More than a single footnote: Connecting Alexis de Tocqueville and Norbert Elias

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Abstract

The view of Norbert Elias as a maverick sociologist who developed his ideas in isolation from other academic thinkers and schools has been debunked since the 1970s. A number of studies have linked Elias's work to scholars such as Marx, Weber, Freud, Huizinga, and Mannheim, amongst others. In this paper, I contribute to these efforts by exploring affinities between Elias and Alexis de Tocqueville. Elias made only passing reference to Tocqueville in his published work, and Tocqueville has, until now, also been absent in the growing literature that situates Elias within the sociological canon. This is surprising, considering that affinities between the works of the two sociologists can be discerned beyond the single footnote that Elias reserved for Tocqueville. To discover and discuss these affinities, I compare Tocqueville's observations on how 'mores become milder as conditions become equal' and Elias's argument on 'functional democratisation', as well as their explanation and interpretation of the French Revolution. The comparison reveals that, in addition to a thematic affinity, Tocqueville and Elias also share a style of theorising and methodology that neither of them makes very explicit but that is distinct from more well-known traditions of sociological research.

Keywords

Elias; Tocqueville; mores; manners; French Revolution; Court Society; power; theorisation; methodology.

Introduction

Academic scholarship is often described as 'an ongoing conversation' (Thomson and Kamler 2013: 56–59). Academics are imagined as conversing in 'conference ballrooms' (Gaipa 2004: 422), the 'salon' (Rorty 1979: 317), or 'crowded coffee shops' (Graff and Birkenstein 2010: 147–148). In these metaphorical places, scholars meet with predecessors, critics, peers and students to argue and listen, to craft and sharpen the quality and authority of their scholarship.

Norbert Elias might have endorsed the analogy between academic progress and conversations in pubs and coffeehouses, considering his engagement during the 1920s in the weekly salon that Marianne Weber organised, and that became 'one of the centrepieces of Heidelberg university life' (Korte 2017: 107). In a previously unpublished chapter on Karl Marx intended for inclusion in his book *What is Sociology?* (Elias 2006 [1970]: 270–309; Elias 2012 [1970]: 177–178), Elias indeed urges sociologists to engage with their

predecessors in order to secure progress in their discipline, and to direct attention from the here-and-now to processes of change and development.

Despite this proposition, it is challenging to situate Elias's own work within the canon that contemporary sociologists are familiar with (Goudsblom 1977: 78; Górnicka, Ó Ríagáin and Powell 2019). One reason why it is difficult to interpret Elias vis-à-vis other sociological paradigms and schools is because his work is devoid of the scholarly trappings and theoretical exegesis that current sociologists expect to find (Kilminster in Elias 1991: viii). Indeed, Elias became known for not being particularly forthcoming or meticulous in conveying the academic heritage he relied on (Wallace 1979: 768; van Krieken 1998: 29; Quilley 2010: 404). In an interview about editing the English-language edition of Elias's Collected Works, Stephen Mennell recounted the frustration of sorting out 'Elias's often vague references' (Flores 2014: 3).

Various explanations for Elias's style of referencing have been offered. Some say current bibliometric routines are quite different from the time when Elias received his education, which is why, by current standards, his referencing seems lacking (Quilley 2010: 404; Flores 2014: 16). Yet, while it is true that standards of academic referencing have changed considerably since the 1960s (Wouters 1999), a number of sociologists working during the Interbellum and whose work Elias knew well, such as Max Weber and Karl Mannheim, always organised their references meticulously, even when compared to contemporary standards. A better explanation therefore seems to be that Elias did not extensively reference other sociological works, or write systematic state-of-the-art sections, because he was strongly convinced of his own originality (Featherstone 1987: 200; Mennell 1998 [1989]: 285).

According to a number of scholars, this originality lies in the synthetic quality of his work, which is unusual against the compartmentalisation, specialisation and proliferation of sub-disciplines and schools that have characterised the development of sociology since the 1950s (Goudsblom 1987: 331; Featherstone 1987: 202; Kilminster 2011: 92; 2014: 98–99; Linklater and Mennell 2010: 385; Quilley and Loyal 2004: 2; Gabriel and Kaspersen 2014: 4–5). Unlike other major syntheses in sociology (e.g. Parsons 1951; Giddens 1984), Elias never used sociological theory as the starting point for his analyses, and avoided carving up social life analytically, in, for example, values, norms, or power (Goudsblom 1987a: 331). Through this interest in 'human beings in the round' (Elias 2008: 109) and 'real-types' (Elias 2012 [1939]: 577–578), Elias's theorisation always remained closely integrated with empirical research on social life.

With his synthesis, Elias saw himself building upon and extending the work of 'the great pioneers of sociology in the nineteenth century' because, just like himself, these pioneers were preoccupied with 'the problem of the development of societies' (Elias 2012 [1970]: 177). When Elias was writing these words, he was clearly thinking of Auguste Comte (Elias 2012 [1970]: 28–45), who features prominently in *What is Sociology?*, but could he also have been thinking of one of Comte's contemporaries: Alexis de Tocqueville?

Especially in recent years, Elias's work has been linked and compared to an increasing number of scholars and disciplines (see, amongst others, Loyal and Quilley 2004; Dépelteau and Landini 2013; Quilley 2010; Paulle, van Heerikhuizen and Emirbayer 2012; Wickham and Evers 2012; Flores 2014), but Tocqueville has until now remained absent from this literature. This is remarkable because close affinities between Tocqueville and Elias can be expected considering the focus and method of their work (Stone and Mennell 1980: 40).

In this article, I will qualify how well Elias knew Tocqueville, but foremost I will explore theoretical and methodological affinities between the two sociologists, [1] [#N1] and to what extent these demarcate a distinct style of sociology.

But before we begin, a word of caution. As often occurs with mediating between bold thinkers, it can easily impose an artificial identity to which both belong that glosses over important differences (Nietzsche 1974 [1884]: 212). It is indeed inevitable that, when Elias and Tocqueville are brought together in one perspective, the originality and detail of their work will fade from view. But distancing myself from detail and originality allows me to follow the contours of their work to where there is overlap (paraphrasing Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 649; cf. Elias 2011: 5). Consideration of affinities can help to identify the style of sociology their work represents.

One footnote

Tocqueville's only appearance in Elias's work is in *The Court Society* (hereafter CS), in a footnote to his discussion of how the French nobility became dependent on financiers in their effort to maintain a lifestyle at the royal court that could lend them prestige. In the footnote, Elias draws the reader's attention to where Tocqueville in *L'Ancien régime et la Révolution* [hereafter AR] quotes a complaint by a nobleman from 1755 about the impoverishment of the nobility in comparison to the enrichment of common people:

> Depuis plusieurs siècles, les nobles français n'avaient cessé de s'appauvrir. « Malgré ses priviléges, la noblesse se ruine et s'anéantit tous les jours, et le tiers-état s'empare des fortunes, » écrit tristement un gentilhomme en 1755 (Tocqueville 1856: 121).

In CS, Elias refers to the passage above as follows:

> Über die steigende Verarmung des Adels s.a. Tocqueville, l'ancien régime Kap. 8. Dort wird auch die Klage eines Edelmanns aus dem Jahre 1755 zitiert, der sagt: »Trotz seiner Privilegien ruiniert sich der Adel und verliert täglich an Bedeutung, während der dritte Stand sich des Reichtums bemächtigt.« (Elias 1969: 101 fn. 52). [2] [#N2]

When CS was republished as volume II of The Collected Works of Norbert Elias, the editor –Stephen Mennell – complemented the quote with a reference to an 1866 edition of AR and the English translation by Stuart Gilbert from 1955:

> On the increasing impoverishment of the nobility, see Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (in *Œuvres complètes*, par Mme de Tocqueville, vol IV, Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1866), ch. 8. He quotes a complaint by a nobleman in 1755: 'Despite its privileges the nobility is being starved out, and all its wealth is passing into the hands of the Third Estate.' [*The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 78.] (Elias 2005 [1969]: 72 fn. 48).

There are three aspects of this footnote that help qualify Elias's knowledge of Tocqueville. First, Elias provides an incomplete title of AR: he only refers to the chapter (Chapter 8 of Book 2) where the quote of Tocqueville can be found and he leaves out the year of publication and pagination. Because a complete reference is missing from the 1969 publication of CS, as well as from its first English translation (Elias 1983 [1969]: 65), it is unknown which edition of AR Elias consulted. Unfortunately, it is not possible to retrieve the original

typescripts of CS to look for further indications because they, including Elias's *Habilitationschrift* (postdoctoral thesis) from 1933 on which CS was based, have disappeared (Mennell in Elias 2005 [1969]: xii).

Second, with the reference incomplete, it is unclear whether Elias translated from French to German, or used a German translation of AR. Other references in CS indicate that Elias tended to quote in French whenever he used original publications, for example Lavisse's *Louis XIV* (1905) (Elias 1969: 193), and only quoted in German where he relied on a German translation, for example Saint-Simon's *Memoires* (trans. Lotheisen 1884–5; see Elias 1969: 182). The German quote of Tocqueville that Elias provides in the footnote is therefore likely to come from *Der alte Staat und die Revolution* (Tocqueville 1867 [1856]), translated by Theodor Oelckers, which was the most common of the two German translations of AR available in the 1930s, [3].[#N3] and which contains the exact same passage (Tocqueville 1867 [1856]: 85) that Elias quotes.

Third, the footnote with the quote from Tocqueville appears at the end of Chapter 3, 'The structure of dwellings as an indicator of social structure'. According to Mennell, this chapter was probably included in the *Habilitationschrift* (Mennell in Elias 2005 [1969]: xiii), which makes it reasonable to assume that Elias read Tocqueville before 1933.

Other than this single footnote, Elias did not leave any other evidence of his engagement with Tocqueville. Elias's personal books, which are kept in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, include only one written about Tocqueville. This single book – *Alexis de Tocqueville on Democracy, Revolution, and Society. Selected Writings* (Stone and Mennell 1980) – is an edition of chapters from English translations of Tocqueville's work. One of its authors, Stephen Mennell, recalls talking about his book with Elias:

> I remember that when John Stone and I were editing the Chicago book [Stone and Mennell 1980], I mentioned it to Norbert. So far as I can recall, he was interested in the similarities that I pointed out, but he did not seem to have any detailed knowledge of Tocqueville. He certainly makes no reference to *Democracy in America* (Stephen Mennell pers. comm. 3 April 2014).

In this book, Stone and Mennell for the first time note similarities between Tocqueville and Elias. Not only do they use a terminology to explain Tocqueville's thinking that is closely associated with Elias, such as 'balance of power', 'interdependence', 'unintended consequences', 'involvement and detachment' (Stone and Mennell 1980: 32), they go so far as suggesting that Elias was a true heir of Tocqueville (1980: 40). Mennell later reflected that, although Elias was mentioned only sparingly in the whole book, 'the comparison was in my mind throughout' (Stephen Mennell, pers. comm., 9 May 2011). Mennell has drawn attention to similarities between the two thinkers in a number of his other publications (1980; 1994; 1998 [1989]; 2007), as we shall soon see in more detail. Moreover, as editor of the English edition of Elias's Collected Works, Mennell included references to Tocqueville in footnotes he added to two of Elias's publications: the article 'Technisation and civilisation' (Elias 2008: 88), and the book *Studies on the Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Elias 2013 [1989]: 337). [4].[#N4]

Like Mennell, the late Dutch sociologist Johan Goudsblom also suspected similarities. When I asked him, during a conversation, if he knew about any connections between Elias and Tocqueville, he replied:

> I never noticed any, which is surprising because they are kindred in their whole way of thinking. And, what is more, they also often discuss exactly the same subject, namely the court society in France (Johan Goudsblom pers. comm., 4 May 2011).

My investigation of the kinship suspected by Goudsblom will start on the trail that Mennell broke. Mennell suggests connections between Tocqueville and Elias in two main areas. First, Tocqueville's argument in *Democracy in America* (hereafter DA) that mores become milder as conditions become equal (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 987–994) and Elias's argument in *On the Process of Civilisation* (hereafter CP) in relation to 'functional democratisation' (Elias 2012 [1939]: 464–478) (Mennell 1980: 89; 1994: 185; 2007: 17–22). Second, the explanation for the occurrence of the French Revolution that Tocqueville offers in AR and Elias in CS (Mennell 1998 [1989]: 293 fn. 27). Following these suggestions in more detail reveals that in addition to a thematic affinity, Tocqueville and Elias also share a style of theorising and methodology that neither of them made very explicit but that has a distinct quality in comparison with more conventional traditions of sociological research.

How mores become milder

In Elias's work, the term 'functional democratisation' (Elias 2012 [1939]: 464–478) denotes how the growing complexity and extension of social networks, as in the division of labour, for example, requires greater and more even self-restraint as more and more people become dependent on one another for their security and wellbeing (Elias 2012 [1939]: 471–472). A close consideration of this argument alongside Tocqueville's claim that mores become milder as conditions become equal (Mennell 1980: 89; 1994: 185; 2007: 17–22) not only highlights an affinity, but also demonstrates a connection with Elias's theorisation of civilising processes that runs more deeply and is more extensive.

To appreciate the depth of this connection, it is important to know that, when Tocqueville speaks of social equality in America (which he uses to refer to the United States of America throughout his work), he addresses the American sentiment of not feeling inferior to others. From the introduction of DA it is clear that Tocqueville recognised the inequality in American society, with people ranked according to legal rights or economic wealth. He explains that these distinctions depend on the power of social groups' access to, and control over, resources (e.g. land) and technology (e.g. firearms, printing press), but also control over minds and thinking (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 9). What makes America exceptional compared to Europe, according to Tocqueville, is the impermanent nature of these distinctions and inequalities (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: cxxxii fn. 273).

For Tocqueville, the permeability of social ranks and distinctions makes mores milder in two ways. The first is an indirect causal relation where social equality leads people to become more industrious and concerned about improving their material and economic wellbeing (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 930–938). When people feel equal in terms of social status or worth, they perceive class boundaries as less rigid and profound and, as a consequence, conceive opportunities for social mobility. The prospect of climbing the social ladder instils in them a 'passion for material well-being' (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 931). When social conditions are equalising, economic or material wellbeing will become an even more important source for social distinction, because ranks and titles that in an aristocracy were once used for this purpose have become obsolete (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 934). According to Tocqueville, the concern with commercial activity makes people in equalising social conditions – a democracy – less inclined to use violence, because war and other violent conflicts could destroy the conditions conducive to the generation of economic wealth (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 988–989; cf. Hirschman 1997 [1977]: 56–63).

Tocqueville also argues that mores become milder directly because social equalisation widens people's 'circles of identification' (de Swaan 1995: 25). To support this point he describes a qualitative difference in how

sympathy is felt by people in an aristocratic society and in a democratic society. In the former, sympathy is reserved for the members of one's class, i.e. 'people similar to you and your equals' (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 989). This means that the bond across classes is foremost an instrumental, 'political bond' (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 990) needed to keep society functioning and to sustain the status quo. But when social conditions are equalising, the reach of 'circles of sympathy' (Forman 2010: 9–11) starts to widen.

> When ranks are nearly equal among a people, since all men have more or less the same way of thinking and feeling, each one of them can judge in a moment the sensations of all the others; he glances quickly at himself; that is sufficient. So there is no misery that he cannot easily imagine and whose extent is not revealed to him by a secret instinct. Whether it concerns strangers or enemies, imagination immediately puts him in their place. It mingles something personal in his pity, and makes him suffer as the body of his fellow man is torn apart (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 993).

The reverse, Tocqueville argues, is also true: mores and violence become harsher when social conditions become more unequal. Social distinctions in opinions, beliefs or mores between societies can produce feelings of superiority whereby members of other societies can be perceived as outsiders, or even non-humans. If war breaks out under these conditions 'it cannot fail to be conducted with barbarism' (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 994; see also de Swaan 1997; Smith 2011).

Tocqueville describes social conduct in democratic societies as softened and morally mild due to 'the restraint that [the men of our times] nearly all maintain in vice and virtue' (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 1249). In this society, 'pleasures will be less extreme and well-being more general; knowledge not as great and ignorance more rare; sentiments less energetic and habits more mild; there you will notice more vices and fewer crimes' (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 21; cf. Elias 2012 [1939]: 413).

The consideration of Tocqueville's full argument demonstrates how it resonates with a number of aspects of Elias's arguments in relation to civilising processes. Aside from functional democratisation, another conspicuous resonance is the widening of sympathy beyond class boundaries as a result of social equalisation. Elias addresses this most explicitly with the concept of the 'We–I balance' (Elias 1991 [1987]: 196) and his case study of exclusion and stigmatisation in a community near Leicester (Elias and Scotson 2008 [1965]), but also more implicitly with the term 'diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties' (Elias 2012 [1939]: 422–427).

Underpinning these and other connections between Tocqueville and Elias is a kindred approach in which both thinkers draw together changes in equality and power with changes in what Tocqueville calls mores (*mœurs*) and for which Elias uses, amongst others, 'habitus' (Elias 2012 [1939]: 405; Elias 2011: 20) and 'personality structure' (Elias 2012 [1939]: 415). I shall consider this approach in more detail in the next section.

Knowing mores through a study of manners

While neither Elias nor Tocqueville write explicitly about theory or methodology (see respectively, Baur and Ernst 2011: 118; Fogelman 1960: 275), it is possible to reconstruct their approach by analysing how they reflect on and organise their work. Elias describes his methodology, in a note to himself, as an effort 'to reveal macro structures by researching micro structures' (Moelker 2003: 378). This methodology is mirrored in the

organisation and publication (in its early editions) of CP in two volumes. Volume I (*Changes in the Behaviour of the Secular Upper Classes in the West*) describes psychogenetic change – changing manners – while Volume II (*State Formation and Civilisation*) interrelates this change with sociogenetic change – state formation (Linklater and Mennell 2010: 385–386).

The organisation and structure of DA likewise reflects Tocqueville's theory and method of social change. To demonstrate this, I need to first describe how he theorises social change. Tocqueville identifies three ideal-typical societies or 'social states' (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 74). First, a democracy where power differentials between social groups are more equal, and social distinctions less marked. Second, an aristocracy where power differentials between social groups are more unequal, and social distinctions marked. Third, a transitory society characterised by revolutions where power differentials between a majority of the social groups are more equal, but there are still marked social distinctions and therefore a clearly recognisable elite (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 32; Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: cxlvi; Kinneging in Tocqueville 2011 [1835/1840]: 1093–1097; Hochberg 2007: 27–37). Transitions between these three types occur, according to Tocqueville, through interrelated changes in 'circumstances, laws and mores' (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 495; Schleiffer 2018: 24–27). Tocqueville believed mores to be the most important of these three causes of social change (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 499).

As Tocqueville himself (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 691–692) and others (Dreschner 1964: 201–216; Schleifer 2000 [1980]: 354–368; Schleifer 2012: 38–46) have observed, the first and second volumes of DA have their own specific scope and focus reflecting the above typology. In the first volume, Tocqueville describes how equality is manifested in the laws, institutions and associations of a real-type democracy – America (Chapters 3–10) – and how American natural circumstances favoured the establishment and maintenance of a democracy (chapters 1–2). The complete second volume, for which Tocqueville considered the title 'The Influence of Equality on the Ideas and the Sentiments of Men' (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: ciii), analyses the effects of equality on mores by focusing on a number of common social activities of Americans. These include the effect of equality on e.g. playing games, dancing, making money, but also on social relationships (between masters and servants, family members, men and women), emotions and beliefs. Tocqueville realised that laws and mores 'have a reciprocal action on each other' but that, for pragmatic reasons, in DA he only analysed one direction – from laws to mores – of the causal complexity that produces social change (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 986 fn. a).

Volume II of DA builds on the assumption that observation of everyday *manières* (translated as 'manners' in Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 1071–1079) can reveal *mœurs* (translated as 'mores' in Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 466–467; Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 1072–1073; see also Weintraub 1996; Maletz 2005: 4; Schleifer 2012: 38–39). Differentiation between mores (*mœurs*) and manners (*manières*) goes back to a classic distinction found in Montesquieu – an inspiration for Tocqueville (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: cii fn. 170; see also Richter 1970; Witteveen 2013) – whereby the former is 'concerned with internal and the latter external conduct' (Montesquieu 2001 [1748]: 329).

Conventionally, *mœurs* is translated in English as 'mores', but a number of authors argue that this term does not capture what Tocqueville actually meant by *mœurs* (Berlin 1965: 202; Marshall and Drescher 1968: 524, fn. 3). Stone and Mennell (1980: 39) suggest that Tocqueville used *mœurs* in two senses: a narrow and broad one. With the former, he referred to everyday conduct and practice; with the latter, he referred to habitus, social character, or culture (see also Mennell 2007: 51; Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: cviii fn. 189; Swedberg 2009: 104 fn. 18). Goldhammer (2002) likens Tocqueville's understanding of *mœurs* to William Graham Sumner's concept of 'folkways' (Sumner 1940 [1906]) because both thinkers used these words to emphasise feelings and doings over beliefs as key to understanding human behaviour. The term 'folkways' refers to habitual modes of thinking, feeling and doing that people share with members of their group (Sumner 1940 [1906]: 1–15).

Interestingly, van Krieken has, in turn, likened Elias's interpretation of habitus to Sumner's folkways (van Krieken 1998: 22).

The work of Elias likewise builds on the distinction between manners (*manières*) and mores (*mœurs*), and the assumption that study of the former can reveal the latter. But instead of using the word mores (*mœurs*) Elias refers to 'social habitus' or 'second nature' to denote ingrained habits, feelings and personality characteristics that members of groups have in common (Elias 2011: 20, fn. 22).

To assume that one can reveal mores (*mœurs*) through a study of manners (*manières*), for Tocqueville, meant to pay attention to the minute details of social life, because he believed that knowledge of the whole comes through intimate knowledge of its parts (Boesche 1983: 81; Schleifer 2006: 124). This is illustrated vividly in the following quote, where Tocqueville comments on Hindu cultural practices:

> The manner of greeting each other; that of dressing themselves; the form of clothing, jewels and other ornaments; their adjustment and the diverse details of one's costume; the way of building houses, the corner in which one must place the hearth, that in which one must put the household vessels; the manner of going to bed and of sleeping; the rules of civility and politeness that must reign among them, all [...] is ruled by superstition and has religion for a theme (Tocqueville quoted in Boesche 1983: 83).

Elsewhere, he remarks that 'architecture paints the needs and the mores' (Tocqueville quoted in Boesche 1983: 82), bringing immediately to mind a famous chapter in CS: 'The structure of dwellings as an indicator of social structure'. In this chapter Elias describes the rationality and attitude of French aristocracy by highlighting details such as the 'size of the courtyard or the ornamentation of a noble's house' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 93) and 'furniture, pictures or clothes, forms of greeting or social etiquette, theatre, poetry or houses' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 124). According to Elias, the observation of such empirical details can produce general, 'paradigmatic' sociological knowledge:

> To understand how even the routine of getting up in the morning and going to bed at night could serve a king as instruments of power, is no less important for a sociological understanding of this type of 'routinised' monopoly rule than it is for a more general insight into the structure of the 'royal mechanism'. It is only through such paradigmatic details that we can gain a concrete picture of what has been previously formulated theoretically. For sociological theories which are not borne out of empirical work are useless. They hardly deserve the status of theories (Elias 2005 [1969]: 25–26).

Elias sums up this approach in the very first sentence of Volume II of CP:

> The deeper we penetrate the wealth of particular facts to discover the structure and regularities of the past, the more clearly emerges a firm framework of processes into which the scattered facts can be fitted (Elias 2012 [1939]: 479).

This quote demonstrates how assertive Elias is, just like Tocqueville, in his focus on particulars to reveal the patterns in which societies develop.

As a logical outcome of their shared approach to theory and method, both thinkers are also joined in their dislike of theorising divorced from attention to empirical detail and social dynamics. Elias's critique of philosophy (2011: 12–19, also Kilminster 2011: 92–93), Weber's ideal-types (Elias 2012 [1939]: 577–578, also Mennell 1998 [1989]: 256–257), as well as the type of theoretical exegesis promulgated by, for example, Talcott Parsons (Elias 2012 [1939]: 497–500) are all illustrative here. Tocqueville's dismissal of 'absolute systems which represent all the events of history as depending upon great first causes linked by the chain of fatality' (Tocqueville 1896 [1893]: 80–81; see also his critique of historical-materialism in Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 957) is well-known, but there are also numerous other places where he criticises philosophy and metaphysics for being too theoretical:

> General ideas do not attest to the strength of human intelligence, but rather to its insufficiency, for there are no beings exactly the same in nature: no identical facts; no rules applicable indiscriminately and in the same way to several matters at once (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 728; see also Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: cxxii fn. 242).

To observe manners in empirical detail (to reveal *mœurs* or habitus) Tocqueville and Elias relied on primary sources. Tocqueville's method was to read:

> not what is said about them or what they said about themselves later, but what they themselves said at the time and, so far as possible, what they really thought (Tocqueville 1858, in a letter to Louis de Kergolay, in Palmer 2014: 241–242).

In AR, he says this about his method:

> I have read more than just the celebrated works of the eighteenth century. I also sought to study many works that, while deservedly less well known, are perhaps more revealing of the true instincts of the age for the very reason that they were rather artlessly composed. I steeped myself in public records that reveal the opinions and tastes of the French as the Revolution approached. The minutes of meetings of the estates and, later, of provincial assemblies shed a great deal of light on these things. I made extensive use, moreover, of the cahiers, or grievance books, drawn up by the three orders in 1789. These grievance books, the original manuscripts of which are collected in a series of many volumes, will endure as the testament of the old French society, the supreme expression of its desires, the authentic manifestation of its last will (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 2).

The parallel with Elias can be elaborated. The argument in CS, for example, is for an important part built on a study of selected diaries and memoirs from French statesmen and nobles, which they often used as outlets for grievance and frustration. The argument in CP is also based on analysis, not of what others have said about behavioural change during and after the Middle Ages in Western Europe, but of what authors from that time, such as Desiderius Erasmus, wrote themselves about how one should (not) behave.

Elias explains how the use of such primary sources allows us to step into the shoes of people who are distant in time and place – to identify with these people. He argues that we can accustom ourselves to their behaviour, thoughts and societies (Elias 2005 [1969]: 226), and in so doing come to recognise and appreciate how our societies are different, but nevertheless connected, to theirs:

> When we see some of the 'basic personality characteristics' or, as it is sometimes expressed, the 'spirit' of court people, emerging from the social figuration they form together; when we understand how they and their modes of expression developed most intensively and subtly in a quite different sphere and in a quite different direction from ours, because this sphere was of vital importance to them, something of the developmental curve leading from that human type to ours becomes visible, and what we have gained and lost in this transformation (Elias 2005 [1969]: 123).

As we have seen, the transformation that occupied Tocqueville's mind was how *mœurs*, and subsequently laws (he assumed circumstances to be constant), change when an aristocratic society develops into a democratic society. Tocqueville is adamant to emphasise the role of chance in the changing of *mœurs* (Mennell 2007: 238):

> men mutually push each other away from their respective plans, and how the destinies of this world proceed as the result, but often as the contrary result, of the intentions that produce them, similarly to the kite which flies by the antagonistic action of the wind and the cord (Tocqueville 1896 [1893]: 32; see also Tocqueville 1896 [1893]: 80–81; Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 1284–1285); and Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 60, 140 for his emphasis on the emergent character of the French Revolution).

The affinity with Elias's insistence on the blind and unplanned character of social development is of course apparent here (cf. Elias 2012 [1939]: 404). In the next section I compare how Elias and Tocqueville worked on the basis of these theoretical and methodological dispositions to explain the French Revolution.

A growing mismatch between rank and power

Elias wrote about the sociogenesis of the French Revolution in CP (Elias 2012 [1939]: 360), and most specifically in 'Sociogenesis of the French Revolution', the last chapter of CS (Elias 2005 [1969]: 286–293). In this chapter, he invokes the image of a petrified figuration in pre-revolutionary France between the monarchy and the various elites of noble and bourgeois origins (Elias 2005 [1969]: 290–291), which pre-empted any adjustment of the mismatch that had gradually developed between the rank that the French aristocracy occupied and the power they could wield.

Mennell remarks in a footnote how Tocqueville in AR anticipated the metaphor of a 'frozen clinch' (Mennell 1998 [1989]: 86–87 and 293, fn. 27). I aim to demonstrate here that Mennell's remark can be read as an understatement and that affinities exist between Tocqueville's and Elias's analyses of the sociogenesis of the French Revolution that substantiate the theoretical and methodological parallels I have suggested in the previous two sections.

Tocqueville wrote about the French Revolution in his essay *France before the Revolution* (Tocqueville 2009 [1836]), but his most extensive analysis is in AR (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]). AR was supposed to comprise two volumes, mirroring the structure of DA, with the first volume covering the *ancien régime* – its establishment before and endurance after the Revolution – and the second volume focusing on the events and mentalities that created the Revolution. Unfortunately, the second volume was never published due to Tocqueville's death in 1859, but a number of chapters and notes that Tocqueville drafted for it have been published posthumously (Palmer 2014: 147–224).

Rather than the image of the nobility and bourgeoisie trapped in a clinch, I find that AR, including Tocqueville's unpublished drafts for the second volume, and CS are similar foremost in their focus on, and explanation of, the discrepancy between social status and power that characterised the position of the French nobility. Both scholars point out that, during the centuries preceding the Revolution, the power balance between the social classes of French society was gradually becoming more equal, while the differences in mores and manners that separated them were getting more profound (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 85; Elias 2012 [1939]: 473). Social distance widened while the material power base to maintain such a distance was dissolving. According to Tocqueville, the traditional French aristocracy were 'the head of an army but in reality a corps of officers without soldiers' (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 179). In his notes for the second volume of AR, he remarks:

> In the time of Henry IV the princes, great lords, and rich bourgeois called together and consulted by the king were still the heads of society; they could thus check whatever they set in motion and support royalty even while resisting it. These same classes, under Louis XVI, retained only the externals of power; we have seen [in AR] how they had already lost the substance of it forever (Tocqueville 1857 in Palmer 2014: 161; see also Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 80–92).

Elias emphasises, in the same vein, the difference between social rank and social power:

> The nobility, as we saw [in preceding chapters in CS] was quite clearly the highest-ranking class in the *ancien régime*, but it was by no means as clearly the most powerful class. At the French royal court there was at any given time a fairly firm hierarchical order of rank, in accordance with which the members of the high court aristocracy, above all the members of the royal house, held the highest rank. But social rank and social power no longer coincided (Elias 2005 [1969]: 287, italics in original).

In AR, Tocqueville argues that the nobles continued to enjoy advantages of rank, wealth and esteem despite losing power (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 42). According to Elias, the nobles emphasised their privileges and displayed their wealth more openly precisely because they were losing power (Elias 2012 [1939]: 473).

Note the contrast between how Tocqueville and Elias characterise the situation in pre-revolutionary France and their respective arguments about how social equality softens manners, outlined in section three of this article. In pre-revolutionary France, the manners that demarcate class boundaries harden with greater social equality, to finally produce the most sweeping and violent revolution that Europe had so far experienced. How was this possible? This is the question that Tocqueville and Elias try to answer:

> The purpose of this book is to explain why this great Revolution, which was in gestation throughout most of Europe in this period, erupted in France rather than elsewhere, why it emerged fully formed from the society that it was to destroy, and, finally, how the old monarchy could have fallen so suddenly and completely (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 3–4).
>
> The question is why this phase of latent, half-underground and very gradual transformation in the distribution of social power passes at a certain point into a different one, in which the shift in power is accelerated and power struggles are intensified, until the monopoly over use of force held by the previous rulers is contested by physical force by the non-elite strata previously

> excluded from the state monopolies, is extended through participation of those previously excluded or is entirely abolished (Elias 2005 [1969]: 286–287).

To explain the mismatch between rank and power, Tocqueville and Elias put forward a number of reasons why aristocratic power diminished relative to the power of the monarchy and the third estate in France during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the next section I shall consider these reasons in more detail to substantiate the affinity that I identified previously. To clarify, my interest here primarily lies in the identification of how the arguments that both sociologists offer run in parallel and complement each other. It goes beyond my intention and capacity to compare the strength or validity of their respective arguments against the formidable academic literature that exists on the sociogenesis of the French Revolution (e.g. Furet 1981 [1978]; Hunt 2004 [1984]).

Interpreting the French Revolution as part of a long-term process of social change

Tocqueville and Elias explain that the French monarchy gained power during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because it was able to recruit its own army of paid mercenaries through nationwide taxes facilitated by monetarisation and economic growth. With a royal army, the power balance between the nobility and the monarchy tilted in favour of the latter because the kings of France no longer needed the nobles to perform military services (Elias 2005 [1969]: 167; Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 95). Elias adds that the relative importance of the nobility in warfare also decreased because firepower became more decisive in battle over armoured cavalry (Elias 2005 [1969]: 167). Furthermore, the nobles were losing out on economic opportunities that opened up in a burgeoning capitalist and commercial society. Due to the import of gold and silver and other valuable goods from overseas, there was an increase in the availability and use of money (Elias 2005 [1969]: 168–169). The immediate effect of these imports was inflation, which undermined the nobility's economic position, since their income was based on fixed land rents (Elias 2005 [1969]: 164–165). Moreover, the nobles did not seize alternative economic opportunities because the growth of the economy during these centuries was limited by the available quantity and quality of energy supply. In addition, the nobles chose not to engage in commercial enterprise as a means of increasing their income. Not only was this legally forbidden, it was also seen as 'personally degrading' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 80) – a taboo – because work and enterprise belonged to the economic ethos of the bourgeoisie.

The discrepancy between rank and power also widened because the nobility became increasingly preoccupied with safeguarding and distinguishing their status and rank in response to their deteriorating power and diminishing wealth relative to the monarchy and the third estate. The nobility confirmed and legitimised its privileged position and rank, and with that, its own self-image and value, its 'social existence' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 88), vis-à-vis the third estate by claiming 'the exclusive prerogative of being the principal servants of the master [the monarch]' (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 83). As evidence of this exclusive prerogative, Tocqueville mentions tax exemptions and other privileges provided by the monarch, which helped the nobles to 'reaffirm the clear, sharp class boundary that divides them [from the third estate]' (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 85).

Tocqueville's main example here is the so-called taille, a tax meant to pay for the upkeep of a royal army, from which the nobility was exempted (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 36, 60). They were exempted because when the taille was introduced '[the nobles] constituted a class that stood as a dangerous rival to the monarchy and would never have tolerated an innovation [i.e. the instalment of a royal, private army] so prejudicial to

themselves' (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 95). Elias does not discuss the taille in CS, but acknowledged its importance in a previously unpublished note accompanying the typescript of *What is Sociology?* (Appendix III) titled 'Fiscal inequality under the ancient regime'. Elias discusses how tax exemptions as privileges constituted for the French nobility a 'central point in their livelihood' (Elias 2012 [1970]: 222). In CS, he points out how 'every loss of privilege meant a loss of meaning and purpose' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 84) because nobles in pre-industrial societies were less able to capture wealth from the growth in commerce (see also Elias 2005 [1969]: 163–164).

Elias argues that the presence of the nobility at the royal court offered them various means of distinguishing themselves. At court, the monarch provided positions, royal pensions, financial gratifications and housing, enabling the nobles at court to enjoy a lifestyle that set them apart from the rest of society and other elites of noble or bourgeois origin.

> [Nobles] went to court not only because they were dependent on the king; they remained dependent on the king because it was only by going to court and living within court society that they could preserve the distance from everything else on which their inner well-being, their prestige as court aristocrats, in short, their social existence and their personal identity depended (Elias 2005 [1969]: 108–109, Elias's emphases removed).

The display of privilege and wealth by nobles was 'an indispensable instrument in maintaining their social position' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 70). Nobles could afford such a lifestyle by paying off their debts through the sale of their landed property (Elias 2005 [1969]: 80) but also by receiving additional income and gifts from the king. As a consequence, their economic means, esteem and rank no longer depended primarily on landholding, but more and more on privileges and incomes from the monarch, and, consequently, on his goodwill and whims (Elias 2005 [1969]: 168–169).

Both AR and CS describe the strategies employed by Louis XIV to isolate the nobility from the third estate. Tocqueville presents the division of the classes as 'the skill that most of our kings have had in dividing men in order to govern them more absolutely' (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 167; see also Herr 1962: 77–88). Elias mentions these skills when he explains that Louis XIV was highly conscious of the possibility that nobles and members of the upper bourgeoisie could cooperate in an effort to overthrow or replace him (Elias 2005 [1969]: 77, 287). The king used the various positions, functions, and privileges at his court and in his administration to make the nobles dependent on him, and to invoke jealousies and rivalry between the various contenders for these positions. The prospering bourgeoisie was eager to attain increased rank and standing, which the monarchy provided with the sale of privileges, offices and titles attached to administration of the country, 'tasks which had previously been reserved for the nobility and high ecclesiastics' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 170).

Elias then points out that, after the reign of Louis XIV, the court etiquette, conspicuous consumption, and preservation of special privileges and rights (as manifestations of the competition over rank and honour) gradually became rigid and self-reinforcing, and semi-autonomous from the desires of the monarch and the nobles. Elias describes this process as 'a ghostly perpetuum mobile' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 95). For Elias, the bourgeois gaining access to these positions in the growing central administration became recognised over time as new nobility (*noblesse de robe*), which, in turn, motivated the old nobility (*noblesse de épée*) to demarcate their position by going to court (Elias 2005 [1969]: 81).

During the eighteenth century in the reigns of Louis XV and XVI, the social figuration that came to exist between the rivalling elites – the monarch, the *noblesse de épée*, *noblesse de robe*, and wealthy bourgeois

merchants – petrified because no one was able to introduce systemic reforms; any change would be conceived not only as a loss of power but also 'humiliation, and, to an extent, self-immolation' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 96; see also Mennell 1998 [1989]: 87). This 'deadlock' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 224) created an opportunity for the monarchy to assume a mediating role in the triad and in this way reinforce the development of an absolutist regime. The monarch was able to play the role of broker because he was sufficiently distanced from both the nobility and bourgeoisie as to not become associated with either one of them (Elias 2005 [1969]: 181), while at the same time both groups tried to ally the king to strengthen their own position (Elias 2005 [1969]: 191–192).

Tocqueville likewise identifies the move to the royal court of the higher nobility as a fatal step that reproduced and widened the mismatch between rank and power. But while Elias primarily considers interactions and relations at the court in Versailles, Tocqueville pays more attention to the places the nobility left for the royal court. As mentioned in relation to Elias, the nobility financed court life by leasing (all or parts of) their estates to their tenants (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 78). These tenants acted as quasi-owners because they could freely inherit, sell or mortgage the land. Tocqueville argues that the court nobility, due to their absence, stopped taking responsibility for the administration and governance of the French countryside. The court nobleman ceased to fulfil public duties, such as maintaining public infrastructure, providing law and order, and offering poor relief, with the result that he was 'in reality nothing more than a resident whose immunities and privileges separated and cut him off from everyone else' (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 118; see also 34–35, 45, 52–53; cf. Elias 2005 [1969]: 180).

Here Tocqueville formulates an argument, now known as the 'Tocqueville paradox' (Elster 2009: 162–169): that the differences of rank invoked resentment not because social inequality was growing but because it was diminishing. The differences in rank and privilege that set the nobility apart from common people were harder to justify, especially for nobles who had left their rural estates (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 156–157). First, because peasants were becoming wealthier and less dependent on the nobility through the de facto acquisition of land. Second, the nobility continued to enjoy certain privileges: disposition of compulsory labour service, highway tolls, fees on fairs and markets, exclusive hunting rights, tax on buying and selling land within the boundaries of the estate, and a monopoly over milling flour or pressing grapes (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 36). According to Tocqueville, peasants refused to accept these privileges because they could no longer consider these as a 'natural consequence of the country's constitution' (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 37). In the eyes of the common people, the nobility 'retained the indemnity while shedding the burden' (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 78):

> Nobles possessed irksome privileges and onerous prerogatives, but they maintained public order, administered justice, enforced the law, came to the aid of the weak, and took charge of common affairs. To the extent that the nobility ceases to do these things, its privileges seem more burdensome, until ultimately it becomes impossible to understand why they even exist. (Tocqueville 2011 [1856]: 37).

At the end of 'Sociogenesis of the French Revolution', Elias remarks that the inability of nobles to consider their 'defunctionalisation' as legitimate holders of titles and privileges, together with their inflexible sources of income, 'prevented a non-violent transformation of the institutions in keeping with the changed balance of power' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 293).

For Tocqueville, the Revolution was a transitionary phase when France was transforming from an aristocratic into a democratic society (Elster 2009: 100–104; Kinneging in Tocqueville 2011 [1835/1840]: 1093–1097; Hochberg 2007: 27–37). Tocqueville was aware that these transitions towards greater equality could take

place with lesser or greater violence. In a note belonging to Chapter 21 of the manuscript of DA, Tocqueville remarks that violent revolutions are prone to happen when 'the struggle takes place between men who are already equal enough to be able to make war on each other and who are dissimilar enough to strike each other without pity' (Tocqueville 2012 [1840]: 1151–1152).

For Elias, the French Revolution represents an example of 'latent democratisation' (Elias 2005 [1969]: 286): a violent episode of a longer process of civilisation taking place in Europe from the Middle Ages. As several have argued (Fletcher 1995; Mennell 2001), including Elias himself (2013 [1989]: 223), long-term processes of shifts in power and social interdependencies also feature so-called 'decivilising spurts' (Mennell 2001: 32): 'infrequent climaxes or turning points' of social transformation (Elias 2012 [1939]: 466) towards greater social equality whereby levels of violence can increase rather than decrease.

What appears at the end of the parallel comparison of Elias and Tocqueville that I pursue here is a synergic interpretation of the French Revolution as a violent episode in a longer social-historical process that has a direction (Mennell 2001: 32) or pattern (Elias 2012 [1970]: 70). It was a process that none of the people involved willed or planned (see end of Section 3 in this article) and tended towards greater social equality and milder mores. In AR, Tocqueville expresses his concern about the effects of greater social equality on individual freedom. He explains how social equalisation (in a democracy) transforms social power from a source that is primarily identified with elites and powerful individuals, such as a monarch, and experienced as external constraint and force, to a form of power that becomes internalised:

> Under the absolute government of one man, despotism, to reach the soul, crudely struck the body; and the soul, escaping from these blows, rose gloriously above it; but in democratic republics, tyranny does not proceed in this way; it leaves the body alone and goes right to the soul (Tocqueville 2012 [1835]: 418–419).

The pressure to conform to a majority – the 'tyranny of the majority' as Tocqueville calls it (2012 [1835]: 402–426) – has become so ubiquitous that people will regulate themselves (Mennell 2007: 106–107; Elster 2009: 38–42) to the extent that they limit their free experience of sentiments and passions. In his work Tocqueville expresses his fear that the demands of conformity in democracies would pressure people into giving up the diversity of taste and spontaneity of conduct of individual distinction (Fogelman 1960: 278).

The 'tyranny of the majority' in Tocqueville's analysis is 'the social constraint towards self-constraint' for Elias (2012 [1939]: 414). Through the processes of state formation at work in Western Europe during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, the direct threat of violence in daily life diminished. But life in the more extensive and complex 'survival units' (Elias 1991 [1987]: 170–171) that states provide requires, in turn, greater self-control ('muting') of emotions, habits and impulses through socialisation and reflection (Elias 2012 [1939]: 411). Elias too acknowledges that processes of civilisation impinge on individual freedom (Elias 2012 [1939]: 415–416), because people learn to give up a freer pursuit of drives and impulses, something that never happens 'without pain' (Elias 2012 [1939]: 416). But, unlike Tocqueville, Elias sounds more positive. Freedom is not impossible when humans are able to find 'a more durable balance, a better attunement, between the overall demands of people's social existence on the one hand, and their personal needs and inclinations on the other' (Elias 2012 [1939]: 490).

Surmised by indirection

Reflecting upon the affinities between Tocqueville and Elias, I return in these final sections to the question that motivated the comparison in the first place: Why does Tocqueville receive surprisingly little attention in Elias's *oeuvre* despite the affinity? Unfortunately, we can never be sure how the affinity discussed in this article developed, because Elias only refers to Tocqueville once (a German translation of Tocqueville's AR read early in Elias's career), and there are no personal notes or annotations from Elias on Tocqueville.

Commentators on Tocqueville's largely implicit intellectual debt (which makes for a final and ironic parallel with Elias), propose the possibility that when a person is deeply influenced by another, he or she adopts the other's opinions to the extent that these opinions become that person's own, and he or she is perhaps no longer aware of their origin (Kinneging 2011 in Tocqueville 1835/1840: 1125; Schleifer 2012: 38). According to Tocqueville scholar James Schleifer, a study of notes, drafts and letters can disclose some of the implicit sources and debates. When such sources do not exist 'recognition of significant intellectual debts and dialogues' has to be 'surmised by indirection' (Schleifer 2012: 37–38). Michel Foucault also suggested this possibility when asked to comment on his use of the work of Marx:

> But there is also on my part a sort of game about this. I often quote concepts, texts and phrases from Marx, but without feeling obliged to add the authenticating label consisting of a footnote and a laudatory phrase to accompany the quotation. Provided you do that, you're regarded as someone who knows and reveres Marx and will be suitably honoured in (so-called) Marxist journals. But I quote Marx without saying I am, without quotation marks, and because people are unable to recognise Marx's texts I am considered to be someone who doesn't quote Marx. Does a physicist feel it necessary to quote Newton and Einstein when he writes a work of physics? He uses them, but he doesn't need the quotation marks, the footnote and the eulogistic comment to prove how completely he is being faithful to the Master's thought. And because other physicists know what Einstein did, what he discovered and proved, they can recognise him in what the physicist writes (Foucault in Brochier 1977 [1975]: 15).

Goudsblom suggests quite a similar attitude for Elias in how he paid homage to his predecessors. According to Goudsblom, Elias's affinity with a number of classical sociologists and sociological ideas 'cannot be explained by direct acquaintance' (Goudsblom 1977: 78). The influence of some of the classic sociological theorists (e.g. Marx, Durkheim, Weber) on the ideas in *On the Process of Civilisation* cannot be directly recognised, although the book nevertheless engages and synthesises the central themes of classical sociology (see also Mennell in Flores 2014: 16 where he makes a similar suggestion for how Elias uses the term *Zweifrontenschicht* or 'two-front stratum').

Unfortunately, the affinity between Tocqueville and Elias cannot be explained in this way because the work of the former has occupied a relatively marginal position in sociology and did not lead to the formation of a distinct theoretical perspective or school (see also note 1 in this article). Moreover, Tocqueville was not widely read and discussed in interbellum Germany (Nissen 2004: 97; Visscher 2013: 9–10).

The only option left open is to surmise affinities by *indirect* acquaintance. This would mean that Tocqueville's work reached Elias through the work of a third scholar who is familiar with Tocqueville and whom Elias knows well. I will hypothesise here that the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga represents perhaps the strongest possibility for this role (Goudsblom 1987b: 45; van Krieken 1998: 23).

It is well known that Huizinga was closely familiar with Tocqueville's *oeuvre* (Gargan 1963; 337; Colie 1964: 620; Visscher 2013; 32; Otterspeer 2019: 1) as well as with the work of other social scientists, such as Marcel Mauss, Karl Mannheim, Max Weber and Georges Sorel (Colie 1964: 608). In a recent contribution to the

conference 'Huizinga heute. Hundert Jahre Herbst des Mittelalters [Huizinga today: (the) hundred-year autumn of the Middle Ages]', Otterspeer (2019: 2–9) argues that notwithstanding their many obvious differences, Tocqueville and Huizinga share a social-scientific approach that is based on capturing patterns or 'rhythms' of social-historical change, a juxtaposition of the form (exterior) and content (interior) of social life, and comparative analysis. Moreover, just like Tocqueville, Huizinga found explanations in terms of linear causality, which he associated with Marx and Freud, deeply suspect because of their determinism; he preferred analysis that acknowledged the contingent and unplanned character of social change (Huizinga 1926 [1950]: 81–82; Colie 1964: 625–626). Could it be possible that the affinity between Tocqueville and Elias that I have observed and analysed comes through the intermediation of Huizinga? A definite answer requires further analysis of how Huizinga builds on Tocqueville, and Elias on Huizinga.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion I will consider how Tocqueville and Elias both share a 'style of thought' (van El 2002: 10–12; see also Kilminster 2007: 1–4). The term 'style' is used here to point to shared habitual, pre-reflexive modes of thought (see e.g. Mannheim and Fleck in van El 2002: 10–11). Styles can relate to theories or methods or certain themes of research, but they can also be linked to certain dispositions, or characters, of individual scholars who share or develop a similar attitude and taste with respect to scholarly work. To belong to a style does not therefore require a unified conceptualisation and application of theory and method. Moreover, styles can also transgress scientific disciplines and fields. If we accept this definition of style and find it plausible that Tocqueville and Elias (and perhaps Huizinga) both worked within, and helped to produce, a distinct style of sociology, which traits would distinguish that style?

Based on the comparison I have pursued in this article, four traits come to the fore. First would be the close integration of social-historical empirics and theorisation. Both Elias and Tocqueville avoid the tendency to isolate aspects from reality – for the sake of theorisation or systematic causal explanation – through close analysis of forms of social life in context using (comparative) case studies. Second, in these studies, they focus on the co-evolution of social life, whereby changes in social structures co-evolve with changes in human personalities. Third, the interdependence between social groups is for both sociologists the mechanism for co-evolution. A fourth trait is that awareness of co-evolution and the role of social interdependence highlights for these scholars how historical legacies, temporality and timing co-determine present social conditions, i.e. that humans in a society function in a particular way because the society developed in a particular way. This process of co-evolution originates from individual humans living their lives, but can only be planned and controlled by them to a limited extent. This awareness enables both thinkers to 'detach' themselves from the immediate and partial moral and political concerns of their times (Kilminster 2014: 104). According to Kilminster (2014: 105–107), this ability for detachment is a trait that characterises non-partisan 'track II sociology' that includes work of Saint-Simon, Comte, Victor Considerant, Lorenz von Stein, amongst others. A final trait is that their style of sociology speaks in terms of probability, rather than certainty or inevitability (Mennell 1998 [1989]: 70). The general insights it generates thus amount to 'sometimes-true theory' (Stinchcombe 1991: 375): theories that hold true under specified 'scope conditions' (Cohen 1989: 83).

I believe that the articulation and further development of the style that Tocqueville and Elias represent is important because sociology that is historically sensitive will be better positioned to resist the tendency for theorisation without clear empirical referents, and to consider in more detail the dynamic and relational nature of social life (Goudsblom 1990 [1974]). The contours of this kind of sociology have been explored and laid out by Elias and many of his students. Connecting this work with other sociological thinkers, such as

Tocqueville, helps to position figurational or process sociology as a style of thinking that has relevance for sociology in a broad sense vis-à-vis other, better-known, sociological paradigms and schools.

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Notes

1. Charles Wright Mills found it necessary in the 1950s to point out that Tocqueville would be a sociologist 'if he were alive today' (Mills 1959: 17), and some years later Raymond Aron wrote about the 'unjustified' neglect of Tocqueville in sociology (Aron 1965: 183). Talcott Parsons, on the other hand, found Tocqueville 'insightful' and 'an extremely talented commentator', but nothing like Durkheim or Weber since Tocqueville did not develop any 'major theoretical schemes for analysis' (Parsons 1967: 641). Isaiah Berlin was like-minded. He found Tocqueville original but not deep enough: 'Seldom, if ever, he stirs thought with the force and boldness of a Hobbes or a Hume, or a Rousseau; he has not the systematic brain or moving directness of Mill; still less does he open windows on literally unfathomable depths like Hegel and Marx' (Berlin 1965: 205–206). Despite some rehabilitation of Tocqueville's position in the history of sociology in more recent years (Welch 2006; Elster 2009), his contribution to the discipline never quite shook off a sense of triviality (Stoutenhuysen 2013). [#N1-ptr1]
2. In the 2002 Suhrkamp Gesammelte Schriften edition, the footnote is rendered 'Über die steigende Verarmung des Adels s.a. A. de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, Paris 1866, Kap. 8.', with the remainder of the footnote exactly the same as the 1969 version; see Elias (2002 [1969]): 144 fn. 46). [#N2-ptr1]
3. The other German translation of AR was by Arnold von Boscowitz and published in 1857 as *Das alte Staatswesen und die Revolution* (Tocqueville 1857 [1856], trans. von Boscowitz). [#N3-ptr1]
4. In 'Technisation and civilisation', Elias writes: 'Remember that in the nineteenth century a somewhat impecunious Russian Tsar sold Alaska to the United States of America. Russia and America were then so far from each other that no one, obviously not even the Tsar and his advisers, thought that the two countries could possibly become military rivals and pose a mutual threat to their security' (Elias 2008: 88). To this sentence Mennell added the following footnote: 'Or almost no one: in 1835 Alexis de Tocqueville, at the end of the first part of Democracy in America [Vol 1 (New York: Schocken, 1961)], pp. 521–2), made his subsequently famous prediction that America and Russia would be the world powers of the future.' (Elias (2008: 88, fn. 23). In *Studies on the Germans*, Elias asks how moral feelings about the reprehensibility of social inequality can become unbearable during a time when a society is becoming

more equal in economic and political terms. He answers his own question as follows: 'human groups usually revolt against what they experience as oppression, not when the oppression is at its strongest but precisely when it begins to weaken' (2013 [1989]: 337). To this section, Mennell added the following footnote: 'This point is usually associated with Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59), who wrote: 'it is not always when things are going from bad to worse that revolutions break out. On the contrary, it oftener happens that when a people which has put up with an oppressive rule over a long period without protest suddenly finds the government relaxing its pressure, it takes up arms against it' (The Old Regime and the Revolution [1856], trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), p. 176 [that is, pt 3, ch.4].–eds.'. [#N4-ptr1]

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