regard to prisoners who could pay and who, moreover, were members of one's own class, one exercised some degree of restraint. But the others? To keep them meant to feed them. To return them meant to enhance the wealth and fighting power of the enemy. For subjects (i.e. working, serving and fighting hands) were a part of the wealth of the ruling class … So prisoners were killed or sent back so mutilated that they were unfitted for war service and work (Elias, 2000: 163).

Elias's reference here to killing and torturing others as a 'socially permitted pleasure' points to an often overlooked feature of 'genocides', massacres, murders and many other forms of violence, namely the socially acceptable, to a degree even licensed 'hunting of humans' (Leyton, 1986) or what one might call 'genocide as play'. If I understand him, Slavoj Zizek came close to using such a concept in his critique of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996). Zizek wrote:

> Goldhagen's insistence that the executioners, as a rule, did not feel any 'shame' about what they were doing is … misplaced: his point, of course, is that this absence of shame proves the extent to which their torturing and killing of Jews was integrated into their ideological awareness as totally acceptable. A close reading of the testimonials of his own book nonetheless demonstrates how the executioners experienced their deeds as a kind of 'transgressive' activity, as a kind of pseudo-Bakhtinian 'carnivalesque' activity in which the constraints of 'normal' everyday life were momentarily suspended   it was precisely this 'transgressive' character … which accounted for the 'surplus enjoyment' one got from excessively torturing the victims. The feeling of shame thus … in no way proves that the executioners were 'not wholly corrupted', that 'a minimum of decency persisted in them': on the contrary, this shame was the unmistakeable sign of the excess of enjoyment they got from their acts (Zizek, 1997: 57).

Although it misses the fact that this 'carnivalesque' behaviour was condemned as 'un-German' by such leading Nazis as Heinrich Himmler and Auschwitz Kommandant Rudolf Hoess, Zizek's point is well taken (Hoess, 1959). That is, the Nazi Holocaust was far from just being the rational-bureaucratic and, in that

sense, 'modern' 'genocide' depicted by Zygmunt Bauman (1984), although that was part of it. Indeed, as Elias (1996) has shown, also involved was a 'breakdown of civilization' on several levels. It is also sometimes argued that the mass slaughter of (mainly) Jews in gas chambers and gas vans from 1942 onwards was decided upon and planned at the Wannsee Conference in Berlin in the January of that year, and that it replaced shooting and other forms of killing because it was less uncomfortable for the killers (see, e.g., Roseman, 2002; and Goldhagen, 1996: 157). This is implausible. The Wannsee Conference was more concerned with facilitating and systematizing a planned process that had begun with the invasion of Poland in 1939 and was already under way. The *Einsatztruppen/ Einsatzkommandos* and the *Ordnungspolizei* had already shot some 2 million by the time the Wannsee Conference took place. Few of the killers showed signs of revulsion or regret. Nor did the death camp, labour camp and concentration camp guards. Gassing was introduced largely as a more efficient supplement, but the shootings never stopped, to say nothing of the 'death marches' of 1944 and later (Goldhagen, 1996). Moreover, while there is *some* evidence that *some* of the killers (Goldhagen, *loc cit*) had breakdowns, they remained comparatively rare whether the killers were Germans, Poles, Lithuanians or whatever. And the idea that the gas chamber technology was somehow more impersonal than shooting is also not quite right. Some victims resisted entry or fought to have their children left outside (Hoess, 1959: 149f). In any case, the killers had to look through the windows to see whether or not the victims were dead. The screams and death cries of the latter were also clearly audible to those outside, even in some of the neighbouring blocks.

Hans Joas is critical of Bauman on a related issue, more particularly for not paying sufficient attention to 'the role of spontaneous and individual violence in the everyday life of the concentration camps' (Joas, 2003: 166). Joas also shares with Elias the idea that there is a need, *contra* Bauman, to stress that the Holocaust took place during the war (Joas, 2003: 168; Elias, 1996: 311). Let me now turn to the issues of crime, punishment and sport. I shall deal with them together and fairly briefly.

11. Aspects of Crime, Punishment and Sport
in the 'Civilizing' of the West

It may seem strange to some that I should think it relevant to include in this discussion of ostensibly 'serious' subjects such as war, 'genocide', crime and punishment, a consideration of the apparently 'trivial' subject of sport. However, just as it is arguably the case that forms of sport can be involved in 'genocidal' acts, war, punishment and crime, it is also the case that serious violence and crime of varying degrees and forms can be accompaniments of sport and play. Sport has also visibly risen in the hierarchies of socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political significance in recent years, and similar 'civilizing/de-civilizing' trends are arguably evident in all these fields as well. Let me try to demonstrate this with regard to crime and punishment.

Although it does not seem to have filtered through yet into mainstream criminology and the sociology of crime, both of which tend to remain predominantly present-centred, there is a growing consensus among historians of the subject that rates of violence fell in Western countries more or less continuously from the end of the Middle Ages until the 1960s/1970s. In a comprehensive review of the literature which serves as a prelude to a demonstration of how such a pattern generally fits the Irish case, Irish criminologist Ian O'Donnell cogently summarizes the trend as follows:

> The evolution of modern societies is characterized by ever-decreasing levels of lethal violence between individuals. In a detailed … review of historical and contemporary sources, Gurr described how homicide trends could generally be seen to describe 'a distended U-shaped curve'. By this he meant that levels of homicide declined steadily from the early nineteenth century, before beginning an upward surge in the 1960s. This upswing was sustained until the late 1970s, when Gurr completed his analysis. The pattern of a nineteenth century decline was found wherever data had been collected. Deviations from the downward trend were temporary and accounted for by the aftermath of war, demographic changes, economic prosperity or decline, and the early stages of rapid urbanization and industrialization. The increase since the 1960s was common though not universal (O'Donnell, 2002: 56).

Looking at the problem from an even longer-term perspective, Gurr (1981: 296) described fourteenth century England as 'a society in which men (but rarely women) were easily provoked to violent anger and were unrestrained in the brutality with which they attacked their opponents'. Commenting on murder rates since the thirteenth century, Lawrence Stone concluded that: 'It looks as if the homicide rates in thirteenth century England were about twice as high as those in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were some five to ten times higher than those of today' (Stone, 1983: 25).

In a recent review of relevant research in England, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and the Scandinavian countries, Manuel Eisner concluded that the apparent general trend is real and neither a methodological artefact nor a consequence of inadequate data. He wrote:

> The notorious imprecision of population data, deficiencies in the sources, shifts in the legal definition of homicide, changes in the age structure as well as improved medical possibilities, surely have to be accounted for. But the evidence is so consistent, the secular decline so regular, and the differences in levels so large, that it seems difficult to refuse the conclusion of a real and notable decline (Eisner, 2001: 628).

In order to explain this 'real and notable decline', Eisner follows Gurr (1989) in invoking Elias's theory of civilizing processes. In fact, in arguing thus these authors are part of an emerging consensus that Elias's theory provides

more explanatory purchase on the problem than either 'modernization' theo-
ries or the conventional explanations the roots of which are traceable to
Toennies, Durkheim and the Chicago School. In their *The Civilization of
Crime* (1996), for example, Eric A. Johnson and Eric H. Monkkonen point
to what they take to be four implications of Elias's work that run counter to what
used to be hegemonic assumptions among historians and sociologists in the
1950s and 1960s and still are far from having lost their hold today. These
implications are that:

i)   Emergent royal courts played a central part in the control of violent behav-
     iour in developing Western nation-states in their early stages;
ii) Behaviour tends to be more 'civilized' in urban than in rural areas;
iii) Levels of impulsive violence tend to be higher among people in areas where
     state systems have not yet penetrated; and
iv) In Western societies since the Middle Ages overall levels of violence have
     declined.

Johnson and Monkkonen continue:

> It is these and many other implications of Elias's work that may have impeded
> its acceptance … for what he said ran contrary to a different and more
> persuasive theoretical sequence. This argument, originally associated with
> classical sociological theorists such as Toennies and Durkheim, and later
> elaborated on by Park and Burgess …, held that, with the breakdown of
> family and community (*Gemeinschaft*) and the rise of mass society
> (*Gesellschaft*), especially through urbanization, industrialization and the class
> alignment of capitalist societies, crime has increased. Since crime did increase
> somewhat (in America at least) following World War II, and dramatically
> subsequent to 1968, this other line of sociological theory made much sense.
> Elias's discussions of the control of violent impulses in 'civilized' societies
> seemed out of touch. So, for historians of crime, the slowly growing conviction
> that crime has decreased, not increased, over the centuries; that the countryside
> used to be dangerous, not safe; that, as Barbara Hanawalt put it, 'fur-collar
> crime' was a major threat. All of this changed the status of Elias from curiosity
> to prescient thinker (Johnson and Monkkonen, 1996: 4-5).

A similar picture holds regarding the punishment of crime. As Spierenburg
(1984), Pratt (2002), and, less unambiguously, Garland (1990) have shown,
pace Foucault (1986) the 'civilizing' of punishment in Western Europe was less
a relatively swift process associated with the decline of monarchy than a longer-
term process connected with state-formation and changing sensibilities at the level
of the social *habitus* of people. A study that we carried out in Leicester in the
1980s points in the same overall direction. Using Leicester's local newspaper,
The Leicester Mercury, as our main source of data, we documented the fact that
the reported incidence of violence in Britain over the years 1900-1975 followed
a mainly downward trend. More particularly, the reported incidence was rela-
tively high before the First World War, fell between the wars, and increased

after the Second World War, especially after the 1960s but without coming anywhere near to approximating the levels of the years before 1914.

One of the innovative features of this study consisted of the fact that we distinguished between violence in four 'spheres': the 'political sphere'; the 'industrial sphere'; the 'community sphere'; and the 'sphere of sport and leisure'. Criminal violence *per se* was not part of our focus. What we found was: a generally downward trend in the reported incidence of political violence in twentieth century Britain; a trend regarding industrial violence that was broadly similar, except that, in this case, the level of reported violence remained high up to the General Strike of 1926; and a steady fall in the incidence of community violence. The only sphere of British social life in which the reported incidence of violence rose more or less steadily in the course of the twentieth century was sport and leisure.

What seems in effect to have happened is that a tradition of working class street and pub fighting which was associated with 'aggressive masculinity' and fighting had earlier been firmly established, began to decline as a result, for example, of residential relocation, growing affluence, and the increasing incorporation of working class people into dominant values. As this occurred, the comparatively small number of males who continued to cling to the street and pub fighting tradition came increasingly to use sport and leisure, and after the mid-1960s especially soccer, as a context for expressing it. This invasion of a national sport by working-class fighting gangs in a country which, up until then, had prided itself and been widely acclaimed internationally for its peace-loving sports spectators, was amplified by media reporting out of proportion to what was actually occurring, contributing to the impression of a society where law and order were on the verge of breaking down. However, if one takes the whole picture into account, it is clear that, for most of the 20th century, the reported — and probably also the factual — incidence of violence in Britain had been falling and that the reported rise in and after the 1960s was relatively slight. Even the increase of hooliganism in conjunction with football can be largely accounted for as a kind of transfer of violent traditions into sport and leisure from the community, pub and street. In a word, our findings are broadly consistent with those of other researchers into long-term trends.

12. Conclusion: Trends in Violence and Elias's Thesis

By way of conclusion, I want to suggest that, — and this slight criticism is in no way intended to detract from the overall significance of their work — *contra* Johnson and Monkkonen (1996), Elias saw 'civilization' as a 'beginningless process' and nowhere claimed that, 'over time, violence would decline'. In fact, he saw the future as more open-ended and suggested that, at the present level of knowledge, all we can do is investigate why particular past sequences rather than plausible and possible others have occurred (Elias, 1978: 158ff). We cannot, however, predict the future and, although he was optimistic, Elias certainly did not rule out the possibility of nuclear war as part of the process of humans learning better ways of living together (Elias, 1991: 146).

Ted Gurr (1981) was one of the first scholars to recognize that the reported rise in violent crime in many Western countries since the 1960s/1970s is best construed as supporting rather than refuting Elias. This increase, Gurr argues, 'appears to be a minor perturbation, proportionately no greater than upward swings in homicide rates in Elizabethan times and during the Napoleonic wars — swings which proved to be temporary'. Each major 'upsurge of violent crime', he suggests, has been a consequence of 'fundamental social dislocation'. Among other things, this has separated whole strata from 'the civilizing institutions which instil and reinforce the basic Western injunctions against interpersonal violence'. These dislocating forces 'may be migrants, demobilized veterans, a growing population of disillusioned young people for whom there is no social or economic niche, or badly educated young black men locked in the decaying ghettos of an affluent society'. Gurr stresses in this connection that 'the most devastating episodes of public disorder' appear to coincide with breakdowns of civilization, short-term 'changes in values which legitimate violence', often transmitted through popular culture. For this reason, the instability of lower working class families and the destruction of the compassion institutionalised through the post-war welfare state in response to neo-liberal demands may have long-term deleterious 'de-civilizing' repercussions. (Gurr, 1981: 338-340, 343, 346; see also Leyton, 1995: 251). This is a cogent argument. In the present context, it is only necessary to add that the currently accelerating processes of globalization which, because they are both causally and consequentially associated with the current dominance of neo-liberal or 'New Right' doctrines are fundamentally fuelling both the erosion of welfare states and the trend towards increasing violence, may make this 'de-civilizing' trend last longer than was the case in Elizabethan and Napoleonic times. Whether this proves to be the case or not, if the analyses and arguments advanced in this paper have any substance, an interpretation of Elias based on a close and accurate reading of his central texts rather than on ideological or other forms of mis-construal of what he wrote, provides us with a basis on which it will be possible to increase our understanding of the structure and dynamics of 'civilizing', 'de-civilizing' and 'dys-civilizing' processes beyond the level reached so far. Hopefully, the typology, the data and the arguments and 'tests' of Elias outlined in this paper will prove to be helpful in this connection.

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