

Long-Term Patterns of Change in Human Interconnectedness: A View from International Relations

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ABSTRACT: Recent scholarship has witnessed ‘the return of the grand narrative’. The establishment of ‘world history’ and the emergence of ‘big history’ and ‘new global history’ are examples of that trend. Similar tendencies are evident in the study of international relations. In the main, those writings have developed independently of each other, and it is unclear whether they add up to a coherent narrative. But they share an interest in understanding what has been identified as the central theme in recent studies of world history, namely the development of human interconnectedness over the last few centuries and millennia. They represent a growing recognition of the need for a broadening of the historical imagination to reveal how ‘encounters between strangers’ have influenced the evolution of societies and civilizations, and indeed the social and political development of the species as a whole. The study of international relations is clearly central to a study of long-term processes that foregrounds such encounters. Precisely what it contributes, and what it can profit from engaging with the larger literature on the evolution of interconnectedness, is the subject of this article.

KEYWORDS: world history, human interconnectedness, international relations theory, process sociology, civilizing processes

‘What can change, and what in fact have changed during the long development of humanity are social standards of self-control. ...’ (Elias 2008: 26)

Recent scholarship has witnessed ‘the return of the grand narrative’ (Sherratt 1995). The establishment of ‘world history’ and the emergence of ‘big history’ and ‘new global history’ illustrate that trend (see Christian 2003, McNeill 1979, McNeill and McNeill 2003, Mazlish 2006). Similar tendencies are evident in the study of international relations (Buzan and Little 2000, Camilleri and Falk 2009, Denmark *et al.* 2000, Ferguson and Mansbach 1994, Gills and Thompson 2006, van der Pijl 2007, 2010, and Watson 1993). In the main, those writings have developed independently of each other, and it is unclear whether they add up to a coherent narrative. However, they share an interest in understanding what has been identified as the central theme in recent studies of world history, namely the development of human interconnectedness over the last few centuries and millennia (Manning 2003). They represent a growing recognition of the need for a broadening of the historical imagination to reveal how ‘encounters between strangers’ (in the form of trade, cultural exchange, migration, war, geopolitics, and so forth) have influenced the evolution of societies and civilisations, and indeed the social and political development of the species as a whole (McNeill 1995).

The study of international relations is clearly central to a study of long-term processes that foregrounds such encounters. Precisely what it contributes, and what it can profit from engaging with the larger literature on the evolution of interconnectedness, is the subject of this discussion. Differences of opinion are evident in interpretations of Thucydides who has often been regarded as the first exponent of the classical realist conviction that naked power struggles and violence are the decisive factors in the relations between separate

states. A more nuanced interpretation portrays Thucydides as the architect of a grand narrative that explained how Hellenic civilisation had evolved over many centuries, only to be undermined by the very instruments of its creation: the poleis (Price 2001). From that perspective, the long process of civilisation that led to shared religious and cultural practices was thrown into reverse by decivilising conflicts between Athens and Sparta that would reduce, although Thucydides could not have known this at the time, the Greek city-states-system to a province of first the Macedonian and then the Roman empire.

Although often thought to anticipate classical realist analysis, Thucydides pioneered an approach to cooperation and conflict that is a distant ancestor of the sociological investigation of the tensions between civilising and decivilising processes. Other ancient histories combined that investigation of long-term trends with a more explicit consideration of the cognitive demands on the analyst. Especially intriguing in that regard is the analysis of the overall historical trend towards the interweaving of societies that was set out in Polybius' *Histories*. The work opens with the observation that up to the 140th Olympiad (220–216 BC), 'the world's history had consisted...of a series of unrelated episodes, the origins and results of each being as widely separated as their localities, but from this point onwards history becomes an organic whole: the affairs of Italy and of Africa are connected with those of Asia and of Greece, and all events bear a relationship and contribute to a single end', namely Rome's 'universal dominion' (Polybius, 1.3). Polybius used the concept, *symploke*, to describe the advances in social 'interweaving' that brought three continents together in the late Hellenistic era. The term was distinguished from *epiploke*, or plain contact. The former drew attention to Rome's imperial achievement in bringing diverse peoples within a higher civilisation while emphasising its unhesitant brutality which was no more evident than in the destruction of New Carthage (Polybius, 10.15).

Of special interest are Polybius's remarks on the cognitive challenges of explaining the integration of different regional international systems: 'Just as Fortune has steered almost all the affairs of the world in one direction and forced them to converge upon one and the same goal, so it is the task of the historian to present...under one synoptical view the process by which she has accomplished this general design'. The examination of 'isolated events' contributed little to the endeavour. Analysts who concentrated on 'separate and specialised reports of events' behaved like 'a man who, when he has examined the dissected parts of a body which was once alive and beautiful, imagines that he has beheld the living animal in all its grace and movement'. To acquire a long-term perspective, the historian had to become significantly detached from immediate circumstances (Polybius 1.4).

Those histories of classical antiquity are interesting in the light of recent scholarship in International Relations that has criticised 'presentism' and 'anarchocentrism'. The first concept points to the problem that Elias (2009a) emphasised in a lament on the 'retreat of sociologists into the present', namely the restriction of scholarly interest to developments that stretch back no more than a decade or so. The second describes the supposition that the state of anarchy (understood as the absence of government) has ensured that the similarities between different eras of international history are far more profound than the differences. The target of that criticism is neo-realism or structural realism that argues that the same 'propelling principles' have governed international politics for millennia (Waltz 1979). The counter-argument is that a more sophisticated explanation would consider at least these three phenomena; the rise and fall of different political associations (city-states, empires, modern nation-states and so forth); changing patterns of 'sector integration' (geopolitical forces for most of human history but now global economic and social factors to a greater extent than ever before); and varying levels of human interconnectedness (Buzan and Little 2000).

Those themes are also central to the critique of 'presentism' that has long dominated the study of international relations with its interest in dramatic contemporary episodes, particularly when marked by extraordinary violence. An example is the explosion of literature following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Overviews of the discipline are revealing in this regard because very few analyse the literature on long-term

developments in international relations (an exception is Dark 1998). The analysis of long-term developments has been most pronounced in historical materialist approaches which remain on the margins of the discipline (see Rosenberg 1994; Teschke 2003, and Van der Pijl 2005, 2010), and also in English School analysis of international society that enjoys a more central place (Bull and Watson 1984; Clark 2005; 2007).

Resistance to long-term perspectives also explains the relative scarcity of works in the area. Professional history, many would argue, is necessarily specialist. It must be based, for example, on available primary sources, as required by the historiographical practice of dividing the past into 'relatively short' and 'manageable periods' (Elias 2007a: 152–4). From that standpoint, the sweeping grand narrative runs the risk of gross over-simplification or highly 'personalised' impressions of large tracts of time that rest on pre-established assumptions about the course of events and clearly cannot examine primary sources on a large scale or engage with more than a small sample of the relevant historical scholarship (for further details, see the exchange between Goldthorpe (1991) and Mann (1994) on the status of historical sociology).

One response to those concerns is that academic specialisation has its own liabilities. In particular, the isolation of specific periods from long-term processes results in incomplete understandings of developments in the selected timeframe. A higher level of abstraction is required so that particular eras, episodes and events are considered in long-term perspective (Elias 2007a: 154–5). On some accounts, significant progress is already evident in studies that have identified the general direction of human history over at least the six thousand years (Sherratt 1995). Even so, those who attempt to rehabilitate the grand narrative run the risk of incurring the 'contempt' of professional historians (Elias 2010b: 157). Crucial here is the assumption that those who opt for the grand canvass cannot escape the belief in progress, teleology and historical inevitability that contaminated nineteenth century philosophies of history. A related question is whether the standpoint can possess the detachment that Polybius regarded as vital for understanding long trends towards greater interconnectedness. The recurrent doubt is that the vantage point will be distorted by the particular biases of the temporal and cultural location of the investigator.

It has been argued that the speculative theories of history were premature because they combined limited historical evidence with Eurocentric assumptions about the superiority of modern peoples. From that standpoint, the approaches developed by Kant, Hegel, Marx, Comte and so forth are best regarded as preliminary efforts to understand long-term trends towards the globalisation of social and economic life (Elias 2007). But to abandon such modes of inquiry because of their failures and limitations and to retreat into the present ditches 'the baby with the bathwater' (Elias 2000: conclusion). The challenge is to aim for greater detachment. Nineteenth century philosophies of history made some progress in that direction because, in Polybius' terms, they did not concentrate on 'isolated events' at the national or indeed at the European level, but attempted to understand them in connection with the development of the species as a whole. To use one of Elias's metaphors, they stood on a lower level of the 'spiral staircase' of increasing detachment (Elias 2007b). Contemporary scholars have climbed a little higher and can look down on earlier efforts with all their flaws including their Eurocentrism. But they are still some way from what may prove to be an elusive summit; they are part of an unfinished quest for greater detachment from partial world-views that requires deeper engagement between 'Western' and 'non-Western' perspectives in the 'post-colonial' era (Burke 2003). That necessary encounter is still in an early phase.

The remainder of the discussion is in three parts. The first summarises the dominant approaches to long-term changes within the study of international relations. There are two sub-sections. One compares the neo-realist focus on the endless cycles of geopolitical competition and conflict within *international systems* and the 'English School' analysis of long-term trends within *international societies*. The other sub-section compares liberal and historical-materialist approaches that have attached particular importance to the growth of economic interconnectedness. The second part discusses Elias's process-sociological perspective which offers,

the argument is, a more comprehensive understanding of the paradoxes of global interconnectedness. The third part considers the importance of that analysis for assessing the prospects for embedding a cosmopolitan harm principle and associated 'social standards of self-restraint' in an international society that is faced with the enormous challenge of bringing partially regulated global processes under greater collective control.

Long-term Perspectives in International Relations

Neo-realism and the English School on strategic Interconnectedness

One of the defining self-images of International Relations emphasises its achievement in explaining geopolitical dynamics that have been constant for millennia. Neo-realism is the approach that has done most to foreground the analysis of recurrent and repetitive forces in world politics (Waltz 1979). The core thesis is that the same 'propelling principles' have governed long-term trends wherever independent political communities have had to rely on their own military and political power for their security and survival. The approach emphasises different configurations of military power in international history - specifically the rise and fall of multipolar systems, and the unique condition of nuclear bipolarity where the superpowers came under unprecedented pressure to display strategic foresight and restraint (Waltz 1979, 1981; Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth 2007; also van Benthem van den Bergh 1993).

Waltz emphasised that in reality 'everything is connected with everything else' but, in the interests of theoretical parsimony, the analyst should treat the anarchic system of states as a 'domain apart'. Cultural forces could be ignored by systemic theorists that aimed to explain the recurrence of the same dynamics across international history despite the rise and fall of different regime-types, political ideologies and so forth. Other realists have argued for formulating realist generalisations that are firmly grounded in detailed comparative historical analysis, including uneven economic and technological developments that have influenced the distribution of military and political power (Gilpin 1981: ch. 1). As recent reflections on the significance of China's rise to power have shown, realists are especially interested in power transitions, and specifically whether the rise of new centres of power invariably leads to military competition, international instability and war. Some analysts have maintained that common interests in maintaining global economic interdependence may promote closer cooperation between the great powers, particularly where the industrial societies cannot wage destructive wars against each other without great cost to themselves (Buzan 2011; Clark 2011). In that case, the observation that 'it is conceivable that the succession of hegemonies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ... will be seen as merely an interlude in the more universal pattern of unifying imperialisms' is unduly pessimistic (Gilpin 1981: 145). Profound changes in world politics may have set humanity on a different course marked by the decline of hegemonic wars (see also Elias 2010).

In reaction to Waltz's parsimonious theory, structural theorists have called for a more synoptic analysis of long-term changes in 'sector integration' including fundamental shifts in the relative importance of economic and geopolitical interconnectedness in the contemporary era (Buzan and Little 2000; also Gilpin (1981: ch. 2). Their perspective builds bridges between the realist analysis of international systems and the English School sociology of international societies that has emphasised the highly institutionalised character of the modern society of states. Crucial is an unprecedented thickening of the web of inter-governmental and international non-governmental organisations that, in conjunction with international law and the system of resident ambassadors (that was initially designed to preserve the balance of power) distinguish modern international society from earlier international systems (Buzan and Little 2000; also Wight 1979: ch. 1; Hurrell 2007).

The gulf between structural realism and English school inquiry is narrower as a result (Buzan 2004), but it is important to stress that one of the leading English School analysts famously described international politics as the 'realm of repetition and recurrence' long before Waltz used a similar phrase (Wight 1966a). A parallel realist orientation is evident in a major English School analysis that provides a panoramic overview of international relations from the rise of the first city-states in Mesopotamia around five and a half millennia ago to the current global order (Watson 1992). The idea of the 'pendulum effect' is used to explain swings between monopolising trends in international systems and societies, and disintegrative tendencies in universal empires (Watson 1992: 252ff). At one end of the spectrum there is *hegemony* (where one state or group of states determines the external conduct of all others) or *dominion* (where one state or group of states shapes the internal as well as the external affairs of subordinated societies). At the other end is the condition of approximate equality between states which finds expression in the legal idea of sovereign equality in modern international society (Watson 1992: 13ff). The argument is that most international systems have occupied a precarious mid-point between the extremes.

Watson (1992: 3–4) followed Wight in arguing that the modern states-system has been a 'succession of hegemonies'. Indeed, Wight observed that the elimination of small states and the concentration of military power in ever few hands is one of the dominant long-term tendencies in all states-systems. Those modes of world political organisation may be especially prone to destruction by struggles for power and security that culminate in imperial domination (Wight 1977: ch. 1). But unlike neo- or structural realism, English School analysis does not reduce international politics to the struggle for power and security. The distinction between an *international system* (where states are locked in strategic competition and are in danger of being drawn into generalised warfare) and an *international society* (where they have shared interests and values as well as common institutions) highlights the English School focus on the moral, cultural and legal dimensions of world politics (Bull 1977: 9ff). Whereas neo-realists take the view that states are only restrained by the fear that others will use force against them, the English School emphasises the *additional* importance of moral and legal restraints on state behaviour that reflect common interests in preserving the 'civilising' institutions of international society (see Linklater and Suganami 2006: 122, n9).

Wight regarded international societies as pulled between two forces. One has already been noted: the tendency towards the monopolisation of violence. The second is internal fragmentation along trans-national ideological fault-lines as in the case of the divisions between faith communities in seventeenth century Europe, and between 'revolutionary' and 'counter-revolutionary' movements following the French Revolution. Such conflicts are struggles over legitimacy. They involve disputes over membership (over what the disputants regard as the regimes that have a right to belong to international society, and the regimes that are deemed to be renegades or outcasts), and over right conduct (specifically whether the principles that apply in relations between those who have the same religion or ideology are binding in relations with enemies, or should be ignored (Wight 1977: ch.6). Underlying the analysis of transnational divisions is the conviction that international politics cannot be regarded as a 'domain apart' but must be seen in conjunction with long-term patterns of social and political change within and across societies (Wight 1977: ch. 6).

Transnational ideological conflicts demonstrate that the members of a society of states are bound together by cross-national processes of social and political change. Wight (1977: ch. 1) maintained that international societies have emerged where separate political communities believe they belong to the same civilisation, and where they emphasise differences between their ways of life and outlying 'barbarians' or 'savages'. Marking the sense of unity and distinction, specific philosophers and publicists in all international societies have envisaged a future condition in which societies overcome their differences in, for example, a collective labour of working for perpetual peace. Similar 'revolutionist' tendencies are evident in the modern society of states

but, Wight (1977: ch. 1) argued the 'succession of hegemonies' rather than progress towards cosmopolitanism has been, and may long remain, the dominant trend.

The more realist end of English School analysis suggests there is little evidence of long-term processes that are likely to propel international society in a cosmopolitan direction. At the more radical (or in English School parlance, more 'solidarist') end of the spectrum is the perspective that emphasises, *inter alia*, the rise of the universal human rights culture (Vincent 1986). The approach highlights the growing interpenetration of international and world society, the latter term describing the growth of non-governmental organisations that press states to observe cosmopolitan principles of legitimacy in the sphere of human rights (Vincent 1986; also Clark (2007). Parallel inquiries have explained changing attitudes to the rights of minority nations and indigenous peoples (Keal 2003; Rae 2002). Also important are radical innovations in international criminal law since the end of the Second World War (Ralph 2007). Similar themes exist in constructivist approaches to International Relations that have explored changing normative attitudes to violence, and shifts in emotional responses to cruelty and unnecessary suffering. They include the early nineteenth century struggle to abolish the Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery and, in the more recent period, greater support for humanitarian intervention to prevent or end atrocities against civilian populations (Crawford 2002).

English School theorists have analysed one further long-term development in world politics, which is the expansion of international society beyond Europe to include, as a result of the decolonisation process, the whole of humankind (Bull and Watson 1984). The ideas of sovereignty and non-intervention, and other core Western principles of co-existence, now form the global political framework that binds all peoples together. Several English School analyses of that process have argued that the dominant Western ideas and practices do not command the legitimacy of the more vulnerable groups in what was once called the 'Third World'. They have argued that the more liberal-democratic powers must 'detach [themselves] from purely Western values' that have privileged order and stability over justice in world affairs (Vincent 1986: 107; Bull 1984). One narrow and one larger claim have been advanced in this context. The first is that Western states should be more assiduous in promoting the human right to be free from starvation and malnutrition (Vincent 1986), and from the burden of relievable disease or illness. The second is that the long-term processes of change that have led to the cosmopolitan culture of human rights may turn out to be as momentous as the transition that brought European international society into existence about four centuries ago (Vincent 1986: 128).

Liberalism and Marxism on economic interconnectedness

Ever since Montesquieu defended the 'gentle commerce', liberals have argued that growing economic interconnectedness has the potential to tame the international struggle for power and security. The eighteenth century Enlightenment belief in free trade and the globalisation of the division of social functions underpinned later optimism about the prospects for the gradual, long-term pacification of inter-state relations. Critics have argued that the more fundamental realities of geopolitical conflict constrain levels of trade and interdependence; they have not lost the capacity to throw them into reverse.

At the centre of such debates is the issue of whether the contemporary international system can escape the fate of earlier orders, namely a collapse into unrestrained violence between the few remaining great powers and replacement by empire. Liberals do not believe that progress is inevitable, but stress that the link between conquest and economic growth has at last been broken. They emphasise the rise of the 'trading state' that aims not for military dominance but for financial or commercial success in global capitalist markets (Rosecrance 1986). Such states regard war as uneconomical and obsolescent. Moreover, industrial states in general are obviously restrained by the plain reality that they cannot use the most destructive instruments of force against each other. A common stake in preserving the world economy has led to the proliferation of

international organisations where states attempt, with varying levels of success, to reach agreements about necessary standards of self-restraint. Social learning has occurred as states have come to realise the importance of becoming more attuned to one another's interests as well as the need for mutual accountability in international fora (Keohane 1989). Liberals do not claim that the global instruments of economic management are immune from collapse but maintain that the most industrialised states are entangled in complex economic and social webs that have made the recourse to violence improbable. They regard the liberal peace as evidence of a 'security community' (where member states have resolved to settle differences peacefully and have acquired a degree of 'we-feeling') that has the potential to extend across the world as a whole (Doyle 1983; Adler and Barnett 2000). Such optimism is usually qualified by the observation that liberal regimes have shown less restraint in taking military action to resolve disputes with illiberal societies that are regarded as lacking domestic and international legitimacy, or as less 'civilised'.

Rather like slavery, it has been argued, the institution of warfare may be falling out of favour (Ray 1989; Mueller 1989). Prior to the First World War, such ideas were popularised by Sir Norman Angell in ways that confirm the analysis of the civilising process that will be discussed in the next section. In *The Great Illusion*, Angell argued that war had become more costly – but not, as some of the critics suggested – completely impossible. With the growth of economic interdependence, 'the possibility of one part injuring another without injury to itself [had] been diminished'; a general dampening of aggressive impulses and a weakening of national attachments had begun as part of the more general civilising of drives that had led to the abolition of duelling and introduced similar pressure to pacify relations between sovereign states (Angell 1912: 203ff; 272–3). The progress of 'civilisation' had occurred only recently – given the evidence that humanity had existed for no more than three hundred thousand years. More far-reaching changes had occurred in the last ten years than in hundreds of years in past epochs. As a result of the 'Law of Acceleration', no one could reasonably deny that humanity could be poised to live in a world that eradicated war (Angell 1912: 199).

Realists have long maintained that the First World War revealed the bankruptcy of liberal progressivism. Grappling with unexpected national divisions within the European working classes, Lenin and Bukharin constructed the theory of capitalist imperialism which maintained that inter-state rivalries had to be explained in connection with two inter-related long-term developmental processes: the growing internationalisation of economic and social life, and the fragmentation of humanity along national lines and the intensification of loyalties to nation-states. The first theme extended Marx's account of the overall trend over the millennia towards the social and economic integration of the species. The second took issue with his assumption that capitalist globalisation and trans-national class struggle would reduce geopolitical competition and weaken national orientations. In due course, two of Marx's other core beliefs would be called into question: the supposition that Western Europe – and Britain in particular – held up an image to the rest of the world of its future course of development, and the conviction that, despite the misery it caused, the globalisation of capitalism would erode pre-modern superstition and create the preconditions for material advancement that would become universally accessible with the passage from capitalism to socialism.

Marxists and neo-Marxists divided into different schools that have attempted to understand the long-term significance of the rise of modern capitalist relations. Neo-Marxists attempted to explain modern capitalism by analysing the development of the capitalist world economy over several centuries or millennia (Frank 1967; Wallerstein 1979), Frank and Gills (1993). In particular, they brought a more critical and detached perspective to the analysis of the relationship between Europe and the rest of the world that showed how the evolution of industrial capitalism forced non-Europeans into global systems of exploitation. Neo-Marxists have been criticised for paying insufficient attention to inter-state competitions for power and security, an issue that is addressed in the first two volumes of a major historical materialist analysis of world history (Van der Pijl 2005, 2010). But Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches have been an invaluable corrective to geopolitical

reductionism in the study of international relations. They have spearheaded the historical analysis of the relationship between the development of the modern states-system and the evolution of industrial capitalism (Rosenberg 1994; 2006; Teschke 2003).

Historical materialists accuse neo-realism of ahistoricism, and they accuse liberalism of false progressivism. Leading perspectives place the liberal global order in long-term perspective. They have traced the global expansion of 'market civilisation' and 'disciplinary liberalism' that largely operate through interwoven national and hegemonic structures, but use force to suppress dangerous 'counter-hegemonic' forces (Cox 1983; Gill 1995; Bowden and Seabrooke 2006). Through such inquiries, historical materialists continue to refine long-term perspectives on the forms of power and subordination that are inherent in trans-national economic relations but which are concealed by the dominant bourgeois ideologies that contend that the globalisation of free-market capitalism is the key to taming sovereign states and expanding human liberties.

Civilising processes and social restraints

As noted earlier, the idea of civilisation and civilising processes surface from time to time in studies of international relations. English School theory analyses degrees of civility in societies of states. Liberals have analysed the civilising role of global commerce. Historical materialists have provided a critical anatomy of the liberal project of globalising market civilisation. Structural realists have focused on the differences between stable hierarchical political systems where notions of civility restrain human conduct and the anarchical 'self-help system' where constraints on violence remain weak. From the standpoint of process sociology, which is the subject of this section, realism highlights a central aspect of civilising processes in most societies, namely the gulf between the social standards of self-restraint that generally apply to relations within the group and the more permissive attitudes to the use of force that pervade relations with external competitors and adversaries.

The analysis of the civilising process brings added sophistication to the study of long-term processes in world politics. The technical meaning of the term refers to the reality that all societies have harm conventions – that is, social practices that are designed to protect their members – or elite strata in particular – from unnecessary violent and non-violent harm (Linklater 2011: ch. 1). Distinctions between acceptable and reprehensible conduct – between civil and 'savage' or 'cruel' behaviour are integral to civilising processes in all societies (Elias 1996: 35). The examination of the European process of civilisation over the last five centuries set out to explain how actions that were once permissible – forms of violence, the public humiliation of 'social inferiors', and so forth – became forbidden (as in the case of the death penalty or public execution) or hidden 'behind the scenes' (as with the slaughter of animals). The boundaries between socially approved and unacceptable behaviour shifted over the centuries as Europeans came to regard themselves as more civilised than their medieval forebears and more advanced than neighbouring peoples (Elias 2000). The approach raises the crucial question of how far such civilised standards have influenced relations between societies, and specifically whether there is a global parallel to the process in which 'things that were once permitted (came to be) forbidden' in the societies of Western Europe and beyond (Elias 2000: 70–1).

Elias's writings do not provide an entirely consistent answer to those questions. They maintained that the state's monopoly powers of violence and taxation, and the lengthening interconnections between members of the same society, set in motion a civilising process that revolved around a combination of internal and external constraints on action (and around the increasing importance of internal as against external restraints as that process developed). No such power monopoly checked aggressive impulses in international relations. In that domain, states have been freer to act as they please, using force when they believed it was essential to

protect their security or promote their interests (Elias 1996: 154ff). A historical survey of relations between societies strongly suggested that nothing has changed but the means of killing and the number of people involved (Elias 2007a: 128–9, Elias 2007b: 175). The division between the dual morality that underpins the dichotomy between domestic and international politics – and explains more permissive attitudes to violence in the latter domain – persists even though highly pacified modern societies regard themselves as more civilised than their war-prone ancestors. But by identifying with their principal ‘survival unit’ which is the nation-state in most regions of the world, modern populations are no different from earlier peoples who looked to the kinship group, the city-state or whatever to protect them from external threats, and who had few inhibitions in supporting the use of the most lethal instruments of violence to defend themselves from external dangers. On that essentially realist interpretation of international relations, what has changed over time is the size of the viable survival unit. ‘Elimination contests’ have led to larger territorial monopolies of power, a process that may only end when the whole of humanity is brought under the dominion of a universal state that undertakes to pacify the world (Elias 2000: 445–6). Those dynamics imply that there is no counterpart to the European civilising process in relations between independent political communities – no equivalent movement in restraining state behaviour, in pacifying international politics, and in widening the scope of emotional identification to include other people, irrespective of social origins.

However, Elias observed that there has been more to human history than the evolution of larger territorial monopolies of power and advances in the technologies of violence. New incentives to restrain violence emerged with the capacity to inflict more devastating forms of harm on more and more people over greater distances. With the nuclear revolution, humanity had to confront the possibility that it was nearing ‘the end of the road’, and was in danger of returning to ‘the cave’ (Elias 2010a: 78, 128). Despite clear parallels with realist pessimism, Elias may have been influenced by the argument that the balance of terror was the ‘functional equivalent’ of a monopoly of power precisely because it placed major external restraints on strategic competition, and demanded greater self-restraint and foresight in order to avoid nuclear war (Van Benthem van den Bergh 1993). Superpower conflict could not be ruled out; however, the ‘hegemonic wars’ and ‘hegemonic intoxication’ that had dominated European international politics since classical antiquity appeared to be drawing to an end (Elias 2010a: 101, 144ff).

Higher levels of economic interdependence also had a vital role since they created incentives to acquire more ‘realistic’ understandings of other peoples and their interests. As a result of the ‘immense process of integration’ that has forced different societies together, human groups have come to face some similar challenges to those that confronted Europeans in the earlier period of state-formation. They face the difficulty of learning how to be more attuned to the interests of others ‘over wider areas’ and ‘over longer chains of action’, and the challenge of working out how to live together amicably, but without the restraining role of a higher monopoly of coercive power. Rising levels of interconnectedness have had a civilising effect in that they have encouraged societies to form ‘unions of states’ to respond to shared problems. The outlines of a global civilising process are evident in the conviction that genocide and other violations of human rights should arouse condemnation and, in extreme cases, lead to global action that may include humanitarian intervention. No less important is the reality that affluent peoples are very conscious of serious poverty in other societies. Feelings of responsibility for the victims have grown with the extension of webs of interconnectedness although efforts to alleviate distant suffering remain limited (Elias 1996: 26).

Furthermore, processes of integration have developed hand-in-hand with ‘counter-thrusts’ that may always gain the upper hand. Many groups resent the encroachment of alien values, and various strata fear that global interdependence will diminish their power, status and autonomy. Loyalties to trusted survival units act as a ‘drag effect’ on ‘union of states’ that are increasingly necessary in order to deal with common problems although they provide little ‘emotional warmth’ to many groups that have become incorporated in larger

political associations (Elias 2010b: part three). Attachments to traditional survival units clash with the pressures to acquire a more detached view of group interests and aspirations, and to see one's own society from afar – that is, from the standpoint of others (Elias 2007b: 162–3). The upshot of those conflicting tendencies is that the modern states-system is delicately poised between civilising potentials that are part of the compulsions of growing interconnectedness and decivilising tendencies that are anchored in familiar geopolitical rivalries as well as in the social tensions that develop alongside globalising forces that, in some measure, tame national struggles for power or security but do not bring the competition to invent and acquire more sophisticated instruments of destruction to an end.

Elias's explanation of long-term social processes in modern Europe (and indeed across history as a whole) achieved a level of synthesis that remains unusual in the social sciences. The analysis highlighted elimination struggles and monopolising trends in relations between states; increasing levels of interconnectedness within highly-pacified societies that acquired global dominance and were able to disseminate their notions of the state and international relations to all parts of the world; and changes in emotional identification so that the members of particular states came to identify with each other to a greater extent than before. As noted earlier, that dimension of the civilising process installed divisions between insiders and outsiders that denied external adversaries the forms of protection from violent harm that had been established within modern states. But as a result of global integration and mutual dependence, states have recognised (however begrudgingly) the necessity of self-restraint and the value of coordinated approaches to global challenges, although they continue to struggle to find solutions to, *inter alia*, the problem of the further proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the threat of climate change, and the continuing risk of global economic instability. However, states are less able to behave as they please. To a greater extent than in any other states-system, states face accountability pressures from assorted international non-governmental organisations that attempt to promote a global conscience that binds all people more closely together.

Civilising Processes and International Systems

Elias's approach to long-term processes was critical of the dominant tendency in Sociology which was to consider social structures and social change in isolation from war, geopolitics and lengthening webs of interconnectedness. The discussion of tensions between integrative and disintegrative tendencies attempted to direct the focus of sociology to patterns of change that occurred 'above' the state, at the trans-national level. But there was little mention of structured relations at the global level – whether balance of power arrangements that lock states together in an international system, or diplomatic networks and international legal conventions that link them in an international society. The observation that modern attitudes to genocide are different from – and more civilised than – attitudes to mass killing in classical antiquity is best assessed as part of a comparative investigation of the Western states-systems (Linklater, in preparation). It can only be confirmed in full or part, or superseded if need be, by developing a sociology of violence and civilisation – an examination of global civilising processes - in those forms of world political organisation. That is the point where the English School analysis of international society and the process-sociological explanation of civilising processes can be integrated in a more comprehensive approach to long-term trends in world politics.

Two themes are of particular interest for that enterprise. The first is Wight's comment that although international society is not poised 'to supersede domestic society', it 'exercises restraints upon its members', as is evident from the 'many examples in medieval and modern politics of restraint in the exercise of power, of refusal to exploit an advantage, where the motive seems to have been not the avoidance of moral self-condemnation...but the attainment of better relations' (Wight 1966b: 95, 129). The second is Elias's

observation that one of the central questions in world politics is whether societies with different civilising processes and conceptions of appropriate levels of restraint in foreign policy can undergo a collective learning process in which peoples become more attuned to one another over greater distances (Elias 2000: 410). As English School writers have argued, many protocols including the notion of diplomatic immunity have facilitated the quest for standards of self-restraint in the modern states-system. But it is not usually recognised that those arrangements evolved as part of the civilising process, and that they were offshoots of the 'supranational' court society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that had its immediate origins in the medieval period (Elias 2010c). Their development which includes the idea that emerged in the Renaissance of great power cooperation to maintain a balance of power has occurred in response to the challenges of rising levels of strategic interconnectedness (Guiccardini 1969 [1561]). In the early eighteenth century, the French diplomat, Francois de Callières (1983 [1716]), argued that all societies would profit from downgrading the aristocratic attachment to military honour and upgrading the virtues of foresight and restraint in a 'civilised' international order that faced the problem of controlling military power. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Swiss international lawyer, Emmerich de Vattel (1866 [1758]: 414) observed that European states were no longer thrown together in 'a confused heap' where there was little consideration for 'the fate of others'; as a result of becoming 'closely connected', they had formed a republic that recognised the need for cooperation to preserve military equilibrium and check hegemonic ambitions.

Over the last two centuries, long-term trends towards greater collective management of the international system have been punctuated by more destructive warfare between the great powers. Notable advances have occurred at the end of major wars when states turned to the issue of how to rebuild international order (Clark 2005). But as in the case of the Congress of Vienna at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the leading states did not only feel the need to establish civilising 'meeting regimes' that enshrined the principle of great power consultation (Van Vree 1999). That development was one aspect of a larger process of social change in which emergent peace societies were instrumental in promoting a European-wide consensus on the need to reduce unnecessary suffering in warfare (Ceadel 1996). From then on, the liberal harm principle – a foundational element of modern criminal law – became central to a globalising civilising process that continues to struggle to keep pace with advances in the power to harm. The harm principle has shaped 'civilised' attitudes to unnecessary suffering in war, to torture, genocide, racial domination and other forms of behaviour that are now prohibited by the global human rights culture and international criminal law. Those features of a global civilising process do not rest on an appeal to some allegedly-universalisable vision of the good life. They depend on the observation that most of the members of very different cultures wish to prolong life for as long as possible, free from relievable pain and suffering, just as they hope or expect that social and political arrangements – whether local, national or international – will help them in their quest to escape deprivation and to enjoy happiness and fulfilment. The course of the global civilising process has been complex for the reasons that have been given by realists and other analysts of the recurrent depressing features of world politics. Even so, the modern society of states is different from its predecessors because a range of international legal codifications of the duty not to cause 'unnecessary suffering' in war, and related obligations to avoid causing 'serious bodily and mental harm' such as genocide and torture, are now central to agreed global standards of restraint.

The movement to abolish the Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery also represented a major advance in embedding 'cosmopolitan harm conventions' in international society that are designed to secure justice for individuals in their own right (see Linklater 2011: ch. 1). That manifestation of 'civilised' attitudes to suffering and humiliation was part of an ongoing debate about the standards of restraint that the imperial powers should observe in their relations with colonised peoples. The sense of belonging to the international society of states had long been linked with assumptions about the right to conquer 'savages' and to transform their ways of life in accordance with the 'standard of civilisation' (Gong 1984; Suzuki 2009). The dual morality that

shaped relations between European societies existed in even starker form in relations between the colonial 'establishment' and non-European 'outsiders'. The dominant social standards of restraint were more permissive in the latter sphere. That dualism was challenged by critics of imperial cruelties from the time of the Spanish conquest. But especially from the early nineteenth century, changing notions of domestic and international legitimacy were evident in the expectations that the overseas empires would be governed - to a greater extent than ever before - by moral and legal constraints on violent and non-violent harm that were consistent with the sense of belonging to a higher civilisation (Crawford 2002).

The progressive ideologies of that period supported a greater convergence between the principles that were deemed relevant within states and the standards that were upheld in the relations between them; they promoted a similar correspondence between the patterns of self-restraint that applied in relations between Europeans and the codes of conduct that governed their behaviour towards colonised peoples. But competing pressures have shaped the first universal society of states that has developed since that era. Many social movements have spearheaded cosmopolitan ideas and visions of world citizenship (Boli and Thomas 1999). They have called for a broadening of the scope of emotional identification to include all peoples irrespective of national origins. Contemporary analysis now devotes considerable attention to the political theory and practice of cosmopolitanism. The 'cosmopolitan turn' reflects a new phase in the development of the species in which there is an evident need for a vocabulary of politics that can bridge the gulf between the social habitus that remains centred on nation-states and the compulsions of rising levels of global interconnectedness. The challenge is not only to 'civilise' relations between states but to work towards new forms of political community and citizenship that combine loyalties to nation-states with attachments to sub-national and trans-national groupings and authorities (Linklater 1998). The difficulties in reaching an agreement about the requisite patterns of cosmopolitan self-restraint are complicated by fears that universal ideologies will be used to legitimate new systems of domination, by the 'drag effect' mentioned earlier, and by familiar geopolitical rivalries. As historical materialists have emphasised, increasing class inequalities compound the problem. The lower strata within modern states extracted political concessions from the dominant groups that had become more dependent on them for the satisfaction of their interests. Ruling elites in the modern world economy do not have to make similar calculations about the costs of displaying indifference to the well-being of the world's most vulnerable groups. The latter lack the capacity to force concessions from them (Mennell 2007: ch. 12). Mutual dependence between highly industrialised societies may create unique potentials in the sphere of cosmopolitan patterns of restraint. That does not rule out the possibility that a ruling-class cosmopolitanism will dominate a stratified world society with a peaceful core that is surrounded by areas of political turbulence that impinge on, and unsettle, the more secure and affluent regions.

Conclusion

Societies of states embody civilising processes although the constituent parts do not have the same expectation of restrained behaviour that the members of stable political communities generally have in their relations with each other - specifically that they will refrain from using force to resolve major differences but seek justice in courts of law whose judgments are enforced by a higher power monopoly. The 'social constraints towards self-constraint' have increased because of the dangers associated with modern forms of strategic and economic interconnectedness. Several developments in international law are evidence of the reduced tolerance of cruelty. They have not taken place because modern peoples are more ethical than their predecessors but because they are more dangerous to each other. In short, becoming more civilised and becoming more destructive have developed in tandem, as different sides of the same coin. Placing

international systems and societies at the centre of world history is crucial for understanding the impact of ‘encounters between strangers’ on such long-term patterns of development. The aim is to comprehend what different forms of world political organisation have contributed to global civilising processes that restrain the capacity to inflict violent and non-violent harm (Linklater, in preparation).

More ‘species-orientated’ historical narratives may have some influence on how the modern states-system responds to the ancient problem of whether human ingenuity with respect to exploiting nature and defeating adversaries will continue to outpace inventiveness in restraining destructive power. Progress in altering the balance of forces will require greater detachment from the standpoint of particular social groups, and advanced skills in thinking from the perspective of others. The shift from ‘nation-centred’ narratives to analyses of long-term processes that have shaped the fate of the species as a whole can contribute to such transformations of perspective. They can enable people to reach a higher level on the spiral staircase that was mentioned earlier. Rather like advances in time-measurement that enabled people to attune themselves to each other over longer distances, such grand narratives are part of a transition from ‘concepts representing a small-scale, highly group-centred’ standpoint to categories that reflect the social need for ‘large scale, more object-centred, more impersonal, and more detached synthesis’ given ‘lengthening interdependence chains’ (Elias 2009b: 121). The discredited nineteenth century theories of history marked the shift from national history to more comprehensive analyses of the development of the species. Efforts to understand long-term processes are being purged of the Eurocentric and racist imagery that contaminated earlier efforts to explain the evolution of human interconnectedness. Further success would not only represent an advance in knowledge. It can promote more detached orientations to the past that alter human self-images and increase the level of support for collective action to embed civilising, cosmopolitan standards of self-control in the contemporary global order.

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