Editor's Introduction

Since our last issue, one might say the world has changed, inexorably, on both sides of the Atlantic. The 'Brexit' (the exit of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union) and the inauguration of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America have generated much uncertainty in international relations and have 'upset a balance globally' (Robinson, 2017). Both raise questions regarding the broader social processes that have led to a heightening in the perceived marginalisation of a more populist 'right' and an associated blaming, if not shaming, of 'the other'. Global established–outsider relations are clearly in flux, at the same time illustrating the drag effect of the social habitus of a great number of carriers of democratic movements.

All of this provides the context for a diverse range of papers in this first issue of 2017, centring around analyses of shifting power balances and the impact on personal and social habitus. The issue opens aptly with Stephen Mennell's reflections on why he became an Eliasian sociologist, entitled 'Apologia pro vita sociologica sua', 'A Defence of Sociological Life' of sorts. Delivered to an audience at University College Dublin's Newman House in January 2016, Stephen Mennell reflects on how his career was shaped by an accidental encounter with Eliasian sociology – in *What is Sociology*? (Elias, 2012) and chapter three in particular – and he explains why the relationship between 'social character and historical process' has been a *leitmotiv* in his thinking. 'Game Models' highlights, for Mennell, how much more fundamental is the concept of interdependence, and the balance of power, to understanding human life. As power ratios become relatively more equal, Elias shows how the course of a game – an analogy for social interdependence involving more and more people – becomes more of an unplanned, blind social process, less in accordance with the intentions of any of those involved. A further personal meeting with Elias led Mennell on a path towards the completion of his doctoral thesis on food. While conducting this research, he, like Eric Dunning, who co-authored *Quest for Excitement* with Elias, had to contend with the traditionalist ideas regarding the status hierarchy of sociological ideas and research topics deeply embedded in the discipline, best characterised by the statement that real sociologists (men) did social stratification and certainly not food or rugby and soccer! Given that figurational sociologists are not well-known for political interventions, readers will, no doubt, be interested in Mennell's former life as a city councillor and his associated comments on the erroneous interpretation of Elias's work on involvement–detachment. Noteworthy in this is the process of secondary re-involvement. Future academics and researchers take note!

Michael Dunning examines the sociogenesis of 'terrorism' in the context of Anglo-Irish established-outsider relations during the nineteenth century. His empirical data are drawn from newspaper reports over this period of time. His argument is that mainstream theories of terrorism produce established narratives – the same as, or only marginally different from, those of governments, which, in effect, collude with established group images. For him, a figurational analysis adds more by illustrating that the antithesis of the 'barbarous' Irish to the 'civilised' British was, in part, used as a justification for British civilising offensives in Ireland. At the same time, interstate relations between the United Kingdom and France contributed to the British seeking monopoly control in Ireland. In many ways, the current situation in Northern Ireland today is an outworking of Dunning's analysis, illustrated by him in the ways in which competing groups can become ensnared in a double bind. Accordingly, the figurations formed between the British and the Irish prior to the partition of the

island of Ireland were preconditions for subsequent later figurations in the context of those relations. Dunning's longer-term analysis is a timely one in light of the very recent collapse of power-sharing in Northern Ireland and the implications of Brexit. For, as he concludes, it is still possible that current centrifugal forces in Britain and Europe could potentially contribute to a resurgence of terrorism in British-Irish relations.

Behrouz Alikhani develops the theme of democratisation in a different context, drawing on the example of Egypt after the Arab Spring and role of non-Islamists in this process. His is a process-sociological model, assessing not only the institutional and functional aspects of democratisation and counter-spurts, but also the habitual dimensions of these processes. For him, the habitual dimensions of democratisation refers to the deep internalisation of new institutions and functional connections, as well as the more-or-less reality adequate perception of shifted power differentials in favour of former outsider groups, especially by the groups themselves. He pays particular regard to the role of non-Islamists in this. Egypt is also a case in point of our opening comments on the potential prevailing of processes of de-democratisation, for, as Alikhani shows, the existence of a democratic social habitus by the majority of people in a society is decisive for a sustainable institutional democratisation. Only then can these processes gain an enormous strength in the steering of conduct and feeling of the involved people.

Tom Scheff takes a closer look at Goffman's microworld of steering and conduct.

> ... You sloughed
> Methodologies, set out to tell what oft
> Is done, but ne'er quite well expressed. And until
> Well, expressed, well christened, ill seen. Gentle
> GOFFMAN, so much of such seeing we owe, we know,
> To thy quick quirky quizzing of our status quo
> > – Dell Hymes, "On First Looking into a Manuscript by Goffman"
> > (1984)

When Scheff (2004: 229) wrote that Freud, Elias and Goffman 'took the extremely unusual step of proposing that shame and embarrassment are crucially important in human affairs', he reminded us that shame arises because the self is social. In this issue, we have invited him to discuss his reading of Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and other earlier works, to address in particular, the suggestion that Goffman's work has no overarching generalisation. Here, Scheff reintroduces Goffman's work on shame as being free-floating, on the one hand, but also inhibited by a governing theoretical understanding, on the other. In this short contribution, he also draws on parallel themes in Elias's work in which the latter revealed the actual mechanisms by which shame is transmitted and maintained. For Scheff, Goffman was 'a genius who was considerably ahead of his time'. He invites sociologists to reassess the theoretical contributions of Goffman's early work beyond the mainstream categories of theory, methods or empirical evidence as they have come to be understood in social science today.

Lastly, Cas Wouters illustrates how long-term evolutionary and social processes are intertwined, by comparing two major transitions in biological and social steering codes, one transition serving as a precondition for the other. Transitions in biological systems and steering codes are conceptualised by him as a shift in the balance of evolutionary formalisation and informalisation in favour of the latter, that is, to the process in which certain steering codes of some forms of life gained plasticity, allowing for more adjustment to the changing conditions of life, while simultaneously compelling psychic processes to be more versatile and more strongly dominated by consciousness. The evolution from mammals to hominoids and then to *homo sapiens* is examined by him in order to illustrate the importance of the social inheritance of collectively learned social codes to this process. In this way, he seeks to argue that, from an evolutionary survival

perspective, evolutionary informalisation entailed both the possibility, and indeed the necessity, for social steering codes to expand. The emergence of languages and symbols used by modern humans was therefore an evolutionary breakthrough to higher levels of biological, social and psychic integration. In considering the implications of informalisation as a theory rather than solely a process, Wouters affirms his earlier arguments that a civilising process had come to comprise two long-term phases: first, a long-term process of formalisation that lost its dominance somewhere in the middle of the second half of the nineteenth century, and a second phase involving a shorter, but still long-term process in which informalisation became dominant. As he notes, Elias only partially accepted and integrated informalisation into this theory, thus demarcating significant theoretical differences concerning the direction of civilising processes. For Wouters, these processes are 'blind', proceeding independently of the wishes and aims of all groups and individuals involved and this 'blindness' partly explains why the significance of the transition in social steering codes has remained generally unacknowledged.

2017 also heralds the transition to a newly appointed Board at the Elias Foundation. Our sincerest thanks go to outgoing members Stephen Mennell, Herman Korte and Johan Goudsblom, who were a collective source of support to the journal from its inception. We look forward to working with Jason Hughes, Adrian Jitschin and Johan Heilbron, who carry the torch to a new generation. Owing to the work of the Foundation, and of Michigan Publishing, we continue to make this scholarship fully open access and that matters to our readership.

References

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