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CHAPTER 15

Individualization and Social Dis/integration in Contemporary Society: A Comparative Note on Zygmunt Bauman and Norbert Elias

John Flint and Ryan Powell

Introduction

This chapter explores the approach to, and conceptualization of, *individualization and socialization* within the work of Zygmunt Bauman and Norbert Elias. We argue that, although both theorists place great emphasis on these powerful social processes, their respective positions differ markedly. We explore the theoretical differences and similarities in the two concepts of socialization and individualization set out by the two thinkers, before a discussion of how their contrasting approaches are manifested in the way that they deal with common concerns including social integration, distinction, and conflict. Both Bauman and Elias have produced a vast and diverse body of theoretical work that we cannot do justice to within the confines of this chapter. We therefore focus on the differences in terms of individualization as a long-term *integrating* force for Elias; and as a selective, discriminatory one for Bauman precipitating a *decline in social solidarity* and the potential for collective action, as well as sharper social inequalities driven by an uneven, individualized mobility.

We conclude that Elias's long-term, detached, and dynamic perspective represents a significant point of departure in relation to competing theories on individualization: one that can elucidate the ubiquitous nature of individualization over many centuries, and the accompanying fears and anxieties that it carries with it. This comparison highlights a number of weaknesses in Bauman's conflicting interpretation, including the lack of empiricism and the risk of a retreat into the present (Elias 1987b, 2000)—both of which influence a decidedly pessimistic view of individualization and the potential for social integration, which, we would argue, has influenced the widespread

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contemporary panic over social malaise within Western societies (Flint and Powell 2012). Although there are particular overlaps between the works of Bauman and Elias, we suggest that there remain fundamental oppositions in their relative approaches toward empiricism and respective positions of involvement and detachment.

In the first section of this chapter we explore Bauman's perspectives on the "current crisis," focusing on the centrality of individualization to his conception of present-day concerns and social ills. We then identify important similarities in the work of Bauman and Elias before turning to their differences, contrasting Bauman's critique of a decivilized postmodernity or late modernity (a concept not used by Elias) with Elias's long-term perspective on individualization, which forms a key anchor of Elias's workable synthesis. We emphasize the integrative nature of individualization related to increasing webs of interdependence, changing power ratios, and an increase in the scope for mutual identification, before considering Elias's concept of the we-I balance. Finally, we argue for the continuing relevance of Elias's theories in contemporary society, illustrating this with reference to the state and forces of internationalization and globalization.

Individualization and the "Current Crisis"

Prominent accounts of individualization often present this social process as a contemporary phenomenon (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1990, 1991). For such authors the process of individualization takes on a particularly pervasive character in Western societies from the post–World War II period onward with a more accelerated period of change ensuing from the 1960s. In such accounts, individualization is bound up with profound changes in society and the shift from a social differentiation and organization based on production to one based upon consumption (Bauman 1983, 1998a, 1998b; Featherstone 1991). The emergence of a *consumer society* and the transformation of urban space in the shift toward the *postindustrial society* are key concepts within this framework (Baudrillard 1998; Bauman 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2005). These shifts are precipitated by complex social transformations, but the key aspect for our concerns here relates to the gradual loss of traditional (solid) markers of social and group identity (such as class, neighborhood, and nationality) and their replacement with more fragmented and malleable identifications, such as those variously associated with consumption practices, neo-tribes and the "aestheticization of everyday life" (Bauman 2005; Featherstone 1991; Savage 2000; Shields 1992). However, Maffesoli (1996), while describing the contemporary period, like Bauman, as one of a "time of tribes" suggests a decline of individualism.

These postmodern impulses suggest "less strong neighbourhood identifications and a less fixed habitus or rigid set of dispositions and classifications into which encounters are framed" (Featherstone 1991, 109). It follows, then, that previously fixed identities derived from the sphere of production (the workplace), and the concrete ideas about one's class status and place in the world are replaced by a more reflexive identity formation (Bauman 2005; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Featherstone 1991; Giddens 1990). Thus, as Bauman and others would have it, as we move from modernity to late modernity, or postmodernity, individuals are being decentered from their place in the world and from themselves, constituting a "crisis of identity" (Bauman 2001, 2005; Hall 1992).

This perspective also emphasizes the great costs to the individual driven by the uncertainty of contemporary life and the anxiety and fears that supposedly characterize Western societies (Bauman 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2005; Beck 1992; Giddens 1990). For Bauman, postmodernity is a decivilized modernity (Smith 2001) characterized by a constituency of rootless and isolated strangers, disoriented by an overload of ambivalence (Smith 2001, 114). In this postmodern habitat, the market rules locally and globally (Bauman 1998a, 1998b) in a world in which "no one seems to be in control" (Bauman 1998a, 58; Bauman 2005; Smith 2001). Such concerns are shared by Judt (2010, 234) who claims that

> We have entered an age of fear . . . Insecurity born of terrorism, of course, but also, and more insidiously, fear of the uncontrollable speed of change, fear of the loss of employment, fear of losing ground to others in an increasingly unequal distribution of resources, fear of losing control of the circumstances and routines of our daily life. And perhaps, above all, fear that it is not just we who can no longer shape our lives but that those in authority have also lost control, to forces beyond their reach.

For both Bauman and Judt, the postmodern condition risks a reduction of society to "a thin membrane of interactions between private individuals" (Judt 2010, 118). The dominant themes are a reduction in social solidarity, loss of control, and personal and societal existence becoming increasingly "difficult to predict" (Bauman 1998a, 2005; see also Rodger 2008). Drawing on Freud, a fundamental aspect of this crisis for Bauman is the trade-off between freedom and security—a freedom to act on impulse, instincts, and desires. Yet "freedom without security is bound to cause no less happiness than security without freedom" (Bauman 2001, 42).

Similarities in Bauman and Elias

Before turning to their differences, it is important to identify similarities in the work of Bauman and Elias. Bauman, like Elias, acknowledges that humans are "locked together in a web of mutual dependency" (Bauman 1990) and that we have innate capacities to identify with others. Indeed, he stated that the central question of sociology was precisely this examination of people's dependence on each other (Bauman 1990; Smith 2001). Equally, Elias acknowledged a Hobbesian conceptualization of "perpetual war of every man against his neighbour" (Hobbes 1651, 296) using strikingly similar language: "Adult life is a constant war of all against all . . . the untamed warrior ethos comes to life here once again in a bourgeoised version" (Elias 1996, 108–109; see Smith 2001). Competition between humans, for Elias (2000, 304), as for Bauman, was prominent and not confined to the economic sphere:

> The competitive relationship is itself a far more general and all-encompassing social fact than appears when the concept of "competition" is restricted to economic structures—usually those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Elias, therefore, would recognize the centrality of conflict and self-interest highlighted by Bauman, and indeed he stated that the "battlefield" remained, but that it was increasingly moved "within" humans (Elias 2000, 375); this is an argument influenced by Freud's insight that civilization intensified the repression of an instinctual

life as individual drives had to be restrained to meet social demands (see Overy 2010, 161). But Elias suggests that, over long time periods, the "constant [physical] wars between neighbours" diminish as reserve and "mutual consideration" of other people increases (Elias 2000, 169).

Elias, writing in the 1970s, stated that "nothing is more striking in our time than the rate of change, the dynamic character of the social universe," and he noted that "the rate of change may be steadily increasing" (Elias 1972; Liston 2012). Elias's observation resonates with Bauman's (2005) concept of "liquid (post)modernity." Both theorists also identify a key role for the state. For Elias the emergence of the nation-state, and particularly its monopolies on violence and other mechanisms such as tax collection, was central to the civilizing process (Elias 2000; Wickham and Evers 2012). Here, Elias shares with Hobbes an understanding that both humans' capacity for sociality and their pursuit of self-preservation is related to the specific configuration of the state (as the dominant survival unit) or the particular rule of Leviathan (see Wickham and Evers 2012). Indeed, Hobbes's often-cited perpetual war of all against all is postulated as occurring in the absence of a commonwealth (Hobbes 1651, 296). But this is not premised upon forms of social solidarity such as those that Bauman identified within modernity; rather, as Locke suggests, individuals unite in commonwealths and place themselves under government in order to preserve their own private property (Locke 1698), and government actually works through erecting guards and fences to protect this property (Davy 2012).

As we already mentioned, the Freudian influence is also common to both Bauman and Elias, as is the related ambivalence of the individualization process emphasized by the two theorists. As Elias (2001, 129) notes,

> The development of society towards a higher level of individualization in its members opens the way to specific forms of fulfilment and specific forms of dissatisfaction, specific chances of happiness and contentment for individuals and specific forms of unhappiness and discomfort that are no less society-specific . . . More freedom of choice and more risk go together.

However, the two theorists have markedly different conceptualizations of the processes of socialization and individualization, to which we now turn.

Socialization and Individualization

Smith (2001) identifies fundamental contrasts in how Bauman and Elias approach the process of socialization—a process closely bound up with that of individualization. Elias emphasizes the early experience, the formative years of a person's life, as a key period in the acquisition of manners and an appropriate habitus (Elias 1996, 2000, 2001) gained through the figurations that they form with others (though it should be noted that Elias does maintain that socialization is a *continuous* process throughout the life course): "The make-up of the individual is attuned to *constant* co-existence with others to whom behaviour has to be adjusted" (Elias 2001, 128, our emphasis). In contrast, Bauman focuses less on habitus emerging from socialization processes commenced at birth and more on the imposition of rules of conduct by bureaucracies and experts, which he argues has fragmented solidarities

(Smith 2001, 128): *"he [Bauman] treats socialisation not so much as the 'filling out' or creation of a person as the 'smothering' of their essential humanity."*

As identified earlier, the role of the state and its bureaucracies are central features of the civilization process and indicators of Weber's influence on Elias's synthesis. According to Elias (2000, 367), the emergence of the state, and the associated internal pacification of society, resulted in a change in the *psychic habitus* as individuals were increasingly required to attune their conduct to that of others. He therefore argues that increased personal control is inherently and inseparably linked to increased political centralization and the enhanced levels of *mutual consideration* between people that this engenders; a mutual consideration that Bauman argues has decreased in postmodernity.

Some readers (Burke 2012; Paulle, van Heerikhuizen, and Emirbayer 2011) have suggested similarities between Elias's concept of figurations and Bourdieu's (1984) concept of the field. Elias's use of *habitus*, *social space,* and an automatic or blindly functioning apparatus of self-control (Elias 2000, 173; Mennell 1989) may also suggest linkages to Bourdieu, although this notion has been critiqued (Déchaux 1993). But it is the case that Elias was as interested as Bauman and Bourdieu (1984) in processes of social distinction. He argues that, even in circumstances of spatial proximity in medieval periods, the gulf between the estates was deep and symbolized by differing customs, gestures, clothes, and amusements (Elias 2000, 392) and that intensive efforts were made to prevent such differences from being effaced (387). Cockayne (2007) has also shown how in English cities in the early modern period, distinctions were maintained in a complex street etiquette relating to social class, although such codes of conduct were regularly subverted. We will return later to the importance of historical precedents for the contemporary conditions of society.

The centrality of the dissemination of conduct and etiquette in Elias's framework, from the court society to the bourgeoisie and then the lower classes, for instance, is viewed by Bauman as a *civilizing* endeavor targeted at those in need of corrective treatment rather than as an unplanned consequence of human figurations. Bauman's viewpoint is no doubt shaped by his experiences in Poland (Smith 2001). Indeed, Kilminster (1998, 51) suggests that the writings of eastern Europeans are "haunted by the ghosts of these experiences." The fact that "philosophy often performed the function of social criticism under conditions of generalized censorship, central control and repression" (Kilminster 1998, 51) in the eastern European bloc prior to 1989 offers a further insight into why Bauman does not reject philosophy with the same verve as Elias; and therefore why the two authors should arrive at such different standpoints in consideration of similar concerns. "The philosophical image of man as a static being who exists as an adult without ever having been a child, the omission of the process in which each person is constantly engaged, is one of the reasons for the dead-end that epistemology constantly comes up against" (Elias 2001, 200–201). This philosophical critique is central to Elias's (2000, 167–168) concept of individualization:

> With each transition from a less populous, less complex form of the dominant survival organization to a more populous and complex one, the position of individual people in relation to the social unit they form together is changed in a characteristic way . . . the breakthrough to a new dominant form of more complex and comprehensive type

> of human organization goes hand in hand with a further shift and a different pattern of individualization . . . The scope of identification increases.

Whereas Bauman discusses the relative decline of solidarity, the fragmentation of identities, and the breaking up of the webs of interdependence as *outcomes* of the individualization process, for Elias ever-increasing webs of interdependence are a *driver*. Beyond the consistent commitment to long-term, empirical investigation, the key point of departure for Elias rests with his emphasis on the interdependence of the development of both personality and social structures. That is, as social processes develop in a particular direction, there is a corresponding change in the psychological makeup of individuals such that "more people are forced more often to pay more attention to more other people" (Goudsblom [1989, 722], quoted in Mennell [1990, 209]). Thus, there is an increase in the scope for mutual identification as individuals think more about the consequences of their actions for others. This is obviously in sharp contrast to the contemporary processes of social disintegration and fragmentation lamented by Bauman and others, and seen in the short-term these changes may be less visible. Over the long-term, however, this results in "differences in the relation of the individual person to his or her society at different stages of development" (Elias 2001, 177). Rather than the "loss of community" or the decline in the concern for the "other," what Elias charts is the shifting nature of identification processes. For, "there is no I-identity without we-identity. Only the weighting of the I-we balance, the pattern of the I-we relation, are variable" (Elias 2001, 184). Perceived over the long-term this balance has tilted more toward the I-identity: "Whereas previously people had belonged . . . to a certain group for ever, so that their I-identity was permanently bound to their we-identity and often overshadowed by it, in the course of time the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme" (Elias 2001, 196–197).

Thus, the long-term perspective again elucidates the importance of shifting social relations related to different stages of development. Yet this same long-term perspective, highlighting the *gradual* conversion of social constraints into self-constraints, is also the source of criticisms of Elias. If, for Bauman, postmodernity entails a search for "humane survival" rather than the more ambitious previous pursuit of a progressive modernity (Smith 2001), we can here address and largely refute the criticism made by Bauman, that Elias, influenced by a particular reading of Western societies, presented an overly optimistic story of humanity rising from barbarity (Bauman 1991). If Bauman were correct, Elias would deny the possibility of the very decivilizing processes in contemporary societies that Bauman charts. In fact, Elias explicitly recognized that strong regressive movements "are certainly not inconceivable . . . such breaches are always possible and can lead to new consolidations" (Elias 2000, 106). Indeed, he observed, in the postscript to *The Civilizing Process*, that "several types of change, even in opposite directions, can be observed simultaneously in the same society" (Elias 2000, 450; see Fletcher 1997; Mennell 1990; Powell and Flint 2009).

Divergent Perspectives on the Crisis of the Present

In his postscript to *The Civilizing Process*, Elias (2000, 450) lamented the fact that long-term transformations of social structures, and therefore of personality structures, had been "lost from view." We have, thereby, become too hodiecentric

or present-centered (Liston 2012). While noting Bauman's postmodern turn Smith (2001) sees continuity in Bauman's strategy of encouraging open communication and creative action, the difference being that the focus switched to *individual* interactions rather than those of groups (Smith 2001). But Bauman remains primarily and directly concerned with the social justice required in the here and now. In stark contrast, Elias (2001, 10–11) argues there is much to be done before we can even diagnose the ills of our society with any accuracy. We must first grasp the unplanned and unforeseen nature of the long-term development of human societies:

> How is it possible . . . that the simultaneous existence of many people, their living together, their reciprocal actions, the totality of their relations to each other, gives rise to something that none of the individuals, considered in isolation, has intended or brought about . . . a structure of interdependent individuals, a society? . . . we can only clarify our actions, our goals and ideas of what ought to be, if we better understand what is . . . Only then would we be in a position to base the therapy for the ills of our communal life on a secure diagnosis

Elias, and Eliasian scholars, have been criticized for their lack of engagement with the politics of the present (Dunne 2009), but such criticisms pay insufficient attention to the importance of the "detour via detachment" within Elias's theoretical framework (Elias 1987a, 1987b). Indeed, Elias sets out a project for the *future* highlighting the need for sociologists to develop the appropriate theoretical tools and vocabulary in order to more accurately diagnose society's ills (1987b).

Certainly, such a critique of the retreat into the present (Elias 1987a, 1987b; Flint and Powell 2012) raises important questions about Bauman's thesis of a decivilized postmodernity. The first of these is the extent to which postmodernity represents uniquely transformed or novel forms of human dependencies and generates new conditions of habitus. Whereas for Elias there are no absolute beginnings or endings (Liston 2012), and ambivalence and psychological costs of individualization are defining features of the civilization process and ubiquitous to all social relations, for Bauman the current epoch is somewhere "we have never been before." Although Bauman acknowledges that "crisis . . . is the natural condition of all human culture" (Bauman 2001, 250), he views the current crisis as a strikingly novel one in which the present-day uncertainty and anxiety are the defining characteristics of everyday life, based on a new economic and social configuration—postmodernity—that may be differentiated and charted from the preceding period of modernity. The order, security, and long-term time horizons of the modern era—symbolized in the job for life and the self-assertion of the labor movement—have been replaced by a *dis*order that values mobility and distinguishes the haves from the have-nots by their ability to move, and move fast. For Bauman (2001, 24, our emphasis), individualization is therefore conceived of as a divisive force:

> The present-day uncertainty is a powerful *individualizing* force. It divides instead of uniting, and since there is no telling who might wake up in what division, the idea of "common interests" grows ever more nebulous and in the end becomes incomprehensible. Fears, anxieties and grievances are made in such a way to be suffered alone . . . This deprives the solidary stand its past status as a rational tactic and suggests a life strategy quite different from the one which led to the establishment of the working-class defensive and militant organizations.

It could be argued that Elias's concept of individualization is more flexible and ambiguous, centering as it does on the integration of society toward higher levels of mutual consideration as a result of growing social interdependencies, but not necessarily implying more cooperation and including spurts of decivilizing processes. In contrast Bauman depicts a contemporary society in which such interdependencies are becoming undone: "The 'heavy modernity' was, indeed, the time of engagement between capital and labour fortified by the mutuality of their dependency. Workers depended on being hired for their livelihood; capital depended on hiring them for its reproduction and growth" (Bauman 2001, 21–22) and both were later supported by the welfare state. Now, however, the mentality is a short-term one in which *flexibility* is the "slogan of the day" and that is characterized by uncertainty for those dependent on the footloose whims of capital (Standing 2011; Wacquant 2008), cut loose from a dependency on labor by way of its freedom of movement. According to Smith (2001, 127),

> Bauman describes a world in which the web of interdependence has been torn to shreds, one in which old power monopolies have been destabilized and dispersed, a world without secure establishments, one populated entirely by strangers and outsiders. Looked at in this way, postmodernity is decivilized modernity.

But the idea that contemporary society is one of fear and uncertainty and a loss of control in which the future is increasingly difficult to predict (Bauman 2005; Judt 2010; Young 2007) would appear to represent a return to what Elias (2000, 169, 372) termed "an existence without security" or "perpetual insecurity," which he identified in much earlier historical periods and societies. It was the mechanisms through which everyday life became more calculable and "freer of sudden reversals of fortune" and the threat of physical attack being "confined to barracks" that characterized the civilizing process arising from the gradual monopolisation of forces (Elias 2000, 372).

While acknowledging that Bauman's and Elias's time frames of analysis were different, it is here that Elias's longer-term perspective and his concept of detachment (1987a) come to the fore. For example, Bauman's notion of ambivalent or distanced *strangers* populating postmodernity has a very long and, it could be argued, continual lineage in urban history—ranging from the awkward silences and lack of interaction among coach passengers in eighteenth-century English cities (Cockayne 2007); through the perceived dissolving of traditional rural community allegiances in the early British industrial cities (Toynbee 1884); and the individual isolation and absence of sociability in the United States metropolis of the early twentieth century (Zorbaugh 1929). Similarly, Bauman's argument that there has been a postmodern intensification of social opprobrium directed toward the poor (a perspective shared by Judt [2010] and Jones [2011]) appears little different to Elias's description of medieval feelings of repulsion and disgust generated by the sight of the lower classes and their behavior, a contempt that was expressed openly and untroubled by any reserve (Elias 2000, 392). However, Elias (2000, 178) also claims that the poor were treated with disdain but not as symbols of either virtue or "ugly vice," which would suggest a different social process to that of Bourdieu's (1984) mechanisms of distinction grounded in the personalized critique of the less powerful, or of Bauman's (1998b) concept of the stigmatization of the poor as "flawed consumers." But, Elias's

commitment to empiricism and historical perspectives enables recognition of processes of social distinction and ambivalent trends of solidarity and individualism between and within social classes in the post-war period of welfare state development (Kynaston 2008, 2010; Young and Wilmott 1957).

Individualization may also bring relative emancipation for some less powerful groups within society as the process of *functional democratization* brings about relative shifts in the unequal power balances between groups. One example is the relative position of women as a result of the relative lessening of the power gradient characterizing relations between the sexes. That is, in Western societies the contemporary female biography underwent an individualization boost as mothers and wives increasingly sought a life of their own, bringing about profound changes in the related spheres of education, work, sex, and relationships (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Yet these freedoms gained bring with them increased contradictions, risks, and responsibilities as young women, relatively more liberated from parental control, must negotiate through their own rules and behavior in their relations with other people.

The example of the individualization process with regard to young women serves to illustrate the way in which social changes impact upon psychological changes within individuals. That is, the social (or external) constraints that previously guided the behavior and etiquette of young women in a particular direction are converted into self-constraints within the individual. It also illustrates the way in which contemporary accounts are, more often than not, overly pessimistic about the outcomes of individualization for many individuals, groups, and societies with the insecurity of the contemporary era emphasized and contrasted unfavorably with the solidity and certainty of bygone eras when "everyone knew their place"—regardless of how repressive such "places" were for many. Social disintegration and the loss of collective solidarities allegedly abound as individual identity is said to usurp that of collective identifications with this or that group (e.g., the decline of the traditional family and the erosion of class, work-based, and place-based allegiances) resulting in the loss of community (Putnam 2000): "The other side of individualization seems to be the corrosion and slow disintegration of citizenship" (Bauman 2001, 49). We would suggest, however, that Elias's long-term account of individualization processes offers an alternative perspective that is better able to capture the *ambivalence* of the continuous pressures toward individualization and, at the same time, highlight the limitations of contemporary perspectives evident in the work of Bauman and others. The continuing relevance of Elias's work may be illustrated through a consideration of changes in the configurations of Western nation-states and the social contracts and global order underpinning them.

Globalization and the Civilizing Process

We return, finally, then to the centrality of the state and social standards of self-restraint in an *international* society (Linklater 2012). Judt (2010, 200) cites Sidney Webb's statement to the historian Elie Halevy (1938, 217) that "the future lay with the great administrative nations where the officials govern and the police keep order." It appears increasingly evident that this, in fact, represents the past. As mentioned, for Elias it was the state's monopolization of violence, taxation, and

other elements of social control that framed the civilizing process in modernity, just as for Hobbes if was fear of an all-powerful *civitas*—*Leviathan*—that regulated self-interest and self-preservation. Indeed, for Hobbes, the first key lesson of sovereignty was that the people were to be taught that they ought not to be in love with any form of government they see in their neighbor nations more than with their own (Hobbes 1651; Wickham and Evers 2012). But increasingly the Western state and its "oppressive bureaucracy," of which Bauman is so critical, may be weakening through reconfigured processes of monopolization. It has always been the case that states have never achieved monopolies over the use of violence. There are many historical precedents for current concerns about terrorism and urban disorder (Judt 2010; Flint and Powell 2012; Slater 2011). But there is clearly a new economic order where states' control over taxation is increasingly and diffusely undermined on a global scale (Shaxson 2011).

Society has never been constituted on an actual social contract, rather it is "an associative figuration" that exists and evolves of itself (Barker 1960; Rousseau 1762). Even if some form of initial contract originated in consent, it did, and does, not continue to exist through consent (Hume 1740). However, even for Hobbes, *Leviathan* became and remained sovereign through some forms of (imagined) covenants with its subjects (Davy 2012), and this included the power of the sovereign authority to protect and provide predictability for its subjects. The philosophy of the social contract, according to Barker (1960, xxxii) marked the transition from natural law to the idealization of the nation-state, and it is the emergence of the absolutist state that is central to Elias's sociology of the civilizing process.

But Bauman (1998a, 58) argues that the power of the market and processes of individualization and globalization have resulted in a situation where "no one seems now to be in control." Judt (2010, 217) concurs and identifies the greatest contemporary fear as being "that it is not just we who can no longer shape our lives but that those in authority have also lost control, to forces beyond their reach." Elias would show us that states have never been monopolistic regimes of authority, but Bauman and Judt argue that, regardless of any accuracy in comparative historical terms, the sociological change is the perception among governed populations that national-states have lost power to global forces. This suggests that the implied contract of government—which, even if it never really existed, shaped human behavior as if it did (Barker 1960, vii)—is being radically altered. What if there is significant weakening of a centralized or centralizing authority that Elias and Hobbes built their theories upon? If, as Smith (2001, 122) suggests, European confidence in empire, science, and the state have risen and fallen together, and the idea (never the reality) of a national space has been eroded (Judt 2010) what are the implications of this?

The large-scale riots and disorder that occurred in many cities across England in the summer of 2011 (see Flint and Powell 2012) would appear to support Bauman's claim of the growing importance of consumption and its corollary of flawed consumption, given the particular focus upon the destruction of commercial premises and the looting of goods (Flint and Powell 2012; Slate, 2011), which was different from the drivers and behavior of early periods of urban unrest in the United Kingdom (Smith 2001). Such episodic events would also suggest a reduction in the so-called civilizing forces of self-restraint and fear previously generated by perceived authority of state powers (including policing), corroded in part by increasing "envy

and resentment" at the growing inequality within Western societies (Judt 2010; Slater 2011; Wacquant 2008). This would indicate that we may be witnessing a spurt of decivilizing processes. However, if we deploy the long-term and detached perspective that Elias (1987a, 1987b) demands of us, it may be possible to detect something more complex and ambiguous.

The "intuitions of impending catastrophe" (Judt 2010, 166) posited as characterizing an emerging age of fear and uncertainty within the vertigo of liquid postmodernity (Bauman 2005; Young 2007) may not necessarily signal entirely a breach from civilizing processes as Elias conceptualized them. Rather, just as Elias explained how increasingly complex webs of interdependence were related to the rise and consolidation of nation-states, so we may be in a new period where interdependencies continue to increase and become more nuanced, but function at the *international* level. In other words, it was precisely a sense of loss of control of one's circumstances (which Bauman and other commentators of the postmodern condition diagnose) that led to the emergence of commonwealths as a form of (imagined) social contract, increasingly nuanced perceptions of others and the intricacies of social life, and enhanced bonds of mutual obligations. Paradoxically, this resulted in life gradually becoming more calculable and predictable, epitomized by the decline in levels of violence (Elias 2000; Pinker 2011).

Could it be that such processes continue to play out, but now on a global scale? Certainly, we appear to be experiencing the ambivalent and simultaneously civilizing and decivilizing processes that Elias identified, as retrenchment of welfare states and punitive social and criminal policies are enacted in response to market forces (Pratt 2005). But equally, Smith (2001, 131) has described how the European Union has imposed new standards of decency in a range of areas. It would be the greatest irony of all if contemporary and future civilizing processes were driven by the global interdependencies of nations, many of which were, in modernity, identified as the "other" to which Western colonial powers compared their own civilized societies (Elias 2000).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have sought to explain how the important works of Bauman and Elias are framed by their different understandings of the processes of socialization and individualization and to apply these theories to reflections upon mechanisms of social integration and fragmentation in the contemporary period often defined as postmodernity. We have argued that the similarities between these theorists, most notably their highlighting of interdependencies as the foundation of sociology, are significant, and that both Bauman and Elias identified the rapid pace of change in current times, the processes of distinction within them, and the central role for the state (i.e., its bureaucracies and centralizing tendencies). However, we have also utilized Elias's focus on long-term perspectives and historical empiricism to critique an apparent retreat into the present that neglects previous epochs in which trends regarded as unique to contemporary society were also present and to argue for a recognition of the complexity and ambiguities within social crises. In doing so, we acknowledge the substantial contribution of Bauman and others but suggest that Elias's theories of the civilizing process, theories on longer-term shifts toward integration and mutual

consideration, and his techniques of scholarship remain particularly relevant to our understanding of a globalizing world characterized by a realignment of nation states and the imagined social contracts underpinning them.

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