

Functional Democratisation and Disintegration as Side-Effects of Differentiation and Integration Processes

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Abstract: *In What is Sociology? (2012 [1970]), as he is about to outline the common origin of social science and social ideology, and building up to set sociology against ideology, Norbert Elias introduces the concept of ‘functional democratisation’. More recently, in his The American Civilising Process (2007) and in two articles (2014a; 2014b), Stephen Mennell launched the contrasting concept of ‘functional de-democratisation’. This essay opens with quotations from Elias and Mennell in an attempt to show how the concepts and processes of functional (de)democratisation are introduced, followed by a discussion from a long-term perspective on processes of social differentiation and integration, in which I explore how functional democratisation and de-democratisation could fit together as trends and concepts in a wider sociological framework. The observation that, as a rule, integration processes go hand in hand with integration conflicts and also some disintegration, leads to the hypothesis that the trend towards global integration is increasingly lagging behind the trend towards the global differentiation of specialised activities or social functions.*

Keywords: *differentiation and integration of social functions, integration conflicts, disintegration, functional and institutional democratisation, figurational process sociology*

Functional democratisation

Elias presents his concept of ‘functional democratisation’ as a cornerstone of his theory. The context is polemical. [2][#N2]. The ‘overall social transformation’, he writes, is usually labelled by only one of its aspects, such as ‘industrialisation, scientification, bureaucratisation, urbanisation, democratisation or the growth of nationhood’ (2012 [1970]: 59). [3][#N3]. Without a model of their interrelations, Elias claims, conceptual divisions such as these will lead sociology astray. The same goes for mentally dividing societies into economic, political and social spheres, for these divisions obstruct the possibility to overcome ‘the sociological problems posed by the common direction of development in many state-societies’. This direction, he writes, ‘has to be brought to light not just in one sphere but in the all-pervading transformation of human relationships’ (59–60). Helpful directional questions are: ‘What overall change in the structure of each of these societies has caused the ruling strata of previous centuries to decline in power in relation to the social heirs of those who were often referred to as the common herd?’ and why ‘societies oligarchically ruled by the hereditarily privileged were transformed into societies ruled by the recallable representatives of mass political parties?’ (60–1). Elias discusses the trend towards reduction of power differentials in two sections, distinguishing a reduction between rulers and ruled, and between different social strata. At the end of these two sections he introduces the concept of functional democratisation, but only after pointing to an inherent regularity, an unintended side-effect that damages people, their functions and power ratios:

[A]gain and again in the course of social differentiation and corresponding integration, certain social groups have suffered reductions in the scope of their functions, and even total loss of function; the consequence has been loss of power potential. But the overall trend of the transformation was to reduce all power potentials between different groups, even down to those between men and women, parents and children.

This trend is referred to by the concept of ‘functional democratisation’. It is not identical with the trend towards the development towards ‘institutional democracy’. [4],[#N4]It refers to a shift in the social distribution of power, and this can manifest itself in various institutional forms, for example in one-party systems as well as in multi-party systems (63).

With the next sentence, opening section three, Elias highlights the importance of ‘this trend’, writing:

Central to this whole social transformation have been impulses towards growing social specialisation or differentiation in all social activities. Corresponding to these have been impulses towards integration of the specialised activities—integration that has often lagged behind the differentiation. [...] Because of their particular specialized functions, all groups and individuals become more and more functionally dependent on more and more others (63–4).

In section four, Elias focuses on two types of intellectual orientation— the scientific and the ideological— that have usually developed in close association with this transformation. Referring to the structural properties which enabled people to become aware of themselves as societies, he writes: ‘Paramount among them is functional democratisation, the narrowing of power differentials and development towards a less uneven distribution of power chances; it permeates the whole gamut of social bonds, although there are impulses simultaneously running counter to this trend’ (64–5).

After having introduced ‘functional democratisation’ in *What is Sociology?*, Elias continues to use the concept, but with little clarification and at times almost casually, without reference to what he describes as ‘central to this whole social transformation’: the ‘growing social specialisation or differentiation in all social activities’. For example, when writing ‘the thrust towards diminishing the power gradient between rulers and ruled, between the entire state establishment and the great mass of outsiders’ (2013: 34), he no longer explains why this democratisation is ‘functional’. It then becomes ‘the equalising process,’ which ‘is inherent in the division of labour’ as Eric Dunning puts it, adding that ‘the term functional democratisation was, in fact, coined later by Elias to represent more adequately what he had earlier referred to as “growing structural pressure from below” and the relatively more equal power ratios within longer chains of interdependence’ (Dunning 2008: 218, 211).

In his major work, *On the Process of Civilisation*, Elias did not use the term ‘functional democratisation’, although his argument that with the increasing divisions of social functions an ‘*open or latent ambivalence*’ emerges in all human relationships, draws attention to directly connected psychological processes that are particularly relevant, as I will argue later in this essay.

Functional de-democratisation

In his book on *The American Civilising Process*, Stephen Mennell has a section entitled ‘Functional de-democratisation’ in which he draws attention to the twentieth-century trends toward social equalisation and

informalisation,

that from some standpoints may appear the dominant feature of the last century. In the counterpoint of history, however, they can be interwoven with contrary trends. Elias paid less attention to the possibility of what may be called *functional de-democratisation* and its effects. Yet in his writings and those of subsequent researchers who have followed his lead, there are important clues as to the genesis and consequences of functional de-democratisation (2007: 311).

Mennell proceeds by discussing 'identification with the established' and related insights of Elias's model of established–outsiders relationships, but abstains from further clarification of the meaning of '*functional de-democratisation* and its effects'. There is a reference to 'increasing disparities in wealth and power' but the relation between these disparities and the concept is not specified. Referring to *The American Civilising Process*, Behrouz Alikhani captures Mennell's argument as follows:

Regarding functional democratisation processes, one fact seems obvious: the widening of the gap between rich and poor in 'democratic' societies will render them less democratic, in other words, *functionally de-democratised*. In these societies, the main sources of power and status are increasingly becoming the monopoly of a few individuals and groups from which the majority of the members of society is being excluded (2014).

At the end of his discussion of the 'economic crisis' since 2007–8, Stephen Mennell again raises

some points of criticism or clarification about Elias's ideas, particularly about [...] the confidence he often expressed that the overall trend of human society was towards longer chains of interdependence, which would tend to bring with them relatively more equal power ratios between the various links in the chain – "functional democratisation" (2014a: 2).

In contrast to Elias, Mennell observes that today in expanding interdependency networks 'in important respects the big picture is of functional *de*-democratisation.' In an even stronger formulation he concludes: 'on the larger scale, there are very powerful forces of functional *de*-democratisation at work' (3).

Mennell argues that 'the dominant viewpoint in economics in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s offered an ideological justification of "Greed is Good",' while 'the invisible hand' translated into 'everything is permitted' and for bypassing responsibility for foreseeable externalities or wider social consequences. Together with the assumption that was dominant until 2008, that (financial) markets are 'free' in the sense of having an equal distribution of power chances, these established views in economics allowed for increasingly uneven power ratios between rich and poor social classes as well as between rich and poor countries.

Drawing attention to 'the financiers and their political allies', who 'increasingly see the need neither to pay their taxes nor to compare their remuneration with that of their fellow countrymen and countrywomen,' Mennell compares this relatively new development with the preceding trend:

in many countries the narrowing of economic inequality went along with more even balances of power between upper and lower strata. Those balances appear to be tipping back in favour of

the more privileged, and global interdependences are increasingly interwoven with countries' internal power ratios (2014a: 12).

In his article 'Globalisation and the "American Dream"', Stephen Menell uses Elias's term 'polyphony of history' as a stepping stone to say that Elias 'would not have been surprised to find that early in the twenty-first century alongside continuing strands of functional democratisation there is evidence of the growing strength of the opposite: what I have labelled "functional de-democratisation"' (2014b). He goes on to provide evidence of 'increasing inequality in America.'

Is functional democratisation compatible with rising inequality?

Stephen Menell's argument that increasing global interdependence coincides with growing inequality in nation-states seems accurate. But he does not specify clearly enough why he calls this *de*-democratisation *functional*, [5],[#N5], and it therefore remains unclear what he means by 'functional *de*-democratisation'. It is also unclear to what extent this concept can have a clarifying function in figurational process theory. It raises some crucial questions, such as: What is the relationship between 'functional democratisation' and rising social equality? What is the relationship between 'functional *de*-democratisation' and rising social inequality? How are these processes and concepts connected with processes of social differentiation and integration?

I will start my attempt at clarification by taking a closer look at connections between processes of differentiation, integration and functional democratisation, processes that have been dominant from the sixteenth century onward since the disintegration of the Roman Empire into the Dark Ages. In Europe and the Middle East they continued in more or less the same direction, taking the course of state formation processes in which 'private' leaders of survival units such as war lords and knights became courtiers. From the courts the 'private' royal functions of managing the monopolies over the use of violence and taxation were gradually or by revolution transformed into the bureaucratic public functions of state institutions. It was an institutional democratisation, a transformation from private to public: state monopolies coming into the hands of an increasingly wider public. Menell's argument opens the possibility that these processes of differentiation, integration and functional democratisation have stalled, come to an end, or have even changed direction.

Menell introduces the possibility of using both 'functional democratisation' and 'functional *de*-democratisation' by suggesting a differentiation between horizontal and vertical chains of interdependence. But he leaves his readers with a question: 'do we need to specify "boundary conditions" (as the logical positivists called them) within which these consequences arise, and outside which the assumptions cease to be valid?' (2014a: 12). Perhaps he stops there because he realises that conceptual divisions such as these cannot take him far, and may in fact lead sociology astray?

Does Elias assume, as Menell claims, that 'longer chains of interdependence would always, or would generally, be associated with functional democratisation'? In the quotations above, Elias restricts his discussion to the period of nation-states from about the sixteenth century onwards, and he focuses on the period in which social sciences and social ideologies emerged. This period also coincides with colonisation and industrialisation. Did Elias forget about the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, when industrial societies seemed to become the least egalitarian of all? And what about the colonisation processes of that era?

Would these rising social inequalities have made Elias's conclusion of 'functional democratisation' wrong, or at least one-sided?

I think the answer is no, because what Elias writes (in the 1930s) about the colonisation of land outside the West can also be read as an example of 'functional democratisation', before he actually coins the concept. In *On the Process of Civilisation* Elias connects the 'mechanism of competition and monopoly' with the 'regularity of functional differentiation' and predicts declining differences in power and conduct:

Western people, under the pressure of their own competitive struggle are making large parts of the world dependent on them and at the same time – in keeping with a regularity of functional differentiation that has been observed over and over again – are themselves becoming dependent on these parts (2012: 424–6).

In the longer run, he argues, 'largely without deliberate intent, they work in a direction which sooner or later leads to a reduction in the differences both of social power and of conduct between colonists and colonised' (ibid.). Thus, Elias acknowledges the social inequalities that were generated by colonisation and predicted their decline via functional democratisation.

In addition, Elias was not blind to the part-processes of disintegration that accompanied functional democratisation and social integration. In his entry on 'social processes', for example, he calls universal progress a myth, citing the example of 'weapons and tools, which gave a particular society advantages in struggles for survival with other groups and with non-human nature', but 'groups which did not adopt them were defeated and disappeared. In retrospect, 'he adds, 'people see only the apparent smooth progress of technology, and not the elimination struggles behind it, which consume human beings' (2009 [1986]: 8).

Accordingly, Elias takes care to present both equalisation and its counter-trend, for example by first drawing attention to social groups that suffered reductions or even total loss of function and power potential, before writing: 'but the overall trend of the transformation was to reduce all power potentials between different groups, even down to those between men and women, parents and children' (63). In a similar example, also quoted above, Elias defines 'functional democratisation' and accentuates its grand scope and importance by writing 'it permeates the whole gamut of social bonds,' but then declaring: 'although there are impulses simultaneously running counter to this trend' (64). Thus, he presents 'functional democratisation' as a balance-concept, [6].[#N6]making it mandatory to ask and determine how strong these counter-impulses towards increasing social inequality have actually been, and specifically to inquire which people and groups in fact 'suffer reductions or even total loss of function and power potential'.

Only with such a balance-concept is it possible to grasp that as interdependency networks expand and become denser, both social equality and inequality tend to increase. Apparently, 'functional democratisation' is compatible with increasing social inequality. As the differentiation of social functions and organisations proceeded and demanded more and higher levels of integration, decreasing inequalities via functional democratisation is just one side of the coin. They also increased, if only because the co-ordination and administration of multi-levelled social organisations implied a longer and steeper hierarchy, and usually also because some people and their groups 'suffer reductions or even total loss of function and power potential'.

It seems likely that both these apparently contradictory trends occurred throughout human history as two unintended side-effects of social differentiation and integration processes. From the organisation of fire control and of agrarian production onward, the expansion of human organisations and human groups have become increasingly interdependent via differentiation and integration of social activities or functions. Some

groups will have lost power potential because they lagged behind in the specialisation or differentiation of functions and/or could not make their social organisation competitive enough to prevent losing power and survival chances.

Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan can be perceived as states whose social organisation lagged behind to the extent that they were not able to make themselves competitive enough to prevent being transformed into 'failed states'. From this perspective, the present refugee crisis – most refugees in Europe have fled these three countries – is an example of the part-processes of disintegration as an unintended side-effect damaging people, their functions and their properties. This side-effect might also be conceptualised as 'functional *de*-democratisation'. However, it is also possible to use Elias's concept of 'defunctionalisation' instead: he writes about the defunctionalisation of priests, of kings, of 'the defunctionalising of the family by the state', and also presents a more general statement:

A defunctionalisation of existing specialisms can be observed again and again in the course of social development. They may be restricted to specific enclaves of the structure of social functions as in the case, for example, when handloom weavers are defunctionalised by factory production using mechanical looms [...] It may comprise the whole function-structure of an integrated social unit [...]. In the territories of the former Western [Roman] Empire, this trend towards the contradiction of differentiation, towards the defunctionalisation of previously existing specialisms reached its high point in the early feudal societies (Elias 2009 [1977]: 29).

[7],[#N7]

Apparently, whole states can also lose functions and defunctionalise to the extent that they become or are perceived to become 'failed states'.

However, on the whole, among the groups that survive, defunctionalisation and growing inequalities will not have been more dominant than 'functional democratisation' – the growing equality that accompanies the expansion and strengthening of interdependency networks. As all groups and individuals became more and more functionally dependent on more and more others, all people bonded in such a network will become less inclined to use violence for solving conflicts or to use other forms of constraints that would disturb the mutual interests of their bonds, including hierarchical ones, as these interests and bonds will have found a well-grounded place in their survival unit. They provide a sense of belonging in combination with a certain protection against loss of material security and physical safety. They tend to become a taken for granted part of the group's culture, its members' social habitus.

Growing interdependence triggers ambivalence

In his book on the process of civilisation, Elias claims that the broader and denser the networks of social interdependence become, 'a specific duality or even multiplicity of interests manifests itself more strongly' in the relations between individuals as well as between different functional strata. And in this argument Elias describes the open or latent ambivalence that I think is crucial for understanding and explaining functional democratisation:

As social functions and interests become increasingly complex and contradictory, we find more and more frequently in the behaviour and feelings of people a peculiar split, a co-existence of positive and negative elements, a mixture of muted affection and muted dislike in varying

proportions and nuances. The possibility of pure, unambiguous enmity grow fewer; and, more and more perceptibly, every action taken against an opponent also threatens the social existence of its perpetrator – it disturbs the whole mechanism of chains of action of which each is a part (352–3).

At this point Elias presents an example that is especially interesting because he writes this in the mid-1930s, when Hitler and the Nazis were in power and he himself was in exile. After having stated that ‘with the growing division of functions, the relations between different power units become increasingly ambivalent’, he continues:

The relations between states in our own time, above all in Europe, offer a clear example of this. Even if integration and the division of functions *between* them have not yet advanced as far as the division of functions *within* them, every military exchange nevertheless so threatens this highly differentiated network of nations as a whole that in the end the victor finds himself in a seriously shaken position. He is no longer able – or willing – to depopulate and devastate the enemy country sufficiently to settle a part of his own population in it. He must, in the interest of victory, destroy as far as possible the industrial power of the enemy, and at the same time, in the interest of his own peace, try within limits to preserve or restore his industrial apparatus (353).

Elias goes on to sketch what can be won by such a war – ‘colonial possessions, frontier revisions, export markets, economic or military advantages’ – and then rams home his point that because ‘in the struggles of high complex societies, each rival and opponent [each nation-state] is at the same time a partner on the production line of the same function-dividing machinery, [8].[#N8]every sudden and radical change in one sector of this network [of states] inevitably leads to a disruption and changes in another’ (353).

[The] inevitable conflicts grow increasingly risky for the whole precarious system of nations. [...] However, through these very tensions and discharges the figuration moves slowly towards a more unequivocal form of hegemony, and towards an integration, perhaps at first of a federative kind, of larger units around specific hegemonic centres (353).

The force of the competition and interweaving mechanism

In Elias’s perspective on international relations and on the pervasive force of constraints at higher levels of differentiation, integration and complexity, the division of social functions proceeds on the ‘production line’ of a ‘machinery’ driven by the unremittingly operative ‘mechanism of competition and monopoly’. [9].[#N9]. This may sound rather mechanistic, but the present trend towards an increasingly global system of interdependent nation-states seems undisputed. In the words of Johan Goudsblom:

No one who is not bewildered by short-term fluctuations can fail to recognise this trend leading to ever more extensive social formations, controlled by ever more encompassing centres monopolising the means of organised violence. That these growing monopolies are not immediately stable goes without saying (1983:).

Surveying many centuries from this perspective, even major violent conflicts such as the Great War and World War II become 'temporary fluctuations' in the long-term development of nation-states and their regimes of manners and emotion regulation.

This view is also in keeping with the results from my study of changes in these regimes in four western countries since the 1880s. I concluded that:

World War II functioned predominantly as a catalyst. Arguably, in terms of changes in the codes of manners and emotion regulation over the twentieth century, both major wars and their aftermath seem to have had little effect on the overall trend (Wouters 2007: 173).

I remember using the words 'little effect' and 'little independent lasting effect' hesitantly and reluctantly because of the obvious and lasting effect which the brutalities of the Nazis had on victims, survivors and their descendants. This realisation made it difficult to acknowledge that the atrocities of the two big wars of the twentieth century had 'small significance for overall developments in regimes of manners and emotions'.

Elias continues his account of how the advancing division of social functions is connected to advancing ambivalences by drawing social classes into the picture, arguing that:

the relationship between different social classes *within* a dominion becomes, with the advancing division of functions, more and more ambivalent in the same way. Here, too, within a far more restricted space, groups whose social existence is mutually dependent through the division of functions are struggling for certain opportunities. They too are at one and the same time opponents and partners (353).

Decolonisation as functional democratisation

As differentiation and integration processes became dominant on a global level, the processes of functional democratisation and advancing ambivalences also continued on that level. Also on an international and global scale, the mechanisms of competition and interweaving continued to operate, increasingly involving each and every state or dominion in global processes of differentiation, integration and functional democratisation. A significant moment in the expanding global network of political, economic and cultural interdependencies emerged when the competition via the accumulation of land stopped and colonialism came to an end.

Although to varying degrees, decolonisation also spread to the countries 'behind the iron curtain' in the USSR. Politically independent nation-states then became the globally accepted dominant standard of social organisation, a rule proven by the exception of the 'failed state', a concept that refers to a place where the state does not function 'normally' and where individuals and groups 'suffer reductions or even total loss of function and power potential'.

To a large extent, decolonisation can be understood in terms of functional democratisation. Within the political and economic interdependency networks, functional differentiation had proceeded to a point where the desire for political democratisation was able to find political expression. After World War II, European colonial empires were exhausted and anti-colonial superpowers were competing for support in the former colonies. The expansion of global networks reached a critical density, implying a functional democratisation that forced up 'the price of violence'. In the post-colonial era it became less likely simply to settle conflicts between nation-states by violent means such as dispatching armies or gun-boats, although bombing from

planes and drones is still considered and practised. But it is increasingly less common, and practised only by powerful rich states who think that bombing can win the battle.

The spread and intensification of restraints on international military intervention created favourable conditions for internationally operating commercial and financial enterprises. It was a similar pacification process to that which took place in an earlier era when national territories were internally pacified. At that time, the pacification forged by the monopolisation of the use of violence and taxation by the state had created physical safety, one of the major favourable conditions for commerce and finance to prosper. Now, over extended pacified territories, the competitive struggle for the accumulation of money continued and intensified on a global scale. From this perspective, it is a continuation of an earlier era, when the balance of power in court societies increasingly shifted from the aristocracy in favour of the functional and commercial bourgeoisie. In the post-colonial era, this shift extended from nation-states to the world at large, providing higher levels of physical safety as well as material security to an increasingly wider public.

Physical safety and material security

At this point it seems relevant to compare the functions of providing material security with the functions of providing physical safety by raising the question: Have monopolisation processes in the world of money developed to a level at which their functions of providing material security are becoming susceptible and subjected to a similar change from private to public as had happened in state-formation processes when private state monopolies providing a certain level of physical safety came into the hands of an increasingly wider public? (see Blomert 2012).

In the era of industrialisation, private owners of enterprises were required by the success and expansion of their businesses to delegate to others more and more of the functions that, according to Fritz Croner's 'delegation theory', were all originally performed by the owners themselves (1962: 132–3). This specific kind of division or differentiation of functions resulted from the rising size of enterprises and from the increasing complexity of the economy. The processes of competition, differentiation and interweaving continued until virtually all private ownership was transformed into shared ownership and then into a variety of managers and CEOs. Issuing shares was another step towards the transformation from a private to a more public functioning of many social organisations providing material security, while further steps consisted of spreading national income via taxation and the reallocating principles of welfare state institutions.

The establishment of welfare states contributed to the flourishing of both the world of politicians and governments and the world of commerce and finance. This lasted until about the beginning of the 1980s, when their power ratio shifted from a favourable climate for national politicians in the direction of a favourable commercial climate. In 1983 an administrator of the World Bank commented: 'The new gods are the free market and private enterprise; the new devils are governments and planning agencies.' [\[10\]\[#N10\]](#) Ever since the 1980s, merger waves and other manifestations of integration processes have been rising to increasingly international and global levels, although more rapidly in the financial and commercial world than in the world of politics. In comparison to the latter, global enterprises could in many ways operate faster and with greater flexibility, for example by transferring labour-intensive production processes to countries where labour was cheap and plentiful. In low-income and low-wage countries the transfer was welcomed for the opportunities it brought in providing work and raising income, but it also placed these countries in competition with each other. Thus, governments in poor countries came under rising competitive pressures to enforce the kind of wage policies that would attract companies and capital investors to come to their country. To import 'market civilisation' (Gills 1995; Linklater 2012) was part and parcel of 'the disciplinary force of the

market' (Haskell 1985: 561). This exemplifies how the worlds of money and politics intermingled on a global scale. It also shows how, in a relatively pacified world, the power sources of the more privileged within countries and around the globe increasingly came to consist of their common interests and bonds in the world of money, to the extent that many people came to believe that what is good for the economy, would be good for the nation and the world. National interests were also increasingly understood in terms of economic interests, particularly in the USA: 'It might be an exaggeration to say that the American government is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of big business – but not much of an exaggeration' (Mennell 2014b).

From the perspective of the rich nation-states, the rise and spread of public welfare-state institutions may appear as a completed process of national differentiation and integration. However, functional differentiation remained firmly restricted to the internal affairs of nation-states, thus leaving the management of their inter-relationships – 'foreign policy' or 'external affairs' – mainly in the hands of an oligarchy of national politicians, if only 'for reasons of state security' (cf Elias 2010: 205–6). Of course this is a major reason why the nation-state or groups of nation-states have continued to be the taken-for-granted framework and point of departure, also in discussions of topics related to processes of differentiation, integration and –functional and institutional– democratisation. It was also a reason why powerful countries like the USA and the UK ensured their national power politics would prevail over international rights by ignoring the United Nations, thus lowering its status by breaking the agreements of this global institution in a demonstration of might-is-right – a show of 'shock and awe' that backfired.

Integration, and part-processes of disintegration as unintended side-effect

From a global perspective both the management of international affairs and the process towards an increasingly *public* functioning of state institutions appears limited. In this respect the differentiation of nation-state functions has stalled, and the management of international affairs lags behind compared to the management of commercial and financial international affairs. In the commercial and financial world, differentiation and integration processes have become dominant on a global level. This trend was accompanied by integration conflicts and part-processes of disintegration, for example by the informalisation of labour relations before a critical degree of formalisation was established (see Wouters 2007: 221–25). The economic crisis of 2008–9 is another such manifestation. At the same time, both examples are also manifestations of the tensions and conflicts between the world of politicians and governments on the one hand, and the world of commerce and finance on the other, in which representatives of the latter have gained the upper hand.

At present, so many processes of integration as well as disintegration can be observed simultaneously that observers often find themselves equipped with little means to appreciate which are more or less significant. On closer inspection, I think it seems plausible that differentiation and integration processes within Western nation states and their national economies have increasingly achieved higher levels, and that in the course of reaching an international and then global level, differentiation and integration processes have simultaneously triggered integration conflicts and disintegration processes. From this perspective, even World War II can be understood as an integration conflict that disintegrated Europe at first, and then later integrated Germany within Europe. But a few simpler examples will probably be more helpful to illustrate my point.

The first example is from a late phase in Western national integration processes in which the welfare state and its institutions emerged and spread the national income more equally among its citizens. The result was a significant decline in the fear of poverty and the spread of an 'equanimity of the welfare state' (Stolk &

Wouters 1987; Wouters 2007: 214, 223). Welfare state arrangements allowed women and young people to feel and act more independently of husbands and fathers – a clear example of functional democratisation: on the level of the state all citizens became more interdependent and at the same time, many became less subordinate to their former (male) superiors. On the other hand, as the latter lost authority, the volume of voices mourning and complaining this loss increased, and all referred to the disintegration of traditional family life and whole families falling apart.

At present, examples of integration processes that trigger integration conflicts and part-processes of disintegration are related increasingly to what David Riesman (1950) would have conceptualised as a transition from tradition- and inner-directed cultures and personalities to other-directed ones. From the perspective of a balance between formalising and informalising trends, I have focused on the integration conflicts and tensions between people living in countries where the phase of formalising manners and emotion regulation is still dominant, as opposed to those in countries where informalisation has spread. In my book *Informalization* (2007: 206–8), I compare an example of a global integration conflict from 1995 with Western examples from the 1920s and 1930s. This global integration conflict refers to a national campaign in Vietnam against what were called ‘negative foreign influences’. ‘American cultural imperialism’ in particular was considered to be a serious threat to ‘traditional morals’. In the 1920s and 1930s, many European authorities used similar language. A Dutch government committee, for instance, warned against the ‘demoralising Americanisation of Europe.’ The threat was disparagingly referred to as ‘instinctual life’ and ‘primitive feelings’. Both the Dutch authorities in the inter-war years and the Vietnamese authorities in the 1990s took disciplinary measures to prevent the population becoming ‘estranged’ or ‘alienated’ from tradition and forming a treacherous union with ‘strangers’ or ‘aliens’ and their more informalised lifestyle. These examples of high-handed attempts at defending ‘traditional morals’ can be extended globally by pointing to groups such as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and Islamic State which feed on the same cause. The social costs of these integration conflicts is clearly vast.

Another example of integration processes that trigger integration conflicts involves the merger waves that have swept through most western countries since the 1960s and 1970s (Wouters 1990). Whether on the level of towns and cities, schools and universities, or business firms and corporations, again and again the same story can be told from the perspective of integration and functional democratisation, as well as from the perspective of disintegration or defunctionalisation. When I tried to explain these two perspectives to a friend, a personnel manager who had witnessed a tidal wave of mergers between academies, colleges and schools, he could easily provide examples of how, in the process of merging, independent schools and colleges had lost cohesion and solidarity. ‘In the transition, the life and soul of these organisations was often severely damaged’, he said, ‘and you could sense it all over the place, in the teachers, the students, and in their relationships’. Most of them were mourning the loss of their old we-identity, and they rejected the possibility of identifying with the higher-level organisation as a sort of ‘treason’. As a side-effect of integration, part-processes of disintegration can unintentionally abolish social functions that people have performed for each other in a preceding phase of development. Such a loss of function can be experienced by them as the extinguishing of a significant source of what gave meaning to their jobs and their lives.

As the chains of interdependence reached the periphery of the world, at the level of nation-states many citizens in the European Union also feel a loss of their old we-identity. They feel they have lost (too) much of their former independence and this hurts their national pride; they seem to be in a state of mourning, anger, or both. Hesitant or even repugnant towards identifying with higher organisational levels than the nation-state, they would rather cling to their national territorial borders and symbols. These feelings and longings are acknowledged mostly by populist political parties. As long as the we-identification of people in these states remains predominantly on the level of their nation-states and only slowly proceeds to higher organisational

levels, this limited orientation and identification will continue to diminish the power chances of all political parties and governments, particularly when compared with the growing power chances of social organisations governing the world of finance and global corporations.

It does not seem plausible that the differentiation of functions or the competition and interweaving mechanism have ceased to operate. I therefore expect them to continue in the same direction on a global level. And I also expect these processes to be more advanced in the world of commerce and finance than in the world of politics, where the integration of functions – including the integration of the functions of nation-states – seems to have been slower. This advance has created favourable power chances for elites in the world of commerce and finance. There has been no loss of functions in this world. Instead the opposite was the case, and the people in it clearly demonstrate this by flexing their muscles and displaying various forms of superiorism [11][#N11]: by demanding and allowing each other excessive salaries, buying or bribing politicians, playing poor nation-states against each other, forging international treaties and legal constructions to curb the power of entire states, evading taxes, and by absolving themselves of responsibility for the ‘externalities’ of their operations. These can be understood as indications of reversing democratisation processes.

All these activities are mentioned by Stephen Mennell (2014a) as symptoms of functional *de*-democratisation. However, this cannot be the appropriate concept to apply because the people who are responsible for this conduct do not suffer from a loss of functions. Instead, they demonstrate an excess of them. It seems likely that they have been able to get away with their excesses for such a long time because so many people have continued and still continue to identify with their success. They did so during the long period after decolonisation and pacification had turned large parts of the world into areas fit for economic enterprise: from the end of the 1970s to the crisis of 2008–9. And even the latter crisis did not seem to change much. Differentiation and integration processes in the world of politics, whether national or international, kept lagging behind those in the world of finance and commerce. [12][#N12]

The crisis brought limited damage to the level of ‘identification with the established’, whereas the level of ‘identification with outsiders’, so prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, suffered more. In prevailing manners and attitudes towards the lower classes and other groups of ‘outsiders’, there was a shift in the carrot-and-stick balance towards more ‘stick’ and less ‘carrot’ (for this balance, see Wouters 2007). Marginalised groups were treated with less consideration and respect and with stricter social control. Children in residential care, for example, were met with ‘subsequent increases in formal social controls, punitive measures and populist support for further restraints,’ this being ‘indicative of fears of a potential surge of new criminals, and crime being committed by the demarcated outsiders’ (Vertigans 2015).

In the near future, only small changes can be expected in the balance of power between groups of established and outsiders (Elias and Scotson 2008), whether local, national or global. An example of such a small change on the national plane is from the Netherlands. A law passed in 2013 capped the top salaries of those people working in government services and semi-public organisations, financed or subsidised by taxpayers’ money. Since then, such salaries have been prohibited by law to exceed the salary of a government minister. The motive behind the implementation of this law involved a scandal around the large number of people in semi-public organisations earning more than the Prime Minister of the country. This example clearly shows how strongly standards from the world of commerce had infiltrated and amalgamated with standards in the world of politics. A law that limits top salaries in the world of politics is aimed at disentangling both standards. The Panama Papers may have a similar disentangling effect on a larger plane. These and similar minor changes may gradually add up and become part of a more encompassing trend in the direction of greater public control over the private governance of capital via national laws and international regulations.

The privatisation of the provision of physical safety is a trend in a different field, but one that moves in a similar direction: under the supervision of a Western state, protection is provided as a service by armed personnel hired for a price. The USA has hired private standing ‘armies’ working in their service, usually abroad, and in Europe, where the monopolisation of the use of violence within nation-states has traditionally been more advanced than in the USA, the hired services of armed personnel for guarding property and/or safeguarding people is spreading on a national plane. This ‘para-militarisation’ is theoretically and empirically significant. It signifies a high, matter-of-course level of pacification, because only where the abstinence of using violence for solving conflicts is to a large extent taken for granted, can this regulated deregulation become possible. It is an informalisation of previous standards of formalisation, a controlled decontrolling of the state’s monopoly of violence.

Physical safety (violence) is in many ways connected with material security (money). In countries where people have been able to develop a high, matter-of-course level of pacification, they will also have developed a higher sensitivity to anything that threatens or is perceived to endanger their established level of physical safety and material security. Hence they become increasingly attracted to perceptions of risk that require privatised securitisation. Except for those who can easily afford to buy private security, all people and groups have become caught in this upward spiral toward para-militarisation and tend to feel increasingly threatened in maintaining their level of material security; thus all the established people who (can) keep up with this type of competition become increasingly inclined to de-identify with individual members of outsider groups and to practise and support stricter external controls on these ‘losers’.

In these last paragraphs I do not mean to suggest that I take one side or the other, the side of physical safety (violence) or material security (money). But they do help to make the theoretical and empirical points that a more substantial integration of both worlds seems likely and that the governance of global issues and conflicts increasingly faces pressures toward global governance. From a still wider perspective, we might conclude that the structure and force of these processes of differentiation, integration and increasing complexity of social functions is strikingly similar to the processes of differentiation, integration and increasing complexity at the level of biological evolution. ^[13][\[#N13\]](#)

Endnotes

1. Many thanks for comments to Stephen Vertigans, Richard Kilminster, Arjan Post, Andrew Linklater and Jonathan Fletcher, and to Jon also for correcting my English. [\[#N1-ptri\]](#)
2. This context, and all the quotations used, can be found on the last seven pages (59–65) of the second chapter of *What is Sociology?* [\[#N2-ptri\]](#)
3. Elias starts by re-humanising these de-humanised concepts, for example, ‘industrialisation ultimately means nothing more than that more and more people came to be occupied as entrepreneurs, white collar employees and manual workers’ (2012 [1970]: 60). [\[#N3-ptri\]](#)
4. At times, functional democratisation is misunderstood as equivalent to institutional democratisation. For example: ‘functional democratisation, a process in which more and more categories of people gain access to political arenas where they can pursue their functional interests and settle disputes, instead of engaging in violent political struggles to achieve these means’ (Weenink 2013). [\[#N4-ptri\]](#)
5. Many thanks to Stephen Vertigans for this observation. [\[#N5-ptri\]](#)
6. For balance-concepts as universal criteria for doing process sociology, see Wouters 2014. [\[#N6-ptri\]](#)
7. Many thanks to Arjan Post for this quotation and for pointing to Elias’s use of ‘defunctionalisation’. [\[#N7-ptri\]](#)

8. Original German text: ‘an den Fließbändern der gleichen, arbeitsteiligen Maschinerie’. ♣ [#N8-ptri]
9. In my article ‘Social stratification and informalisation in global perspective’ (Wouters 1990), I have argued that not a monopoly is decisive for the tenor of this concept but the increasing density and the growing range of the network of interdependencies through the interweaving of human functions and activities. Therefore, I concluded, ‘competition and interweaving mechanism’ seems a more adequate conceptualisation. ♣ [#N9-ptri]
10. Prof. I. van Dam in *NRC-Handelsblad*, July 1, 1983, also quoted in Wouters 1986. ♣ [#N10-ptri]
11. The concept of ‘superiorism’ brings all the ism’s such as racism, sexism, ageism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, etc. onto a higher level of generalisation, highlighting their common characteristic: equating power superiority with superiority as a human being (see Wouters 2007: 219–220). ♣ [#N11-ptri]
12. The *Trade & Investment Partnership* (TTIP), a treaty between the USA and the EU in the tradition of GATT (1946) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO 1995), is suspected of promoting the interests of big corporations at the expense of EU democracies. ♣ [#N12-ptri]
13. The same conclusion is obvious from my article on ‘Informalisation and Evolution’ (2015). ♣ [#N13-ptri]

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