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Process sociology, the English School, and postcolonialism – understanding 'civilization' and world politics: a reply to the critics

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Abstract

This article responds to critics of *Violence and Civilization in the Western States-Systems* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). It provides a rejoinder to challenges to the attempted synthesis of process sociology and the English School analysis of international society. It rebuts the postcolonial contention that the process-sociological analysis of the impact of the European 'civilizing process' on the modern states-system is Eurocentric. The article explains how process sociology contributes to the postcolonial critique of 'civilization'. It concludes by arguing that their combined strengths of the two perspectives can inform the comparative study of Western and non-Western 'civilizing processes' and support the development of a more 'global IR'.

Introduction

I must first of all express my deep gratitude to the *Review of International Studies* for including this wide-ranging forum on *Violence and Civilization in the Western States-Systems* (hereafter *V&C*) in this forum. I am especially grateful to John Hobson for the original idea of organising the exchange and for his towering introduction, which deserves a wide readership in its own right as a major reflection on the postcolonial critique of *V&C* that runs through much of the discussion.[1] All of the contributors deserve my thanks for generously engaging with the book in rigorous and challenging ways and for pressing me to clarify and extend key parts of the argument.

Several of the articles in this exchange argue that the synthesis of process sociology and English School analysis that is at the heart of *V&C* is guilty of Eurocentrism. The claim is advanced explicitly by L. H. M. Ling, Julian Go, Zeynep Gülşah Çapan and, implicitly, by Alan Chong and George Lawson, while Hobson occupies an adjoining position in that he accepts some of their contentions but provides his own rebuttals. It will become apparent that I believe the critique misfires in large part because of the assumption that the book provides a study of the 'rise of the West' that ignores or underestimates the role of non-European agency. Large issues are raised by that line of argument. There has been little systematic discussion of process sociology in International Relations and no

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[1] I have also profited greatly from his immensely detailed comments on earlier drafts of this article.

investigation, as far as I know, of the relationship between its explanation of the European 'civilizing process' and postcolonial inquiries into the civilisational dimensions of world politics. The recurrent charge of Eurocentrism in the forum, and Hobson's insightful distinction between two versions of this perspective, invite closer analysis of the relationship between those standpoints. Much of the following reply to the critics is devoted not only to defending a synthesis of process sociology and the English School, but also to arguing that process sociology outflanks postcolonial reflections in important respects, particularly by virtue of its analysis of power struggles in relations between 'established' and outsider 'groups' within social figurations. The stakes in the discussion are high and revolve around largely-neglected issues about the sociological study of long-term social and political processes that have special relevance for the future of International Relations as a 'post-Western' academic discipline.

The discussion below presses home some of the advantages of process sociology over other approaches in the social sciences by contending that central themes in postcolonialism are best understood from the standpoint of Elias's explanation of the 'civilizing process'.[2] The aim is to turn the tables on some of the critics by inviting them to rethink some of their effervescent lines of argumentation in the light of that mode of sociological inquiry. The task is not simply to react to the critics but also to outline possible future avenues of inquiry into the comparative study of 'civilizing processes' that build new bridges between historical sociology and International Relations. The following reflections on the potentials for integrating elements of process sociology, postcolonial analysis, and English School reflections on international society are designed to contribute to that ongoing endeavour.

The article is in five parts. The first summarises core objectives of *V&C* that are overlooked in some of the critiques and which lead to distorted views of its main purposes. The second responds to the criticisms of the synthesis between process sociology and English School inquiry that is developed in Lawson's article. It considers Tim Dunne's and Richard Devetak's argument that the final chapter of *V&C* exaggerates the novelty or distinctiveness of the most recent phase in the development of international society. The third section explains what the book is not (namely a study of the rise of the West which endorses the 'big bang' approach that Hobson describes in his deliberations on the postcolonial critique of the volume) while the fourth deals with the related contention that the argument of *V&C* is Eurocentric. The penultimate section uses process-sociological concepts to explain distorted interpretations of *V&C* that arise in the postcolonial contributions to this forum. The final part of the reply promotes the synthetic project noted earlier by highlighting research areas that will hopefully become more central to IR as scholars from different regions reshape an Anglo-American dominated discipline that is constrained by a lack of understanding of, and serious engagement with, some of the best work in Sociology.

On the processual analysis of violence and civilisation

Before proceeding to reply to the critics, it is necessary to comment on the project of which *V&C* is part and to expose the errors of the interpretation that the book provides 'a linear and progressive narrative' shackled to a 'triumphalist teleology'[3] and, in addition, to reject the contention that it presumes there was an 'inevitable march towards European modernity' that was driven by an

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[2] Norbert Elias, *On the Process of Civilization: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2012 [orig. pub. 1939]).

[3] Zeynep Gülşah Çapan, 'Writing IR from the invisible side of the abyssal line', this forum.

indestructible capacity for 'self-rectification' in the face of violence and suffering.[4] *V&C* is the second part of a three-volume study of 'the problem of harm in world politics' (hereafter *PoH*), the eponymous title of the first volume that will conclude with a long-term perspective on the relationship between social and political symbols and global 'harm conventions'.[5] The first volume emphasised the tension within recent studies of world history over whether significant changes have taken place outside the technological domain and whether it is possible to identify progressive developments including the widening circle of moral concern between societies (and, more specifically, on whether the history of Western brutality, greed, and exploitation have consistently outweighed the West's more 'beneficent and humane' qualities).[6] *V&C* extends the argument of *PoH* that the gulf between the two standpoints is not as great as it may initially appear to be.

The process-sociological analysis of European state-formation as discussed in Chapter Four of *PoH* and developed in *V&C* is incompatible with linear, progressive narratives, teleological explanations, and faith in historical irreversibility. State-formation and the inter-related development of notions of civility and civilisation gave rise to deep tensions within European patterns of social and political development. Modern states amassed extraordinary destructive capabilities that were intertwined with colonial expansion and the global transformation of human societies. The concept of civilisation, which was a crucial part of the self-consciousness of colonising groups,[7] was repeatedly employed to justify nineteenth-century imperial expansion and colonial violence. But as the sixth and seventh chapters of *V&C* showed, discourses of civilisation were also used to condemn imperial cruelties that were deemed to be incompatible with 'civilized' existence. Criticisms of *V&C* that were noted at the beginning of this section fail to take account of the ambiguities of the idea of civilisation in the history of the modern states-system. The persistence of those ambiguities is evident in how the concept is often deployed in the West to condemn 'barbaric' practices such as the death penalty and to authorise using force against contemporary 'savage' terrorist organisations.[8] One of the aims of *V&C* is to understand changing balances of power between the different faces of 'civilization' and antecedent notions of refinement and restraint in the Western states-systems.

A second theme in *PoH* that is relevant to my later response to the supposed Eurocentrism of *V&C* was that there have been many scholarly studies of the 'impact of non-European civilisations on Western development'; however European states 'created the international political framework that now embraces the entire world'.[9] There may come a time, the argument continued, when Western principles of international relations are largely forgotten and when they only interest scholars who are curious about the history of civilisations and international relations. Future scholars may well pass judgement on the historical legacy of the Western states-systems. They may debate whether it laid the foundations for more successful 'efforts to reduce or eradicate violent and non-violent harm' or left a legacy of unprecedented global interconnectedness and associated social and political conflicts without 'parallel moral developments' that greatly reduced the incidence of violent and non-violent harm in world politics.[10]

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[4] L. H. M. Ling, 'The missing Other: a review of Linklater's *Violence and Civilization in the Western States System*', this forum.

[5] Andrew Linklater, *The Problem of Harm in World Politics: Theoretical Investigations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Hobson provides a summary of harm conventions in his introduction.

[6] Ibid., p. 166.

[7] Elias, *On the Process of Civilization*, p. 17.

[8] See Andrew Linklater, 'Torture and civilization', *International Relations*, 21:1 (2007), pp. 119–30.

[9] Linklater, *The Problem of Harm*, p. 24.

[10] Ibid., p. 25.

The postcolonial critics of the supposedly progressive narrative of *V&C* overlook that position on the ambiguities of the European 'civilizing process' that is reaffirmed in the introduction to the book where it is stated that the 'central question' in the investigation is 'whether modern ethical attitudes to the use of force are significantly different from the prevalent assumptions about violence and suffering in the earlier Western states-systems'.[11] Some parallels in the writings of Wight and Elias were discussed to explain that focal point. The former observed that ancient Greeks and Romans appeared to have had little or no conception of 'international ethics' that acted as a restraint on violent harm. Wight stressed the differences between the states-systems of classical antiquity and the modern international order where moral sensitivities to the use of force appear to be more developed.[12] My argument in *V&C* is that there is a striking parallel with Elias's observation about the contrasts between 'ancient' and 'modern' responses to what is now known as genocide. Images of the Holocaust produced shock and revulsion among 'civilized' peoples, not least because of the realisation that one of them – another advanced, technological society – had organised unprecedented mass slaughter on an industrial scale. But, according to Elias, such massacres were commonplace in classical antiquity, and invariably passed with little comment or condemnation.[13]

Wight's remarks, the discussion continued, co-existed uneasily with his claim that international politics constitute 'the realm of recurrence and repetition'. For their part, Elias's references to the impact of 'civilized' self-images on modern perspectives on state-organised violence sat awkwardly alongside the bleak observation that little seems to change in world politics other than the methods of killing and the number of people involved (or alongside the similarly dark statement that 'civilized' peoples in the modern period are still living much as their ancestors did 'in the period of their so-called "barbarism"').[14]

The introduction to *V&C* speculated that few scholars 'would claim that international relations have barely changed across the centuries apart from successive revolutions in the instruments of warfare', but 'few would contend that the relationship between morality and politics is the same today as it was in earlier phases in the history of the modern states-system, or in the earlier systems of states in the West'. But such judgements, it was claimed, are 'largely impressionistic' rather than based on systematic comparisons. There has been little empirical research that sheds light on what is and what is not distinctive about 'international ethics' in the modern period. On that basis, *V&C* set out in a preliminary manner to discuss three questions: first, whether the most recent phase of the modern states-system is markedly different from its Western predecessors; second, whether notions of civilisation that first emerged in late eighteenth-century French court society explain basic differences between those states-systems; and, third, what can be inferred, albeit provisionally, about the social and political preconditions of ethical restraints on violence that would mark the emergence of a more 'advanced' civilisation than the one that emerged in the West. As those comments demonstrate, *V&C* did not set out to provide an account of the 'rise of the West' as some

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[11] Andrew Linklater, *Violence and Civilization in the Western States-Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 1.

[12] In support of that conjecture, he referred to the Western Allies' rejection of Stalin's alleged suggestion that the German General Staff should be liquidated at the end of the Second World War. The clear implication was that societies that belonged to what he described as the 'simpler civilizations' of antiquity were, in the main, untroubled by the summary execution of vanquished enemy leaders (see Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 1).

[13] Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, pp. 1–4.

[14] Norbert Elias, *Involvement and Detachment* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), p. 175; Norbert Elias, *Studies on the Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), p. 190.

of the critics maintain in their contributions to the forum. Nor was it an attempt to show that the European course of social and political development took place in a vacuum and was entirely free from non-European influences. Those are issues to come back to later.

What is central to *V&C* is the question of what difference, if any, conceptions of civilisation have made to world politics. To that end, it was essential to extend Elias's analysis of the 'civilizing process' (which had explained how 'civilization' superseded the ideas of courtesy and civility that had been prominent in elite circles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) by discussing some antecedent concepts in the earlier states-systems.[15] To begin to explain key features of the Western states-systems, the inquiry examined such notions as *sophrosyne*, *clementia*, and *virtu* in European antiquity and their ambiguous role in permitting and forbidding violence. Those concepts contributed to the traditions or patterns of thoughts from which modern ideas of civilisation are derived. But the primary aim was not to produce a history of European ideas but to analyse the conditions under which commitments to restraining violence have been extended to different spheres of social interaction and, most crucially, to relations between societies. As Stephen Mennell correctly states in this forum, *V&C* relies on process-sociological investigations into changing balances of power between social groups and their world-views in the quest to identify and understand significant trends or directions – or the 'immanent order of change' – in different eras.[16]

The inquiry therefore broadened the discussion of 'the problem of harm' in human societies or the tensions that exist between pressures to accumulate the instruments of violence to deal with external threats and countervailing imperatives to control violent capabilities whether for self-interested, prudential, or moral reasons.[17] *V&C* explains how modern notions of civilisation as well as earlier discourses that encapsulated at least elite beliefs about permissible and forbidden forms of violence developed in the course of the 'scaling up' of social and political organisation.[18] The idea of the ambiguities of civilisation was used to analyse changing balances of power between violent capabilities, doctrines that legitimated the use of force, and moral standpoints that were deployed to urge greater controls on violence in intra- and inter-societal relations. As the discussion will show, the focus was on the changing power balances between 'civilizing' and 'decivilizing processes' in the Western states-systems. *V&C* identifies limited 'progressions' in international society but it is not a 'progressivist' narrative that trades in the thematics of discredited nineteenth-century philosophies of history.[19] As Mennell emphasises in the conclusion to his article, the aim of process-sociological inquiries is to understand the sociogenetic and psychogenetic conditions under which reversible progressions occur. That is why the analysis of *V&C* is processual but not committed to 'a linear and progressive narrative'.[20]

Process sociology and English School inquiry

One of the primary objectives of *V&C* was to extend the synthesis of process sociology and English School inquiry that was explored in *PoH*. Prior to considering Lawson's critique of that endeavour,

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[15] Elias, *On the Process of Civilization*, pp. 105–7.
[16] Stephen Mennell, 'Norbert Elias's contribution to Andrew Linklater's contribution to International Relations', this forum.
[17] Linklater, *The Problem of Harm*, introduction.
[18] See Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, ch. 2.
[19] I am grateful to Stephen Mennell for a conversation many years ago in which he used the distinction between 'progressions' and 'progress' to characterise Elias's standpoint on the European 'civilizing process'.
[20] Mennell, 'Norbert Elias's contribution to Andrew Linklater's contribution to International Relations'.

it is necessary to stress how the narrative was shaped by complementarities between the two perspectives that are evident in scattered references to the 'civilizing' role of international society in English School writings.[21] The expression was used loosely in those texts to refer, *inter alia*, to achievements in securing diplomatic agreements on restraints on force. There is a direct parallel with Elias's analysis of what Europeans came to regard as distinctive about their 'civilization', but no evidence that the employment of that terminology resulted from engaging with process sociology. In the opening chapter of *Systems of States*, Wight argued that a shared sense of belonging to a superior culture (ostensibly a civilisation) that was differentiated from 'barbarian' societies has been common to all states-systems.[22] That observation was not linked with a detailed examination of the processes by which different peoples came to identify with the same culture or civilisation. There was no discussion of the relationship between international society and 'civilizing processes' at the intra-societal level. The reverse problem exists in Elias's explanation of how Europeans came to see themselves as 'civilized'. Although he analysed the relationship between state-formation and ideas of civilisation he devoted no attention to the parallel development of international society and the major overseas empires which were central to the formation of European 'civilized' we-images. *V&C* therefore highlights the connections between civilisation and imperialism that have particular significance for the postcolonial engagements with the book. But it takes issue, as the following sections will explain, with postcolonial arguments that the volume largely ignores the impact of non-Western influences on the European 'process of civilization'.

In an important contrast with process sociology, the English School investigation of the expansion of international society emphasised its interconnectedness with state-formation and the overseas empires. 'When the Spanish conquistadors first encountered the Aztecs and Incas', Hedley Bull and Adam Watson argue, the 'European states were far from having repudiated the hegemonial principle even in their relations with one another … the doctrines of the internal and external sovereignty of states had not yet been clearly formulated'.[23] Furthermore, the 'evolution of the European system of interstate relations and the expansion of Europe across the globe were simultaneous processes … which influenced and affected each other' from the end of the fifteenth century until the recent period when power balances between the colonial powers and colonised peoples became less uneven.[24] But the reality is that the English School and process sociology have not analysed how the interdependencies between European state-formation, the rise of international society and the emergence of the overseas colonial empires drove humanity as a whole in particular directions. Neither perspective has explored the inter-connections between the three sides of the triangle that led to the global dominance of European standards of civilisation.[25]

Lawson rejects the project of integrating what he describes as incommensurable perspectives in a supposedly higher-level synthesis. In his article, he contrasts Wight's 'substantialist' approach with Elias's 'relational' perspective on social-scientific inquiry. The contention is that the former has a static, ahistorical conception of the common culture which is the supposed *sine qua non* of an

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[21] See Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami, *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 122n9.

[22] Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: University of Leicester Press, 1977).

[23] Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 6.

[24] Ibid.

[25] For further elaboration, see Andrew Linklater, 'The "standard of civilization" in world politics', *Human Figurations: Long-Term Perspectives on the Human Condition*, 5:2 (2016), available at: {http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0005.205}.

international states-system. The criticism is not decisive as far as synthesising core elements of English School inquiry and process sociology is concerned. Wight's explorations can be reworked to explore the connections between intra- and inter-societal 'civilizing processes'. There is no insurmountable barrier to extending the inquiry in that way. However, Lawson's second and more fundamental criticism is that Elias's 'relational' analysis of the European 'civilizing process' fails to provide an adequate foundation for the proposed synthesis. In common with some of the more overtly postcolonial criticisms of *V&C* in this forum, he maintains that Elias's inquiry into the rise of European notions of civilisation concentrated too narrowly on elite interaction within court societies. He argues, and this is a correct interpretation of Elias's narrative, that the focus was on how dominant codes of behaviour spread downwards from the higher echelons to the lower strata and outwards to ruling elites in other societies.[26] Lawson's argument is that the analysis ignored the influence of voices 'from below' in shaping Western civilisation.

The next section considers the related argument in Lawson's critique, which has strong support from the articles by Go and Ling, that *V&C* is equally guilty of ignoring or downplaying the role of non-Western 'agency' in that process. But there is a central point regarding power relations to make in response to Lawson's critique that is also relevant to their postcolonial lines of argumentation. As Elias argued, it is impossible to understand the course of the European 'civilizing process' without first analysing the power asymmetries between the 'established and the outsiders' within the standard-setting societies such as France – and without investigating the power differentials between elite court circles and the lower strata which they regarded as their natural inferiors. Members of court society did not invite focus groups that drew together representatives from different social groups to assist them in defining 'civil' and 'civilized' conduct. No referendum was ever held – and none was contemplated – to ascertain whether the people at large consented to, or had a preference for exiting, the 'civilizing process'. In the context of highly uneven power balances, the opinion of outsiders scarcely mattered within 'civilized' societies or, as I shall argue in the section on Eurocentrism, in relations with supposedly savage non-European peoples in the colonial era. Lawson does not stand alone in this forum in ignoring those crucial power relations when making the case for considering the impact of 'voices from below' on European trajectories of development.[27] The upshot is that the appropriate criticism of Elias's 'relational' analysis of the 'civilizing process' and its globalisation is not that non-Western agency had far greater significance than he realised, but that he did not take the emphasis on power inequalities far enough.[28] Missing from the inquiry was the focus on how established-outsider relations within 'civilized' societies developed hand in hand with similar dynamics in the overseas colonies and within international society.[29] That limitation does not of itself block the path to the closer integration of Wight's 'substantialist' and Elias's 'relational' approach. More specifically, the Eliasian focus on power dynamics within established-outsider relations can bring sociological depth to a more processual English School exploration of the interconnections between European civilisation, colonial expansion, and international society.

[26] That was the dominant process while power relations were highly uneven, but the lower strata succeeded in extracting major concessions from the ruling elites as more even power balances developed and those elites became more dependent on the members of less powerful groups for the satisfaction of their interests. See Mennell, 'Norbert Elias's contribution to Andrew Linklater's contribution to International Relations', on 'power ratios' and 'functional democratisation'. Global equivalents will be considered in the discussion of process sociology and postcolonialism.

[27] George Lawson, 'The untimely historical sociologist', this forum.

[28] See Elias, *On the Process of Civilization*, p. 425.

[29] Linklater, 'Standard of civilization'.

A separate challenge to the synthesis of the English School and process sociology is advanced in Dunne's and Devetak's article in this forum.[30] They make the point, for which I am grateful, that the emergence of the European pluralist society of states should be understood in connection with the Utrecht Enlightenment. More fundamental is their criticism that the most recent phase of that society is more 'pluralist' and less 'solidarist' than the final chapter of *V&C* maintains. Doubts are raised about whether universal and egalitarian principles are deeply embedded in state structures and in international society echoing, it should be argued, themes developed in *V&C*.[31] Several sources cited there implicitly recognised the need to distinguish between tracing the rise of more demanding social standards or expectations of restraint and judging how far they are widely observed for reasons of 'conscience' rather than because of external constraints including the desire to avoid domestic and/or international condemnation.[32] The thesis that European governments decided that they had little choice as representatives of 'civilized' societies but to support the international convention against genocide (despite significant reservations) sheds interesting light on such dynamics.[33] That argument is worth recalling in connection with the postcolonial criticism that the evolution of the universal human rights culture since the end of the Second World War often owed less to the Western powers than to initiatives that were taken by the newly-independent, postcolonial states (see Lawson and Go in this forum).[34] Significant here is the question of how far 'civilized' governments have been pushed in certain directions less by the force of conscience at certain junctures than by external pressures that opponents applied often by appealing to the formers' professed role as the custodians of civilisation.[35]

The vital distinction between self-restraint and external constraints is crucial to process sociology as Mennell notes in this forum. It is pivotal to understanding whether the dominant direction is towards a 'civilizing' or a 'decivilizing' process in which internal as well as external restraints on violence crumble and break down. The argument in the final chapter of *V&C* focused on *limited* and *reversible* 'civilizing' developments in world politics. Some confusion on this point is reflected in the fact that some read the analysis as more optimistic than it actually is while others identify significant reservations. Thus, along with Dunne and Devetak, Mennell interprets the argument as cautiously optimist (and explains how changing power relations can weaken 'civilizing' movements),[36] whereas Chong correctly detects a note of pessimism in the discussion of whether significant changes in personality structures have developed alongside more cosmopolitan standards of restraint in the post-Second World War era.[37] However, Dunne and Devetak raise serious questions about the need for more empirical

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[30] Tim Dunne and Richard Devetak, 'Civilising statecraft: Andrew Linklater and comparative sociologies of state-systems', this forum.

[31] Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, pp. 450–1.

[32] See ibid., pp. 379, 394.

[33] See ibid., p. 401ff, citing K. E. Smith, *The Europeans and Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[34] Both authors refer to Steven L. G. Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization, and the Reconstruction of Global Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). I am grateful to them for this reference. Especially interesting is the analysis of 'negotiated universality' since the 1960s (Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights*, introduction).

[35] See John M. Hobson, 'A critical-sympathetic introduction to Linklater's odyssey: Bridge over troubled (Eurocentric?) water', this forum, citing *Violence and Civilization*, p. 445.

[36] Mennell's argument in 'Norbert Elias's contribution to Andrew Linklater's contribution to International Relations' about the barriers to greater cosmopolitanism resonates with the discussion of 'organised irresponsibility' in the final chapter of *Violence and Civilization*.

[37] Alan Chong, 'Civilisations and harm: the politics of civilising processes between the West and the non-West', this forum, citing *Violence and Civilization*, p. 370.

research on those matters that inevitably requires further explorations of the emotional dimensions of world politics.[38] That is one of many areas where process sociology with its interest in the 'psychogenetic' as well as the 'sociogenetic' dimensions of the 'civilizing process' can be combined with English School analysis to develop more nuanced understandings of the 'immanent order of change' in different states-systems.

On the 'rise of the West'

Hobson states in the introduction that some of the critics regard V&C as an 'untimely' example of the 'big bang' view of history ('Eurocentrism I') according to which Europeans, entirely unaided, raised themselves above other cultures and civilisations in their own eyes and proceeded to bring progress and civilisation to societies that were presumed to be mired in ignorance and superstition. It is as if V&C provided a study of the rise of Europe or the West that wholly neglects the transformative influence of non-Western societies on the main course of social and political development that includes breakthroughs in the economic and technological spheres. But V&C is not a grand narrative that falls into the trap that Go (in this forum) regards as ingrained in historical sociology more generally, namely the myopia of 'civilizational isolationism'.[39] As a long-time admirer of Benjamin Nelson's inspiring writings on 'civilizational analysis and inter-civilizational relations', I would not have considered taking such a path.[40] It is worth pausing to note that Nelson argued that the so-called twelfth-century European Renaissance was heavily influenced by rationalising drives in science, technology and theology in the Islamic world.[41] Such analyses of the inter-civilisational domain have been extended in recent years and not least in International Relations by Hobson's pioneering volume on Eastern influences on Western civilisation.[42] Those investigations deserve pride of place in any contemporary investigation of Europe's rise to global dominance but, as noted earlier, V&C is not a reflection on that process. Rather, the primary aim was to understand the ways in which discourses of civilisation have altered international politics in the modern era. It was to inquire into distinctive trajectories in different Western states-systems. Interesting questions certainly do arise about the extent to which non-European influences influenced the development of 'civilized' self-images. But as far as I am aware, although there are many studies of how contrasts with non-European 'barbarians' and 'savages' were integral to the rise of 'civilized' identities, there are no detailed investigations of extra-European forces that had a powerful effect on the 'civilized' orientations to the social world that first appeared in European court societies. Thus, the pivotal argument that informs the postcolonial critiques in this forum – that V&C largely ignores the role of non-Western political voices and initiatives in the rise of the West – misses its specific focus on the European 'civilizing process' and on the construction of the dominant narratives of violence and civilisation.[43]

That is not to deny the existence of important non-European social influences on the European 'civilizing process'. In correspondence with me, Hobson has posed the intriguing question of whether and how far contacts with the Islamic world may have influenced the rules of behaviour regarding spitting and nose-blowing, urination, and defecation that Elias examined in the first volume of On the Process of

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[38] See Linklater, The Problem of Harm, chs 4–5; also R. Bleiker and E. Hutchison, 'Forum on emotions and world politics', International Theory, 6:3 (2014).

[39] Julian Go, '"Civilization" and its subalterns', this forum.

[40] Andrew Linklater, The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), pp. 123ff.

[41] Benjamin Nelson, 'Civilizational analysis and inter-civilizational relations', Sociological Analysis, 34:2 (1973), pp. 79–105.

[42] J. M. Hobson, The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[43] I am grateful to John Hobson for discussion on this point.

Civilization. A similar point can be made about the extent to which other aspects of the 'civilizing process' including treatises on the art of government – the so-called 'mirror-for-princes' genre – as well as manuals on diplomatic protocols that appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were influenced by regular interactions between European and non-European court societies.[44] In this forum, Go asks, 'but did the "West" learn absolutely nothing about statecraft or civility from interacting, over centuries and at multiple registers (economic, political, cultural) from its relations with non-Western societies?'[45] It is a good question. But revealingly, none of the critics of the Eurocentrism of *V&C* – of its alleged 'civilizational isolationism' and 'metropolitan diffusionism'[46] – provides convincing examples of powerful non-European influences on the ways in which Europeans configured notions of civilisation.[47] Overwhelmingly, the emphasis is on extra-European forces that had a major impact on the 'rise of the West' and on European economic and political development. For instance, Hobson stresses the impact of Chinese inventions with respect to the metal-barrelled guns that could fire metal bullets on the 'Western military revolution'. However, the question of whether such technology first appeared in Sheffield or Shanghai is not obviously relevant to an investigation into the emergence and development of the more specific phenomenon of European conceptions of civilisation.[48] Lawson makes a more salient point by arguing that a more detailed analysis of the slave testimonials discussed in *V&C* would shed light on non-European agency (see also Ling, this forum).[49] Along with the studies of the Haitian Revolt that are reported by Go, Ling, and Çapan, such investigations may well contribute to explaining how Europeans constructed unique discourses of progress and civilisation. But there is considerable sociological research to undertake to explain the processes through which outside influences shaped such narratives within the European powers. It is not enough to assert that those non-European forces helped to shape the overall course of the 'civilizing process'. Indeed, not least because of the power disparities between European and non-European groups, it is necessary to explain exactly how extra-European political developments had a direct impact on ideas of civilisation. An example that is discussed in *V&C*, albeit briefly, is how slave testimonials became entangled with inter-related domestic and international power struggles in 'civilized' societies to abolish the Atlantic slave trade and eradicate chattel slavery.[50] Paradoxically, this is an area where, in Hobson's words, the processual argument of *V&C* may contribute to the postcolonial critique of Western civilisation.

Exactly how *V&C* came to be read as an 'untimely' grand narrative about the rise of the West is a matter that is best left to the critics. However, it is useful to note in the quest for an explanation that the idea of 'civilization' is an instance of what Elias called a 'praise word' that the European ruling elites and then populations more generally used to celebrate their 'superiority' over non-Europeans. Social-scientific

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[44] Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 126, pp. 216ff. Hobson, 'A critical-sympathetic introduction to Linklater's odyssey' refers to Adam Watson's claim in 'a rare moment of "postcolonial sensibility"' that the European consular system was directly influenced by 'Ottoman diplomatic practices').

[45] Go, '"Civilization" and its subalterns'.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ling, 'The missing Other' gives the example of the Chinese Confucian influences on Matteo Ricci's moral-religious thought.

[48] Hobson contends that it is problematic to separate state-formation and the 'civilizing process' from the broader 'rise of the West' and so it is essential to emphasise non-European influences on those phenomena. But the emphasis of *V&C* is on how the rise of territorial states with their monopoly controls of violence and the right of taxation led to radical shifts in global power balances that were directly expressed in the rise of the European overseas empires. *V&C* stresses the importance of European contrasts with non-European cultures for the 'civilizing process' without assuming that crucial dimensions of European state-formation and economic and military development owed nothing to extra-European developments.

[49] Lawson refers to the discussion in Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, pp. 256–8.

[50] Ibid., pp. 251ff.

examinations of civilisation and the 'civilizing process' may therefore arouse the suspicion that they are underpinned by pernicious binaries between 'advanced' and 'backward' peoples.[51] Analysts may easily fall into a trap of their own making by searching for evidence that seems to support initial preconceptions or prejudices.[52] In fact, process sociology contributes to the critique of 'civilization' by examining in a relatively-detached way – by explicitly eschewing questions of praise and blame – how Europeans came to regard themselves as uniquely civilised with all the attendant ambiguities. No assumptions about any 'pre-determined point of origin' and about subsequent patterns of change in which 'civilizing processes' inevitably triumph over countervailing 'decivilizing' trends exist in that perspective or in *V&C*.[53] No assumptions are made about what Ling describes as the logic of 'self-rectification' in 'civilized' societies that secures moral progress despite, if not through, the suffering of others.[54] A closer reading of the section of *V&C* that is devoted to 'organised irresponsibility' – the possible 'Achilles heel' of the modern states-system – should have dispelled those myths.[55] One of the main purposes of the volume was to initiate a sociological analysis of changing balances of power between the ambiguous properties of the 'civilized' self images that emerged in Europe and which were subsequently exported by colonial expansion aided by mimetic non-European 'civilizing' offensives to other regions of the world. Such an investigation is very far removed from a 'triumphalist', teleological account of the 'rise of the West'.

The question of Eurocentrism

There is an easy transition from reading *V&C* as an account of the rise of the West to the accusation of Eurocentrism. Process sociologists are all too familiar with the line of attack. In his procataleptic article, Stephen Mennell, battle-hardened by decades of explaining Elias's work and defending core arguments from misguided critics, underlines the value of the distinction between Europe-centred and Eurocentric explanation. Elias's examination of the 'civilizing process' and my process-sociological exploration of violence and civilisation are examples of the first standpoint. Elias's analysis of the 'civilizing process' attempted to explain the distinctive, but not entirely unique features of European 'civilization' that he linked with state-formation, substantial internal pacifi-cation, increasing revulsion towards various forms of violence or cruelty within 'civilized' societies, and the persistence of much more permissive attitudes to the use of force in the relations between states. It was expressly stated that Europe is not the only region that has undergone a long 'civilizing process' in the technical, etic sense of the term which Mennell explains in this forum. For example, one characteristic of the European 'civilizing process' – the 'taming of the warriors' – had taken place much earlier in China[56] (which is why Chong's discussion of distinctive Southeast Asian 'civilizing processes' is a fascinating contribution to the forum). In an amusing aside, Elias added that some Chinese observers were shocked to learn that 'civilized' Europeans ate with 'swords'.[57] Process sociologists therefore recognise the existence of multiple 'civilizing processes' with different 'standards of civilization' and interlinked notions of 'barbarism'. They do not naively assume that

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[51] Mennell, 'Norbert Elias's contribution to Andrew Linklater's contribution to International Relations'.
[52] Ling, 'The missing Other' recognises the importance of changing standards of self-restraint for the argument of *V&C* but does not consider their place within the ambiguities of civilisation. The upshot is a series of erroneous claims that *V&C* assumes that the West and morality are 'coterminous', that the international '*status quo* benefits everyone in the long run', and that 'those in charge … should *stay* in charge' (emphasis in original) given the unassailable evidence that 'the West represents the best'.
[53] See Lawson, 'The untimely historical sociologist'.
[54] Ling, 'The missing Other'.
[55] Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 455.
[56] Elias, *On the Process of Civilization*, p. 589.
[57] Ibid., p. 126.

the sociological categories that were used to explain the European 'civilizing process' can be applied automatically to the study of non-European counterparts.[58] That is the force of the distinction between Europe-centred and Euro-centric modes of sociological inquiry.

As Hobson argues in his introduction, landing the blow as far as the accusation of Eurocentrism is concerned is more difficult than the critics in this forum realise.[59] Elaborating the point, he distinguishes between two types of Eurocentrism: 'Eurocentrism I' (the 'big bang thesis' mentioned earlier which ignores the role of non-Western agency in the making of the West and in the making of the Western international order) and 'Eurocentrism II' (which he regards as more useful for assessing the argument of *V&C* because the perspective focuses solely on the role of Western imperial agency in the formation of the modern world system). Exponents of 'Eurocentrism II' including Immanuel Wallerstein have argued against granting non-European agency a major place in the explanation of the rise of the modern world-system, one that would contradict the historical evidence. To inflate their role, it is claimed, is to distract attention from highly uneven power distributions and capacities to shape global political and economic structures. The standpoint resonates with core arguments in process sociology and chimes with Bull and Watson's reflections on how the combined development of international society and colonial expansion that began in the final part of the fifteenth century endured until the end of the Second World War 'by which time European dominance was clearly at an end and the global international system, while still evolving, was being shaped less by Europeans than by others'.[60] Considered in that light, Lawson's reference to Gandhi's sardonic response to the question of what he thought of Western civilisation (namely that 'it would be a good idea') works against rather than for the critique of *V&C*. As the idea of 'Eurocentrism II' makes clear, the idea of civilisation was developed by European ruling elites and promoted through colonial expansion to non-European elites that were pressed to internalise European images of their inferiority, which is exactly what many did. As Gandhi's statement implied, there was no 'dialogue of civilizations' with respect to the construction of European notions of 'civilized' existence or with regard to the justification of imperial 'civilizing' offensives. Given the power disparities between 'the established and the outsiders' in the colonial era, it would have been extraordinary if it had been otherwise.[61] Moreover, new power relations had to appear before non-Western peoples could secure a favourable hearing even for elementary claims that the principle of racial equality should be embedded in international society.[62] As Bull and Watson's comments that were cited earlier make clear, significant

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[58] See Stephen Mennell, 'Asia and Europe: Comparing civilizing processes', in Johan Goudsblom, Eric Jones, and Stephen Mennell, *The Course of Human History: Economic Growth, Social Process and Civilization* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

[59] Hobson, 'A critical-sympathetic introduction to Linklater's odyssey'.

[60] Bull and Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society*, pp. 6–7.

[61] See the discussion in Norbert Elias, 'Towards a theory of established-outsider relations', in Norbert Elias and John Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2008).

[62] For a recent analysis, see A. Klotz, 'Racial equality', in Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit (eds), *The Globalisation of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), ch. 19. Hobson raises the question, as does Lawson, of why there is little discussion of non-Western influences on international society since the end of the Second World War (but the question should have been whether or how far changing power balances have altered the relationship between violence and civilization in the recent development of that arrangement). My response is that shifts in global power balances over a longer period eroded assumptions that Europe possessed a monopoly of truth about 'civilized' existence. One of the consequences was that the 'standard of civilization' more or less disappeared from official Western discourse and not least because of the greater scope for non-Western agency in the post-Second World era – which is not to argue that the underlying ideas simply vanished. I discuss those issues in a book provisionally entitled, *The Idea of Civilization in World Politics: States, Empires and International Society,* which is nearing completion.

increases in non-European agency had to await major inter-related shifts in the balance of power between the traditional imperial powers and the colonies and between the European great powers and the rising superpowers with their emphatic anti-colonial rhetoric. As a result of those power shifts, non-Western peoples were able to extract various concessions from European societies that were consistent with (and often influenced by) earlier 'civilized' critiques of colonial domination.

Curiously, Elias's analysis of the process of civilisation paid little attention to European colonial expansion that is so central to postcolonial analysis, a bias that *V&C* endeavoured to correct. The neglect of Europe's relations with non-European peoples is a long-standing criticism of Elias's position. Several years ago, Jack Goody who was not a reliable guide to Elias's explanation of the 'civilizing process', maintained that it rested on 'a purely European genealogy of learning' that ignored all extra-European influences.[63] But that internal genealogy may have been substantially correct as far as the explanation of the transformation of European manners and attitudes to violence and cruelty is concerned (although there is certainly much more to be said about Europe's relations with non-European peoples). To develop the point it is useful to turn to a powerful critique of Elias that has been advanced by a leading process sociologist. The contention is that, with the exception of

> a few passages in *On the Process of Civilization*, we do not get a very clear sense … that at the very time that civilization was developing in Western Europe, it was busily spreading itself over the whole globe in the most violent of ways, so that it is not unfair to say that the ritualized civility of European court society was built on the blood of murdered 'primitives' and bought with the land, labour and raw materials which marauding Europeans plundered from 'their' empires.[64]

The argument continues that, throughout the Eliasian explanation of the state's monopolisation of violence, there is surprisingly little discussion

> of what states actually *did* with that monopoly, in relation to both their own populations and those of the parts of the world they set about colonizing. Elias himself, for example, spoke of the 'spread' of Western civilization, the 'transformation of Oriental or African peoples in the direction of Western standards', and the 'integration' of the rest of the world within European standards of behaviour as an essential element of the 'civilization of the colonized' in a way which glossed over exactly how violent a process that really was.[65]

To construct a more complex analysis of European civilisation, it is maintained, it is essential 'to supplement, systematically, the concept of "civilizing processes" with that of "civilizing offensives", to take account of the active, conscious and deliberate civilizing projects of both various powerful groups within societies and whole societies in relation to other regions of the world'.[66]

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[63] Jack Goody, *Renaissances: The One or the Many?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 59. See the critique of Goody's perspective in Katie Liston and Stephen Mennell, 'Ill met in Ghana: Progress and process in Goody and Elias', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 26:7–8 (2009), pp. 52–70.

[64] Robert van Krieken, 'The barbarism of civilization: Cultural genocide and the "stolen generations"', *British Journal of Sociology*, 50:2 (1999), p. 300. The point resonates with the thesis that the violent character of 'civilization' is often most dramatically expressed on the 'periphery'. For further discussion, see Nicole Pepperell, 'The unease with civilization: Norbert Elias and the violence of the civilizing process', *Thesis Eleven*, 137:1 (2016), pp. 1–19.

[65] Van Krieken, 'The barbarism of civilization', p. 300, emphasis in original. Critics of Bull and Watson's analysis of the expansion of international society make a similar point. I am grateful to John Hobson for this observation. For further discussion, see Dunne and Reus-Smit (eds), *The Globalisation of International Society*.

[66] Van Krieken, 'The barbarism of civilization', p. 300. For reflections on such 'civilizing offensives' that were initiated by the French colonial state in Cambodia, see Roderick Broadhurst, Thierry Bouhours, and

That powerful critique of Elias's analysis of the 'civilizing process' is advanced as part of a discussion of how European settlers behaved towards indigenous peoples in Australia, and specifically with reference to the 'stolen generation'. The analysis has been extended by countless historical studies of violence on the periphery. The idea of 'civilizing offensives' and the related 'standard of civilization' that Europeans invoked to justify the transformation of 'semi-civilized' and 'savage' societies demonstrates that process-sociological investigation displays some of the hallmarks of 'Eurocentrism II'. But the analysis also contributes to understanding presumed features of *V&C* that have been criticised from postcolonial standpoints, specifically 'civilizational isolationism' and the 'abyssal' approach to Western civilisation. Intriguing is Elias's observation, which Chong cites in his article, that the idea of civilisation

> sums up everything in which Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or 'more primitive' contemporary ones. By this term, Western society seeks to describe what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of: the level of *its* technology, the nature of *its* manners, the development of *its* scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more.[67]

It is not at all clear why Elias chose to italicise the principal objects of European pride, but certainly the effect was to describe a central feature of European 'civilized' self-images that was the assurance that various practices were their achievements alone (and that non-European peoples had played no part in their creation). The statement effectively describes the emergence of an 'abyssal' image of a civilisation that was set apart from and raised above all others, a process that is clearly central to postcolonial analysis.[68] Massive power inequalities underpinned European civilisational arrogance. Those disparities underpinned the delusion that their civilisation was equivalent to a natural or biological endowment that was entirely immune from reversal. One of the consequences was a collective lack of preparedness for the 'regression to barbarism' that occurred under National Socialism where, as discussed in *V&C*, colonial violence was imported back into Europe.[69] The upshot is that Çapan's claim that '"European" history and that of the colonies is bifurcated' in *V&C* is unfounded.[70]

But the belief in civilisational superiority underpinned not only European initiatives to force other societies to comply with the 'standard of civilization'. It also led in an era of massive global power asymmetries to the plethora of late nineteenth-century non-Western 'civilizing offensives' that were designed to emulate what was often admired in the 'level of *their* technology, in *their* manners, in the development of *their* scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more'. That is not to suggest that non-Western 'modernising' elites were uncritical of Western civilisation – of its devotion to greed and accumulation as opposed to virtue from the standpoint of Confucian intellectuals, and its barrenness from the perspective of Japanese and Ottoman intellectuals who took pride in the deeper spirituality of indigenous belief-systems. Nevertheless, various regimes promoted secondary 'civilizing offensives', which, in the case of Japan, Russia and the Ottomans, employed forms of mimetic imperialism to demonstrate an eagerness to take part in the larger global 'civilizing mission' of bringing 'progress' to 'backward' peoples. Mimetic imperialism was one of the main ways in

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Brigitte Bouhours, *Violence and the Civilizing Process in Cambodia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015), esp. chs 3–4.

[67] Elias, *On the Process of Civilization*, p. 15, emphasis in original. See Chong, 'Civilisations and harm'.

[68] See Çapan, 'Writing IR from the invisible side of the abyssal line'.

[69] Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 354. As *Violence and Civilization* emphasised, violence in the periphery can be traced back to the early phases of European state-building, as the discussion of English state-formation and the construction of images of 'barbarous' Celts revealed (see Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, pp. 235ff).

[70] Çapan, 'Writing IR from the invisible side of the abyssal line'.

which non-Western political agency promoted the dissemination of Western conceptions of civilisation. What has been described as 'Ottoman Orientalism' or 'Russian Orientalism' refers to non-European 'civilizing offensives' that are not easily subsumed under the ideas of Eurocentrism I and II.[71] The notion of non-Western Orientalist 'civilizing' initiatives describes the process in which non-Western elites emulated in *distinctive and varied* ways Western legal-rational state structures, diplomatic codes, 'rationalised' economies as well as bureaucratised armed forces that could engage in Western modes of warfare and, not least, compete effectively in the longer-term with the dominant Western powers. Non-Western agency within the constraints of the imperial great power 'establishment' resulted in the universalisation of core features of the 'civilizing process' including 'the globalisation of international society'.[72] The 'Europe-centred' analysis of the relationship between state-formation and the 'civilizing process' (extended to investigate the rise of overseas empires and the development of international society) explains how humanity as whole was driven in that direction with all the ambiguities that were discussed earlier. A process-sociological examination of those established-outsider relations can illuminate global social and political dynamics that are largely missing from the postcolonial contributions to this forum.

Process sociology and postcolonialism

The discussion has attempted to turn the tables on the postcolonial critique of *V&C* by showing how process sociology contributes to understanding the 'abyssal' image of Western civilisation in addition to the rise of European assumptions about 'civilizational isolationism' and 'metropolitan diffusionism'. Its long-term perspective explains the emergence of notions of civilisational superiority that shaped the colonial era and continued to influence world politics in the 'postcolonial' era. The significance of the analysis of the 'civilizing process' for postcolonial investigations will be apparent, but it is possible to extend the argument to show how the working principles of process sociology shed much light on the rise of postcolonial sensibilities in the first place (and promote an understanding of the concerns about 'Eurocentrism' that run through much of the forum). Notable is the analysis of power balances or 'ratios' and established-outsider relations in social figurations. The following summary of the basic method of process sociology emphasises the central themes. When studying the relations between groups of people, the argument is, it is necessary to analyse 'the central balance of power' noting, specifically, how far particular groups succeeded in monopolising key social and political resources, thereby forcing other strata to be dependent on them. In conditions in which power capabilities are 'very uneven', it is also imperative 'to be alert for the operation of group charisma and group disgrace, the process of stigmatisation, the absorption of the established group's view of the world within the very conscience and we-image of the outsiders, producing a high measure of resignation even though the tensions remain'. But when power balances are 'becoming more equal', analysts should expect to observe open 'rebellion, resistance, emancipation' among traditional outsider groups.[73] Those observations about the method of process-sociological investigation are invaluable for analyses of power struggles within and between societies as well as tensions in other figurations such as academic disciplines that are relevant to the arguments of this forum's postcolonial critics.

[71] Ussama Makdisi, 'Ottoman Orientalism', *American Historical Review*, 107:3 (2002), pp. 768–97; also David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the European Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (London: Yale University Press, 2010). A more detailed analysis will be provided in a book on civilisation that was mentioned earlier.

[72] Dunne and Reus-Smit (eds), *The Globalisation of International Society*.

[73] All quotations are from Stephen Mennell, *Norbert Elias: An Introduction* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), p. 138.

Those interdependencies are clear in the case of postcolonial studies that reflect changing power balances between the traditional imperial establishment and the 'outsiders' consisting of the former colonised societies. Earlier practices in which the dominant groups claimed to have a monopoly of truth on 'civilized' existence and pressurised outsiders to internalise assumptions about their intrinsic 'barbarism' or 'savagery' were contested in the course of the twinned 'revolt against the West' and reassertion of 'traditional' narratives and values.[74] Revisionist 'national' histories have been a major part of that process as have recent attempts to construct 'post-European' or 'post-Western' world histories. In International Relations, related developments include the reconsideration of the classical English School investigation of the expansion of international society, the broader postcolonial critique of Western IR with its persistent neglect of non-Western perspectives, and emergent images of a 'post-Western' discipline. Critiques of 'Eurocentrism I' and sensitivities to any academic standpoint that seems to hark back to 'civilizational isolationism' and to overlook 'subaltern' voices belong to the 'revisionist' narratives that emerged as power balances between the 'established and the outsiders' became less uneven. Tensions within fields of study can be intensified alongside changing power distributions within scholarly communities as well as in global politics. An attendant danger is the stigmatisation of academic standpoints that are judged to be on the 'wrong side' by virtue of supposed commitments to Eurocentrism that downplay the role of non-Western agency in world politics (even though that presumption may not square with a more 'detached' and less 'involved' engagement with inconvenient evidence).[75] Again, the phenomenon needs to be considered in long-term perspective to highlight the ways in which established groups dismissed and stigmatised social 'inferiors' and attempted to convince them of their diminished social worth and lesser human value.[76] Revised narratives of the kind that exist in this forum that discard hegemonic views are often central to the politics of restoring self-esteem to subordinated groups. But the reciprocated stigmatisation of perspectives that are deemed to be hostile or unsympathetic to traditional outsiders may well emerge alongside shifting power balances in social figurations. The phenomenon is evident in Ling's argument that *V&C* is informed by and reinforces 'Hypermasculine Eurocentric Whiteness'. 'The critique, which is full of 'outrage' and 'disgust' in Ling's terminology in this forum, demonstrates how 'highly-involved' world-views can gain the upper hand over 'detachment' in 'academic' power struggles.[77]

It has been argued that the significance of process sociology for critical inquiries has suffered because of the plain fact that Elias did not wear his heart on his sleeve. The disavowal of political affiliations and the advocacy of non-partisan sociology, the thesis is, clash with the openly 'critical-theoretical'

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[74] Hedley Bull, 'The revolt against the West', in Bull and Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society*.
[75] For further discussion on involvement and detachment, see Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*.
[76] Regrettably, Ling deleted a section from an earlier version of her article that shed interesting light on this dimension of established/outsider dynamics in International Relations (but that version stated that her reflections on a specific conversation that took place at a recent international conference were posted on Facebook). The section described what was in process-sociological terms an invitation from a member of an established group to internalise feelings of inferiority (see the comments on the working method of process sociology earlier). The reported exchange resonates with a central theme in the approach, which is that the analysis of specific practices can illuminate large-scale social processes. Not only does process sociology provide insights into the connections between established-outsider relations at different levels; it operates critically in an image of 'the sociologist as a hunter of myths' that underpin and maintain such power relations. See Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press), ch. 2. In that way, process sociology can contribute to the 'postcolonial critique of Western civilization' by analysing the established-outsider dynamics that Ling highlights in 'The missing Other'. On that basis, I invite postcolonial scholars to regard process sociology not as a foe but as an ally.
[77] See fn. 51.

aspirations that run through several branches of social-scientific inquiry that are well represented in this forum.[78] Those observations raise important questions about how far the critics of *V&C* object to an apparent identification with the 'wrong team' in ongoing struggles between the 'established' and the 'outsiders'. Deep issues are at stake here, which require some comments on the relationship between process sociology and critical theory as constructed in the two volumes on 'the problem of harm'. The first point to make is that processual analysis combines a commitment to relatively-detached inquiry ('relatively-detached' because complete detachment is an impossibility) with humanistic (or left-leaning, cosmopolitan) affiliations. A central premise is that greater sociological detachment and the quest for 'reality-congruent knowledge' can provide the foundations for political interventions that enable people to exercise greater control over largely-unregulated and unplanned processes (and for criticising modes of analysis or interventions that come with a high risk of compounding rather than alleviating human problems). But the immediate task is to understand more about power relations and power struggles, established-outsider dynamics, patterns of stigmatisation and counter-stigmatisation and other forces that have repeatedly trapped social groups in processes that they have often been unable to comprehend, let alone control. Crucially, the aspiration is to improve the *human* rather than national means of orientation to the social world in the light of those long-term aspirations.[79] It is necessary to add that the claim that Elias embraced 'methodological nationalism' is erroneous but understandable given the fact that those specialist dimensions of process sociology have not been discussed at length in International Relations.[80]

The second point is that, as Chong stresses, the analysis of harm conventions in *PoH* and the study of violence and civilisation in *V&C* are indeed connected with critical social theory.[81] With that in mind, this section ends with a brief response to Hobson's argument for a stronger normative commitment to trans-cultural dialogue but one that eschews Kant's cosmopolitanism given the persistence of racist themes in his writings.[82] I would need to return to the relevant scholarly literature before commenting further on that issue, but a preliminary judgement is that the jury may have yet to reach a final verdict. However, from the standpoint of process sociology, Hobson's summary of the 'Kant/Herder debate' on whether all cultures have 'intrinsic worth' reflects a transformative moment in the development of 'civilized' self-images in which many Enlightenment thinkers developed a more self-critical view of their 'civilization', considering its main characteristics including its colonial practices as if 'from outside'.[83] As argued in *V&C*, Georg Foster and others constructed a more detached standpoint on Eurocentric distinctions between the 'civilized' and the

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[76] For further discussion, see Richard Kilminster, 'The dawn of detachment: Norbert Elias and sociology's two tracks', *History of the Human Sciences*, 27:3 (2014), pp. 96–115 and the same author's 'Norbert Elias's post-philosophical sociology: From "critique" to relative detachment', in Norman Gabriel and Stephen Mennell (eds), *Norbert Elias and Figurational Research: Processual Thinking in Sociology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). Also relevant is Shannon Brincat, 'The harm principle and recognition theory: On the complementarity between Linklater, Honneth and the project of emancipation', *Critical Horizons*, 14:2 (2013), pp. 225–56.

[79] See Mennell, 'Norbert Elias's contribution to Andrew Linklater's contribution to International Relations'. For that reason, the analysis of violence and civilisation aims to promote the 'sociological' as opposed to the 'normative' and 'praxeological' dimensions of critical theory as set out in Andrew Linklater, 'The question of the next stage in International Relations theory: a critical-theoretical point of view', *Millennium*, 21:1 (1992), pp. 77–98. As this paragraph indicates, they are three interwoven domains of critical inquiry.

[80] See Lawson, 'The untimely historical sociologist'.

[81] See Chong, 'Civilisations and harm'.

[82] The question of race in Kant's writings is discussed in Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 278.

[83] Hobson's reference to the 'Kant/Herder debate' lends support – although I do not think this is his intention – to my focus on how intra-European discourses and debates determined the overall development of the 'civilizing

'savage' as part of the quest to understand 'humanity from as many different perspectives as possible'.[84] A major step was taken towards recognising the multiplicity of 'civilizing processes' and promoting analyses of cultural varieties that combined greater detachment with pronounced cosmopolitan sympathies.[85] The following discussion reflects the spirit of that phase of the European 'civilizing process'.

Future avenues of research

Engaging with the critics has encouraged further reflections on five possible lines of future research on 'civilizing processes' in world politics. They are outlined here in the attempt to promote discussion and debate about how elements of process sociology, the English School, and postcolonialism can be woven together in more synoptic studies of long-term patterns of social and political development. The different standpoints do not meet as equals. A recurrent theme in process sociology is that different fields of investigation tend to follow their separate trajectories with the result that synthesis usually lags behind specialist analysis. Elias operated on a very broad large canvass by endeavouring not just to integrate major themes drawn from different spheres of social-scientific inquiry, but also to build bridges with the biological sciences to explain very long patterns of human development.[86] He is reported to have believed that processual analysis had the 'right of way' over narrowly-focused perspectives in part because of the capacity to promote very high levels of synthesis geared towards improving the human means of orientation.[87] This is not the place to assess the claim although it will be clear where my sympathies lie. Rather, the objective is to follow its lead by considering lines of research that draw together elements of three perspectives that are the focal point of this forum in order to contribute new themes to ongoing efforts to forge connections between historical sociology and International Relations. The five areas of investigation are as follows:

(1) The discussion of Eurocentrism in the forum underlines the need for empirical research on non-European influences on European conceptions of 'civilized existence' that emerged in the late eighteenth century in the context of the long history of 'inter-civilizational' relations and imperial conquest. Such inquiries can complement existing studies of extra-European economic and technological breakthroughs that are significant for understanding the 'rise of the West'. Future research may well extend Elias's inquiry into the processes that shaped the ways in which Europeans came to regard themselves as uniquely civilised although the supposition here is that intra-European deliberations on the nature of 'civilization' will remain at the centre of the inquiry.

(2) Earlier reflections on the distinction between Eurocentrism I and II led to a brief discussion of non-Western mimetic 'civilizing offensives' that invite the further broadening of the analysis. Existing studies of such initiatives in Japan, China, Siam, Tsarist Russia, and the Ottoman Empire have analysed what were often deeply-divisive non-European initiatives to reform political structures in accordance with an alien 'standard of civilization'.

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process', an approach that clearly troubles the postcolonial critics. For further details, see Go, '"Civilization' and its subalterns' and George Lawson, 'The untimely historical sociologist'.

[84] Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, pp. 278ff.

[85] Those shifts in orientation led to greater self-restraint on the part of several European colonial powers (as discussed in Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, pp. 264ff), and to greater openness to non-Western influences.

[86] Stephen Quilley and Steve Loyal, 'Eliasian sociology as a "central theory" for the human sciences', *Current Sociology*, 53:5 (2005), pp. 807–28.

[87] Richard Kilminster, 'Introduction to Elias', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 4:2–3 (1987), p. 215.

Sociological explorations of interwoven national and global established-outsider relations can enrich inquiries into the relations between the impact of colonisation on non-Western societies, the subsequent expansion of international society, and the unfinished dimensions of the 'revolt against the West'.

(3) Further broadening the discussion, such investigations require advances in the comparative sociology of Western and non-Western 'civilizing processes'.[88] Elias's analysis of the European 'civilizing process' is standard-setting in that it reveals how such inquiries might be constructed and explains key concepts that can inform the analysis (which is not to assume that the framework can be applied without amendment to other historical cases in what would certainly constitute Eurocentrism).[89] Elias speculated that court societies in different regions might hold the key to understanding non-Western 'civilizing processes'.[90] More empirical research is needed to test that hypothesis and to ascertain how far the relevant standards of 'civilized' behaviour developed more or less autonomously within separate court arrangements or as part of movements within larger 'supranational' court figurations.[91]

(4) Such investigations can advance the comparative study of states-systems that was developed by Wight, or the sociology of 'civilizing processes' within those figurations.[92] Research in this area remains in its infancy which makes Chong's erudite article on precolonial Southeast Asia especially welcome. Particularly challenging, as far as the argument of *V&C* is concerned, is the thesis that very different dynamics from the ones that shaped the Western states-system existed in the region. The contention is that because of distinctive cultural forces, Southeast Asia avoided the violent encounters that have dominated international politics in the West. Chong's conjecture is that it may not have been the only region that escaped the European configuration of violence and civilisation. Intriguing questions are raised about how far the framework of analysis that was employed in *V&C* to analyse the Western states-systems can be applied to Southeast Asia and other areas (not that the volume made that extravagant claim). Interestingly, in the light of the preceding paragraph that referred to the relationship between court societies and civilisations, Chong's discussion holds that a 'culture of nobility' exercised constraints on 'untrammelled violence' in relations between interwoven court societies. However, the analysis seems to sail perilously close to cultural reductionism. Questions immediately arise about whether the key concepts used in process-sociological studies of figurations (including power ratios, established-outsider dynamics, modes of stigmatisation, struggles for emancipation, and so forth) can be used to explain core dynamics in that region and in other international societies. Those are issues that the comparative analysis of global 'civilizing processes' needs to examine.

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[88] See the discussion in Mennell, 'Asia and Europe: Comparing civilizing processes' and the references in Mennell, 'Norbert Elias's contribution to Andrew Linklater's contribution to International Relations'.

[89] See Broadhurst et al., *Violence and the Civilizing Process in Cambodia*, pp. 332–3 for reflections on the potentially 'universal purchase' of Elias's explanation of the European 'civilizing process'. For a different standpoint, see E. Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[90] See Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press. 2006), ch. 1.

[91] Elias used this term in connection with European court societies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Norbert Elias, 'The fate of German Baroque poetry: Between the traditions of court and social class', in *Mozart and other Essays on Courtly Art* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2010), pp. 4–5. See also Andrew Linklater, 'International society and the "civilizing process"', *Ritsumaiken International Affairs*, 9 (2011), pp. 1–26.

[92] Wight, *Systems of States*, ch. 1; also Linklater *The Problem of Harm*, ch. 6.

(5) Those investigations can be conducted as part of the larger project of forging connections between the study of international systems and world history.[93] They can attempt to explain a central overall trend in the history of human groups, which is their incorporation in longer chains of interconnectedness. Struggles between states, their territorial enlargement, and colonial expansion have been among the main driving forces behind that direction of travel. The ways in which societies have developed the instruments of force and the extent to which they have succeeded in controlling violence in the relations with each other (in short, collective responses to 'the problem of harm in world politics') have shaped 'civilizing processes' that have come to affect humanity as a whole. Understanding how societies dealt with the challenges of interconnectedness in the past has a valuable role to play in advancing the human means of orientation in the current era – in comprehending how societies can collaborate to promote a global 'civilizing process' which ends, or at least greatly reduces, the violence that dominated the Western states-systems and which is a continuing part of their global legacy.

The contributions to the forum raise deep questions about combining the strengths of process sociology and English School inquiry in order to comprehend the relationship between violence and civilisation in the Western states-systems. The most critical articles challenge core assumptions from postcolonial standpoints. The response has been that the more robust challenges rest on basic misunderstandings of the core argument of *V&C* and its process-sociological foundations (which are expertly discussed in Mennell's contribution to the forum). This section has endeavoured to broaden the investigation by explaining how process sociology, the English School and postcolonialism can advance the inquiry into 'civilizing processes' in world politics. The aim has been to raise the stakes in this discussion by outlining some future lines of investigation.

A final comment is that there is a paucity of research on those different areas and almost no investigation of how future inquiries can be brought together in a large-scale exploration of 'civilizing processes'. Countless research projects that draw on scholarly expertise in different parts of the world are needed to make significant advances. Large research teams are essential to undertake and integrate diverse areas of research over long time-scales as part of the quest to promote 'global IR' and 'global social science'. The requisite research institutions, academic cultures, and necessary sources of research funding are not in place. That may or may not change over the coming decades. But perhaps there is progress in describing the scale of the challenge and in charting some future directions.

Biographical information

Andrew Linklater is Woodrow Wilson Professor of International Politics at Aberystwyth University. His most recent books are *The Problem of Harm in World Politics: Theoretical Investigations* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and *Violence and Civilization in the Western States-Systems* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). He is currently completing a book with the provisional title, *The Idea of Civilization in World Politics: States, Empires and International Society*.

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[93] See Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).