

# Violence Control and the Civilization of Intimacy. Remarks on Norbert Elias' Sociology

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Kontrola násilí a civilizace intimity. Poznámky k sociologii Norberta Eliase

**Abstract:** This study is a modest contribution to the reception of Norbert Elias, one of the giants of 20th century sociology. The paper's overriding question concerns the relevance of the Eliasian big-picture narrative: whether the theory of civilization is sufficient to explain this process or is it possible to include complementary factors? It will be argued that while Norbert Elias convincingly explores several key elements of the Western civilizing process, he does not ascribe due importance to the long-term transformation of the intimate sphere. The paper claims that, from the 17th century onwards, the centre of family-life has shifted from paternal authority to maternal care and psychological harmonization. Hence, it is justifiable to regard the shift of the power balance within the family as a key explanatory factor of the civilizing process.

**Keywords:** Norbert Elias; civilizing process; homicides; intimate sphere; sentiments approach

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Our languages are constructed in such a way that we can often only express constant movement or constant change in ways which imply that it has the character of an isolated object at rest, and then, almost as an afterthought, adding a verb which expresses the fact that the thing with this character is now changing. For example, standing by a river we see the perpetual flowing of the water. But to grasp it conceptually, and communicate it to others, we do not think and say, "Look at the perpetual flowing of the water", we say, "Look how fast the river is flowing." We say, "The wind is blowing", as if the wind were actually a thing at rest which, at a given point of time, begins to move and blow. We speak as if the wind were separate from its blowing, as if a wind could exist which did not blow [*Elias 1978: 111–112*].

## Introduction

The author would like to enrich the reception of Norbert Elias by trying to point out to some important aspects of further researches. First, Elias' perspicacity is intended to be illustrated by the fact that, in the past few decades, investigations on the history of homicides have convincingly verified the violence-control thesis of his opus magnum. Next, it will be argued that the critique of calling Elias to account for the analysis of the conventional "complex interactions of social, political and economic forces" is based on a de-theorized reading of his sociology, since it reprimands him for something that he does in the most original way. In other words, the conceptual framework of certain historians of

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crime reveals that they criticize the Eliasian opus magnum without having a deep insight into the working of the figurational paradigm.

Although the author of this paper is a disciple of Elias, he does not think that the Eliasian oeuvre is beyond criticism. In the following sub-chapter, then, it will be tried to point out to some weaknesses of his paradigm, namely that it does not ascribe due importance to the churches and religion, and fails to deal, adequately to its weight, with the long-term transformation of the intimate sphere. The paper does not confine itself to just summing up the thoughts of the cited authors or offering a meta-theoretical synthesis of the literature. By putting the reviewed texts under critical scrutiny and, more importantly, by trying to re-contextualize them in each other's perspective, it seeks to draw the reader's attention to some understudied aspects of the civilizing process. These texts derive from three sources. The paper relies, first of all, on Norbert Elias' opus magnum and his figurational paradigm. The second source which is referred to makes use of an important aspect of the history of crime-literature studying the long-term transformations of interpersonal homicides. There is a significant trend in the history of crime-literature to refer to Norbert Elias. Several authors take him as their starting point, although at times they also put some critical remarks on him – some of which are worth pondering. However, occasionally it is precisely this criticism that makes clear their limits. These deficiencies justify a re-interpretation of these texts and the inclusion of the Sentiments Approach, i.e. a major tradition in the historical study of the Western family, to our analysis.

### **Violence Control in Europe between 1300 and 2000**

“He spends his life”, we read of a knight, “in plundering, destroying churches, falling upon pilgrims, oppressing widows and orphans. He takes particular pleasure in mutilating the innocent. In a single monastery, that of the black monks of Sarlat, there are 150 men and women whose hands he has cut off or whose eyes he has put out. And his wife is just as cruel. She helps him with his executions. It even gives her pleasure to torture the poor women. She had their breasts hacked off or their nails torn off so that they were incapable of work” [*Elias 2000: 163*].

It is easy to understand the main thesis of Elias' opus magnum if we reflect on our feelings and sentiments that overcome us while reading the above lines. No doubt there is hardly any reader in the 21st century in whom no feeling of embarrassment, confusion, puzzlement, abhorrence or shame is caused by the acts described in these sentences; in other words, who has not internalized violence control, i.e. the most important indicator of the civilizing process. The book, *On the Process of Civilization* appeared in German in 1939 while in English it was only released some thirty years later. Then it was translated into dozens of languages and now, in most part of the world, it is considered as one of the main sociological books of the 20th century. (This statement does not refer to the USA: Steven Pinker, the eminent American public social scientist wrote in 2011 that Elias is “the most important thinker you have never heard of” [*Pinker 2011: 59*].) The kernel of the Eliasian argument is that upon external social pressures, people develop self-control mechanisms which suppress the “uncivilised”, animal-like behavioural elements based on violence. These suppressions function as feelings of shame, confusion and embarrassment, as the reader might have felt reading the above passage. Hence, these feelings are not natural endowments but the internalized products of social-historical circumstances [*Dunning – Hughes 2013; Mennell 1989, 1992*].

According to Elias, violence control is to be traced, first of all, to the emerging state monopoly of violence and taxation:

The financial resources that flow into this central authority maintain its monopoly of military force, while this in turn maintains the monopoly of taxation [*Elias 2000: 268*].

Through the formation of monopolies of force, the threat which one person represents for another is subject to stricter control and becomes more calculable. Everyday life is freer of sudden reversals of fortune. Physical violence is confined to barracks, and from this store-house it breaks out only in extreme cases, in times of war or social upheaval, into individual life. [...] When a monopoly is formed, pacified social spaces are created which are normally free from acts of violence [*Elias 2000: 369–372*].

It is understandable that Elias used secondary qualitative sources in his work as there were no quantitative historical data available on various forms of violence at his disposal yet. The scientific community likes to rely on quantitative and measurable data, on the basis of which social processes, including long-term changes in violent behaviour, might be analysed. The examination of homicide rates appears to be a good choice for this purpose – although it should be stressed that a more thorough analysis cannot be undertaken without taking into account correlations between homicides and other acts of violence – such as, for example, domestic violence. Elias' perspicacity is proven by the fact that, in the past few decades, investigations on the history of homicides have convincingly verified his statements.

One of the most frequently cited works on this issue appeared in the early 1980s. Its author, Ted Robert Gurr, sums up the homicide-related historical data concerning England, published on perpetrators during the 1970s, and concludes that from the 13th to the end of the 20th century the homicide rate has gradually and unambiguously decreased in England. He states that from twenty homicides per one hundred thousand people in the 13th century, this rate is dropping to ten in the 17th century, and below one by the end of the 20th century [*Gurr 1981*].

Fellow historians of crime have systematically checked Gurr's findings. One of their main questions was to what extent was the data he had found valid for the Western world in general. Within a few years, stunningly similar long-term trends were to be demonstrated in Scandinavia and the Netherlands [*Österberg – Lindström 1988; Österberg 1996; Spierenburg 1996*]. After the turn of the Millennium the question was practically settled definitively: the Cambridge-based historian of crime, Manuel Eisner has carried out a meta-analysis of the sources and studies about long-term historical trends on violent crime in Europe. He has processed over ninety publications, combining national statistics with historical data coming from local authorities and from the police of ten countries, and created a valuable "History of Homicide Database" [*Eisner 2003*]. The findings of his much-cited study have clearly confirmed that from 1200 to 2000 the rate of homicide had decreased in Europe on the whole. Undoubtedly, there had been temporal differences between countries, groups of countries and regional units which can be summed up – grossly simplified – as follows: homicide rates had usually decreased in the North and in more densely populated urban zones earlier than in the South and in rural or mountainous regions. For example, in Milan in the first half of the 1880s, as against a 3.6 homicide rate (annual 3.6 homicide/hundred thousand inhabitants) the corresponding rate was 45.1 in Palermo [*Chesnais 1981 in Eisner*

2003: 105]. But the tendency of decrease is obvious everywhere in Europe. What is more, from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century a convergence between countries, country groups and regions can be demonstrated.

According to Eisner, it is also noteworthy that the data displays unparalleled stability as regards their gender- and age distribution: the overwhelming majority of perpetrators are young men in their twenties. Nevertheless, the decline in homicide rates coincides with the decrease of male-to-male killings and the relative increase in murders within the family [Eisner 2003: 108]. While in the 14–17th centuries the rate of intra-family homicide does not exceed 10–15% of the homicide in general, by the second half of the 20th century about one-third of murders are committed within the family. It must of course be remembered that in the meantime the general homicide rate has dropped from 30 persons / 100 000 people to about 1–1.5 person(s) / 100 000 people. It is to be stressed that in the Middle Ages interpersonal violence is not a class-related phenomenon yet. In the 14–15th century more than a quarter of noble males died violent deaths – either in duels with a peer or in wars [Pinker 2011: 81–83; Eisner 2003: 115]. Non-violent behaviour becomes a class-related issue only from the late 16th century onwards: in the early 17th century in Amsterdam, for example, the decline is linked primarily to the fact that the wealthy, churchgoing citizens renounced violence, while the men of the lower-classes were still participating in knife fighting [Spierenburg 1998].

### Historians of Crime on Norbert Elias

The majority of historians of crime took the Eliasian argument as their point of departure. They include several pupils of Elias who – plunging into the study of the long-term trend of homicide upon their master's inspiration – pointed out that in pre-16th century Europe “homicide was regarded with lenience if it was perceived as the result of passion or occurred in defence of honor” [Eisner 2003: 126]. In such a case the authorities were usually satisfied with the restoration of order and the requirement that the families involved should make peace with each other (for example, through paying a wergild to the victim's family). Eisner refers to a so-called “honourable manslaughter” in Zurich in the 14th century when in a fight a butcher stabbed another one; the judges declared the case a “murder of honour” as they thought it proven that the victim had passed abusive remarks about the perpetrator's family. The sentence for the murderer, who lived on as a respected citizen of Zurich, was to pay indemnity to the family of the victim [Eisner 2003: 126].

Later, thanks to the crystallizing centralized monopoly of violence, the aristocratic families governing cities and principalities were less and less content with mere reconciliation of the concerned parties and urged for punishment:

Mortal aggression became the object of a campaign of “moralization” and “civilization” around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, between the religious wars and the Thirty Years War. This undertaking was visible mainly in the development of criminal law and in the growing sophistication of legal definitions as well as in the emergence of homicide as a matter for the gallows. This undertaking was relatively successful if we take into account the drop in the number of homicides and the virtual disappearance of private dispute settlements [Rousseaux 1999: 157 in Eisner 2003: 126–127].

Some authors note that from the mid-16th century onward a wave of intensified magisterial social control spread throughout Europe that restructured the relationship between state and its citizenry, establishing more centralized administrative and judicial organizations [Tilly 1992], and distributing ordinances regarding feasts, child rearing, appropriate clothing, alcohol consumption, and church attendance [Oestreich 1968, 1982 in Eisner 2003: 127]. Eisner formulates critical remarks, too, stating that

these activities resulted in an acceleration of social disciplining, a process that can be seen as the result of complex interactions among different social, political, and economic forces [Dülmen 1993, 1996].

The consolidation of state power is only one of them. Yet factors such as the increased religious zeal following the Reformation movements, the expansion of literacy and schooling, an early capitalist organization of work constitute independent sources of the disciplining process in the early modern age. Their similar effects on the structures of the self were both to enforce self-control rigidly and to provide the cultural and social resources needed for a more orderly conduct of life [Eisner 2003: 127].

Eisner has further critical comments on Elias' civilization theory, when he states that "Elias almost exclusively emphasizes the state's coercive potential exercised through the subordination of other power holders and bureaucratic control. [...] Although the long-term expansion of the state and the decline of lethal violence appear to correlate nicely on the surface, a closer look reveals several inconsistencies" [Eisner 2003: 127]. Referring to Muchembled [1996], he also claims that "the decline in homicide rates in early modern Europe does not appear to correspond with the rise of the absolutist state". Furthermore, he points out that "police forces in medieval and early modern Italian cities were surprisingly large, but they did not effectively suppress everyday violence" [Eisner 2003: 128]. What's more, on the basis of Roth [2001] Eisner argues that "the sudden decline in homicide did not correlate with improved economic circumstances, stronger courts, or better policing. It did, however, correlate with the rise of intense feelings of Protestant and racial solidarity among the colonists, as two wars and a revolution united the formerly divided colonists against New England's native inhabitants, against the French, and against their own Monarch, James II." [Roth 2001: 55 in Eisner 2003: 128–129]. By commenting this passage, Eisner declares that "on the level of macro-trans-historical comparison, the decline of homicide rates appears to correspond more with integration based on trust than with control based on coercion" [Eisner 2003: 129].

### **Elias and the Figurational Paradigm**

What can be said in defence of Elias? First of all, I flatly disagree with the statement according to which Elias would have almost "exclusively emphasized the state's coercive potential". In volume two of the *Civilizing Process* he devotes the first chapter ("*Dynamics of Feudalization*", the length of which is several dozens of pages!), among others, to the increase of population after the great migration, the internal expansion of society, the formation of new social organs and instrument, the new elements in the structure of the Medieval Society, and so on and so forth [Elias 2000: 195–256], and only after these arguments, in chapter two of volume 2 ("*On the Sociogenesis of the State*") does he give

a systematic analysis of the interdependencies between state formation and civilizing process [Elias 2000: 257–362].

With this division of functions the productivity of work increased; this greater productivity is the precondition for the rise of the living standards of ever-wider strata; with this division of functions the functional dependence of the upper strata increases; and only at a very advanced point in the division of functions, finally, is the formation of more stable monopolies of physical force and taxation with highly specialized administrations possible – that is, the formation of states in the Western sense of the word, through which the life of the individual gradually gains greater “security” [Elias 2000: 429].

Furthermore, analysing the long-term transformations in the behaviour of the secular upper classes in the West, Elias constructs a big-picture narrative about Europe as a whole – by stressing several times that this process is reversible and there are many de-civilizing counter-spurs within it [Mennell 1990: 210]. I think, then, that it is not fair to question the relevance of this grand narrative by referring to some unique and short-term figurations crystallized at certain definite places and times. Nor does it seem a relevant counter-argument that although police forces in some medieval or early modern cities were large they did not suppress everyday violence. As a matter of fact, the size of the police force itself cannot guarantee the decline of violence, particularly before the 16th century when honourable manslaughters were socially acceptable. Commenting on the case when a butcher stabbed another butcher in a “honourable manslaughter” in late fourteenth-century Zürich, Eisner himself writes that “the example is similar to many others found in late medieval records” [Eisner 2003: 129]. The validity of the statement according to which Elias would have ignored the expansion of literacy can also be easily confuted. Numberless citations can be quoted in proof of the opposite. Here is only one:

The humanists were representatives of a movement which sought to release the Latin language from its confinement within the ecclesiastical tradition and sphere, and make it a language of secular society, at least of the secular upper class. [...] This, too, was a line in the great movement of “civilization” [Elias 2000: 145].

Although at first reading one might easily agree with the passage in which Eisner – citing Dülmen – states that “an acceleration of social disciplining can be seen as the result of complex interactions among different social, political, and economic forces”, in the context of the next phrase (“the consolidation of state power is only one of them”) both statements become debatable. The main problem with this argument is that it comes *after* a critical remark on Elias according to which he would have only stressed state-imposed constraints. What’s more, in the next sentence, Eisner replaces the Eliasian key term (civilizing process) with an alternative term (*disciplining process*) – even though this alternative term is an organic part of the criticized theory. To put it emphatically: when Eisner writes about these “complex interactions” and the “disciplining process”, his critique is based on a simplifying, *de-theorized reading* of the Eliasian argument: instead of relying on the Eliasian conceptual framework, he uses a conventional vocabulary.

We cannot understand Elias’ theory of civilization, unless we also know his figurational approach, the elements of which are implied already by the opus magnum but

are only made explicit in later works – especially in “*What is sociology?*” [Elias 1978]. Dülmen and Eisner try to explicate in a conventional social scientific idiom what Elias calls *figuration*. Their set of concepts reveals that they criticize the opus magnum without having an insight into the working of the figurational paradigm. In this context there is no room to introduce the figurational sociological paradigm in detail, yet it is indispensable to briefly review a few of its essential features. Perhaps the fundamental specificity of this line of thought is that figurationalists wish to grasp the studied phenomena as they *move* and *change*. Many social scientists think this statement is self-evident. If, however, we take the stream- and wind-metaphor of this paper's motto seriously and wish to apply it, we must recognize that we have to break radically with our routine, for – as Elias notes – the language we use forces us to try and grasp the analyzed subject with the help of static notions

At present, sociology is dominated by a kind of abstraction which appears to deal with isolated objects in a state of rest. Even the concept of social change is often used as if it referred to a fixed state – one drifts, so to speak, from seeing the state of rest as normal to seeing motion as a special case. [...] The word “power” again is usually used as if it referred to an isolated object in a state of rest. Instead we have shown that power denotes a relationship between two or more people, or perhaps even between people and natural objects, that power is an attribute of relationships, and that the word is best used in conjunction with a reminder about more or less fluctuating *changes in power* [Elias 1978: 115–116, italics in the original].

This quotation also stresses that the concept of power in the figurational sense always refers to a *changing balance of powers*. When examining the power relations, a social scientist using the figurational approach does not think in static and rigid dichotomies (as are, e.g. oppressor/oppressed, lord/servant) but lays great stress on motion, change, and transition:

From the day of his birth, a baby has power over its parents, not just the parents over the baby. At least, the baby has power over them as long as they attach any kind of value to it. [...] The master has power over his slave, but the slave also has power over his master, in proportion to his function for his master – his master's dependence on him [Elias 1978: 74].

At the core of the changing figurations – indeed the very hub of the figuration process – is a fluctuating tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and fro, inclining first to one side and then to the other. This kind of fluctuating balance of power is a structural characteristic of the flow of every figuration [Elias 1978: 130–131, italics in the original].

These quotations are also well suited to present two other decisive elements of the figurational thought. One is its consistent *relationality*, and the other issuing from relational thought is that Elias' sociology resolves with elegantly the *micro-macro problem*: the question of mediation between the individual and collective levels.

There is a specific reason for introducing the concept of “figuration” here. It makes it possible to resist the socially conditioned pressure to split and polarize our conception of mankind, which has repeatedly prevented us from thinking of people as individuals at the same time as thinking of them as societies. [...] The concept of figuration therefore serves us as a simple conceptual tool to loosen this social constraint to speak and think as if the “individual” and “society” were antagonistic as well as different [Elias 1978: 129–130].

I am aware that the above citations are insufficient to represent the intricate density of figurational thinking. The quintessence of this kind of sociology is precisely that it grasps both the whole of the forest and says important things about the formations/figurations of trees and groups of trees as well. Elias is able to explore the permanently changing interdependencies between phenomena (such as spitting, defecating, behaviour in the bedroom, state formation, monopoly of taxation, living standards, shame and repugnance, etc.) that seemingly are not linked to one another. That is why this paper contends that the critique of calling him to account for the analysis of the conventional “complex interactions of social, political and economic forces” is based on a de-theorized reading of his sociology, since this reprimands him for something that he does in the most original way.

### Criticism on Elias

However, having written all of this, it can be stated that Elias’ ideas are not beyond criticism. Namely, there is some validity in the critical views [Dülmen 1996; Taylor 1989; Jarrick – Södeberg 1993] that reproach him for not ascribing due importance to the churches and religion, first of all Protestantism in his analysis of the Western civilizing process. Indeed, it is difficult to find an answer to the question as to why he has not tried to integrate the Weberian opus magnum [Weber 1992] into his own grand theory although he had been well aware of the links between religions and the Western civilizing process:

The change in religious feeling to which sociology has paid most attention hitherto, the increased inwardness and rationalization expressed in the various Puritan and Protestant movements, is obviously closely connected with certain changes in the situation and structure of the middle classes. The corresponding change in Catholicism, as shown for example in the formation of the power position of the Jesuits, appear to take place in closer touch with the absolutist central organs, in a manner favoured by the hierarchical and centralist structure of the Catholic Church. These problems, too, will only be solved when we have a more exact overall picture of the intertwining of the non-courtly, middle-class and the courtly lines of civilization, leaving aside for the time being the civilizing movement in worker and peasant strata which became evident more slowly and much later [Elias 2000: 417].

This paper also accepts the critique that Elias has under-interpreted the role of the lower social groups in the civilizing process. Nevertheless, it will not be embarked on these shortcomings in more detail below because the author intends to concentrate on a dimension of the Eliasian oeuvre that has so-far been under-studied: the civilization of intimacy (some of the significant exceptions are found in [Klein – Liebsch 1997]). Two aspects of this huge topic will be taken into consideration in the following: changes in men/women relationship and the transformation of families.

Elias was interested in men/women relations from the beginning to the end of his career: The *Civilizing Process* has even a separate subchapter on this issue, entitled “*Changes in Attitudes towards the Relations between Men and Women*”, in which it is stated that “the feeling of shame surrounding human sexual relations has changed and become noticeably stronger in the civilizing process” [Elias 2000: 142]. Putting this topic into the context of the transformation of the broader social structure, he also claims that “sexuality, too, has been increasingly removed behind the scenes of social life and enclosed in



a particular enclave, the nuclear family. Likewise, the relations between the sexes have been hemmed in, placed behind walls in consciousness. An aura of embarrassment, the expression of a socio-genetic fear, came to surround this sphere of life" [Elias 2000: 152]. He also states that

marriage in the absolutist court societies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries derived its special character from the fact that, through the structure of these societies, *the dominance of the husband over the wife was broken for the first time*. The social power of the wife was almost equal to that of the husband. Social opinion was determined to a high degree by women. And whereas society had hitherto acknowledged only the extramarital relationships of men, regarding those of the socially "weaker sex" as more or less reprehensible, the extramarital relationships of women now appeared, in keeping with the transformation of the balance of social power between the sexes, as legitimate between certain limits. *It remains to be shown in greater detail how decisive this first power-gain or, if one likes, this first wave of emancipation of women in absolutist court society was for the civilizing process. [...] This strengthening of the social position of women signified (to express the point schematically) a decrease in the restrictions on their drives for women and an increase in restrictions on their drives for men* [Elias 2000: 155, the author's italics].

There is another sub-chapter in the second volume of *Civilizing Process* ("On the Socio-genesis of Minnesang and Courtly Forms of Conduct"), where he concentrates on the broadly-defined issue of men/women relations, stressing women's increasing share of power:

As happens wherever men are forced to renounce physical violence, the social importance of women increased. Within the great feudal courts a common sphere of life and a common social life for men and women were established. [...] For the master of the court, his function as knight and military leader was still the primary one; his education too was that of a warrior centred upon the wielding of arms. For just this reason the women surpassed him in the sphere of peaceful society. As so often in the history of the West, it was not men but women of high class who were first liberated for intellectual development. [...] She could attract poets, singers, and learned clerics. And so it was about women that the first circles of peaceful intellectual activity were established [Elias 2000: 248–249].

Around the 1960s he even writes a book on the transformation of the relation between men and women, which is almost ready in 1971 when – to the greatest dismay of posterity – it perishes due to the neglect of the cleaning personnel [Mennell 1989]. It can only be approximately reconstructed what he would have liked to write on the theme. Luckily, we have a study [Elias 1987] which is rightly presumed to contain part of the destroyed book. In this article he argues that a civilizing process took place in the Roman Empire over the centuries. By way of illustration, he refers to Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* which he finds to exemplify the increasingly refined and self-controlled interpersonal relations in sexual behaviour, art and social life in general: people communicate with increasing sensibility, sophistication and empathy with each other. As can be seen, the reasoning of this late work is essentially identical with that of the opus magnum. Or, if you please, Elias repeats what he expounded earlier, carrying out a kind of paradigm expansion: he applies his theory of civilization to different social-cultural circumstances.

In sum, Elias had interesting and original thoughts on the transformation of men/women relations. However, he failed to examine to what extent and in what way the dynamic of these relations within the intimate sphere had contributed to the civilization

of violence in the long run. Nor did he adopt, between the 1960s and 1980s, the conceptual framework of the emerging Gender Studies. It would be pardonable that in the *Civilizing Process*, written in the 1930s, the concept of gender was not included. But it is less acceptable that as late as in 1987, when the gender-term was already in use in social sciences, he preferred to choose the “sex”-concept in the title of the above-mentioned article on the ancient Roman Empire (“*The Changing Balance of Power Between the Sexes*”). To put it sharply, Elias failed to differentiate between gender, sex and sexuality, and he did not deal, adequately to its weight, with the transformation of the intimate sphere. He did not analyze systematically the changing dynamic of sexual life, the power differences between genders, the division of labour within the household, the issue of child rearing, the role of the parents, and the emotional relations within the intimate sphere. It is symptomatic that, when writing about the emerging importance of women who attract poets, singers, and learned clerics in the pacified feudal courts, Elias did not dig deeper into the analysis of the changing power relations but concentrated on how the poetry of these troubadours and Minnesangers surrounding the high-born ladies with devotion and love poems promoted the advance of the civilizing process.

It is worth to be noted that, although historians of crime usually made a distinction between data referring to men and women, their inconsequential conceptual framework implicitly also could have fuelled the myth of the biological origin of gender differences. For example, in Eisner’s meta-analysis we can find sub-chapter titles like “Sex of Offenders” or “Sex of Victims”. However, the title of a table in the sub-chapter entitled “Sex of victims” is “Average Estimate of *Gender-Specific* Victimization Rates before the Nineteenth Century” [*Eisner 2003: 118*, the author’s italics]. Given that the title of both the sub-chapter and the table are on the same page, this conceptual chaos becomes more transparent.

## Family History

Elias gives proof that he is aware of the importance of intimacy when he writes that “it remains to be shown how it leads to a transformation of sexual impulses and an advance of shame feelings in the relation of men and women”, and he adds in a note:

This particular problem, important as it is, must be left aside for the time being. Its elucidation demands a description and an exact analysis of the changes which the structure of the family and the whole relationship of the sexes have undergone in the course of Western history. It demands, furthermore, a *general study* of changes in the upbringing of children and the development of adolescents [*Elias 2000: 417*, the authors’ italics].

This “general study” was never actually realized by Elias. (It cannot be precluded, of course, that he has embarked on these themes in his perished book.) Fortunately, there is a tradition, the so-called “Sentiments Approach” within the burgeoning literature on the history of the Western family whose practitioners have done what Elias had anticipated in the 1930s. There is a consensus among followers of this approach that before the 17th century marriage was an economic, production-oriented and procreative unit in which the sexual act was not aimed at procreation but was considered as a sin [*Aries 1960; Shorter 1976; Flandrin 1979; Anderson 1994; Stone 1982*]. The prime aim of marriage was to (re)produce fortune and social position from one generation to the other.

The nuclear family in the modern sense did not exist. The stage of “family life” was the household in which the relatives, servants, occasional business partners, neighbours and clients, sponsors, trustees, lived in a kind of symbiosis. There was no need or possibility for intimate seclusion: the bedroom was non-existent at that time. There was nothing to curb the patriarch’s (father’s and husband’s) power: it was not only the financial issues that the head of the household decided autocratically, but – for want of restrictive legal rules – he controlled the rights and duties of the subordinates and applied force and physical violence at his discretion. To use Elias’ words: until the 17th century the violence monopoly of the state stopped at the boundary of the households.

According to Stone [1982] and Flandrin [1979], in this early period there were no modern-type emotional ties between family members. The moment children were released from under maternal care, they became part of adult society. Since medieval society was “status-graded” and not “age-graded”, kids dressed and worked like adult, and boys were even expected to take part in wars following their fathers and elder brothers. Based on an interesting qualitative study of confessor’s manuals, Flandrin concludes that these sources look upon sentiments and feelings with suspicion as they are believed to lead to disorder. There is no trace of the obligation of love in the modern sense towards the spouse and the offspring in these manuals. By contrast, the historical evidence of the manuals suggests that great emphasis was laid on obligation, deference, and on paying due respect.

From the 17th century onwards important changes began. As Philippe Aries demonstrated in his book, in aristocratic and highly educated families, attitudes towards children gradually changed: specific children’s dress, toys, readings, games, and pedagogical programmes were devised for them; i.e. the conditions for the emergence of “childhood” as a separate life period started to be created. The “innocent” child was seen and represented as a human being with specific emotions and a fragile but promising developmental potential, with feelings and thoughts that are adequate and worthwhile to be understood by adults. The “birth” of childhood entailed the parallel emergence of parenthood, that is, the development of the modern institution of maternal and paternal activities requiring the internalization of appropriate emotions, duties, and goal-oriented educational tasks.

By the 19th century, there was a good chance that an upper class Western family would become a unity of separate parts with specific functions assigned to the constituents. With the passage of time, not only the parents but also children had separate rooms. This alone is an indicator of the growing autonomy and freedom of both wife and child: legal rules covering an increasing portion of the intimate sphere also sought to limit the patriarch’s possibilities to impose physical aggression and to protect the rights of women and children [Oestreich 1982]. As an implication of this process, the decision-making mechanisms in selecting spouses also changed. As long as the parents had disposal over the important resources of the child, they had decisive influence in “marrying off” their offspring. Once the children were capable of earning independently and could stand on their own feet, the chances were greater to decide on their would-be spouses alone.

According to Stone, there was a gradual relative shift in the power balance between parents and children; he reckoned with four criteria in the selection of the spouse: interest, mutual affection (including friendship and companionship), romance and sexual attraction, stressing that these factors did not follow suite but as we came closer to our present day, the significance of each of them increased. (In a much-cited statement La

Rochefoucauld claims that three-quarters of the English middle- and lower classes marry on mutual friendship and sympathy. Unlike in France, he adds, where such marriages are still rare in that period. This remark also confirms that in a more complex historical analysis regional difference should be taken into account with greater weight.)

All of these authors point out that the significance of the intimate sphere was upgraded in this process: husbands spent more time at home, in the company of their wives: “What really distinguishes the nuclear family [...] from other patterns of life in Western society is a special sense of solidarity that separates the domestic unit from the surrounding community” writes Shorter in his ground breaking “*Making of the Modern Family*” [Shorter 1976: 205]. Or, as Anderson puts it: “From the second half of the 18th century domesticity had reached its zenith and spread to other social groups. [...] The home came to be seen as a haven, a retreat from the pressures of a capitalistically oriented competitive world” [Anderson 1994: 47]. Although it is still the man who is the master of the household, the strengthening of emotional ties in family life softens the rigidity of patriarchal dominance.

“Good mothering is an invention of modernization. In traditional society, mothers viewed the development and happiness of infants younger than two with indifference. In modern society, they place the welfare of their small children above all else” – claims Edward Shorter [1976: 168]. With the decrease in family size and the increase in the importance of the child-rearing mother the centre of family life moved – to use Mary Ryan formulation – “from patriarchal authority to maternal affection” [Ryan 1981: 102]. The invention of modern motherhood [Dally 1982; Badinter 1980] and the identification of maternal activity with the essence of femininity mean that the growing legitimacy of the woman – paradoxically – will be rooted in the “mysterious,” “natural” and “irrational” otherness of the “weaker sex.” “As an article on marriage published in 1839 observed, ‘the man bears rule over his wife’s person and conduct. She bears the rule of his inclinations: he governs by law; she by persuasion ... The empire of women is an empire of softness ... her commands are caresses, her menaces are tears’” [Giddens 1992: 43].

Woman defined by their motherhood became the protagonist of lots of 19th century disputes over population – both as an actor and as a subject. All this can be interpreted as the increase in the relative power of the female agent. In France, for instance, threatened by Bismarck’s Germany, “*depopulation*” and “*dénatalité*” were considered to be a “social plague” and maternity became an object of many and contradictory comments” [Cova 1991: 119]. The basis for this moral panic was that “whereas France had been the most densely populated country in Europe, by 1918 it ranked fifth in population. [...] Many ‘repopulators’ accused the feminists of being responsible for the declining birth-rate. [...] The strategy of the feminist movement as a whole was to utilize that apparent demographic danger and the glorification of motherhood as a weapon in the struggle for the rights of mothers.” Maria Martin, the editor of *Journal des femmes*, wrote in 1896: “If you want children, learn to honour the mothers” [Cova 1991: 119–120].

Whilst the Sentiments Approach and the literature on the history of Western feminisms are hardly known outside the Academy, Anthony Giddens’ book on the transformation of intimacy became a bestseller in the 1990s. Giddens sets the new “emotional order” in the focus of attention which had a crucial role in the equalization of power relations between men and women in Western Modernity. He wishes to grasp this emotional order using three key concepts: “pure relationship”, “plastic sexuality”, and “the ethos of

romantic love". Pure relationship designates a "relationship of sexual and emotional equality" [Giddens 1992: 2], plastic sexuality means a "decentred sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction" and "from the rule of the phallus"; the ethos of romantic love, the harbinger of the pure relationship, "presumes that a durable emotional tie can be established with the other on the basis of qualities intrinsic to that tie itself". According to Giddens, although this ethos helps "to put women 'in their place' – the home", its emergence "can be seen as an active, and radical, engagement with the 'maleness' of modern society". (The *Transformation of Intimacy* takes the above concepts as its starting point since Giddens primary aim is to refine his own theory on modern democracy. While the title of the 9th chapter of the book is "Sexuality, Repression, Civilization", Elias' name is only mentioned once in passing.)

## Conclusion

The transformations outlined above were sketched with broad brush-strokes, without alluding to regional, generational, national, temporal or social (etc.) differences or to polemics between experts. In a detailed historical analysis deeper examination should be devoted to these long-term transformations. It was argued that although Elias had explored key elements of the civilizing process, he had not ascribed due importance to certain decisive factors. Namely, besides under-interpreting the role of Protestantism and the lower social strata in the civilizing process, he failed to explore what further changes had been generated by the transformation of the intimate sphere. He also failed to differentiate between gender, sex and sexuality, and he did not deal in depth with the changing dynamic of sexual life, the power differences between genders, the division of labour within the household, the issue of child rearing, the role of the parents, and the emotional relations within the intimate sphere. He did not take into account that – with the decrease in family size and the increase in the importance of the child-rearing modern motherhood – the centre of family life moved from patriarchal authority to maternal affection. The paper has primarily meant to argue that if we take seriously the Eliasian thesis according to which "the rise in the division of functions also brings more and more people, larger and larger populated areas, into dependence on one another; it requires and instils greater restraint in the individual, more exact control of his or her affects and conduct, it demands a stricter regulation of drives and – from a particular stage on – more *even self-restraint*" [*Elias 2000: 429*, italics in the original], *it is justifiable to regard the shift of the power balance within the family as a key explanatory factor of the civilizing process*. To put it shortly: the long-term psychologisation and pacification of social life are dependent on the changes in the intimate sphere.

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