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Established-Outsider Relations and 'Figurational' Analysis

Jason Hughes & John Goodwin *

Abstract: »Etablierte-Außenseiter-Beziehungen und ‚Figurations‘-Analyse«. In the introduction to this HSR Special Issue we provide an exposition and overview of Elias and Scotson's *Established and Outsiders*, seeking to identify the empirical and conceptual significance of the relational model of inter-group tensions contained therein. Our core argument is that Elias and Scotson wrote in the historical context of a British intellectual *zeitgeist* in which a preoccupation with 'established' groups followed from proto-Marxist political/macro-sociological concerns with the reproduction of social elites; and an engagement with 'outsiders', which followed from an ascendant micro-sociological concern with sub-cultural and 'deviant' groups who defined themselves in opposition to a dominant mainstream. Elias and Scotson's contribution, viewed in this vein, was to provide a radically relational theoretical-empirical model which synthesised micro, meso and macro sociological concerns with social power dynamics into a unified synthetic scheme. We propose that while such a model is entirely consistent with the broader conceptual architecture of Elias's approach, it is important also to recognise the not insignificant influence of Scotson's empirical work in informing the specific concerns of their study. We further reflect upon the origins of the study and its implications for our more general methodological questions relating to undertaking 'figurational analysis' in the context of historical social research.

Keywords: Figurational analysis; community studies; established and outsider relations; relational sociology.

The papers in this HSR Special Issue share a central engagement with Norbert Elias and John Scotson's seminal study, *The Established and the Outsiders* (Elias and Scotson 2008 [1965]). Now something of a paradigmatic text in the field of community studies, *The Established and the Outsiders* presents a radically relational model of inter-group tensions – one which, as the range of papers in this collection exemplifies, can be extended to a diverse array of empirical cases: from the social dynamics of tattooing (Rees) and museums

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(Fyfe) to, for instance, the inter-group conflicts experienced by migrants (Rommel), and the ascendancy of ‘Jihadi terrorism’ (Dunning).

The origins of *The Established and the Outsiders* relate back to a period in the 1950s when Elias was a lecturer (from 1959, a Reader) at the University of Leicester, with John Scotson an MA student whose master’s thesis Elias was then supervising. Scotson was a local school teacher who had a foundational interest in juvenile delinquency. Working under Elias’s supervision, Scotson undertook exploratory ethnographic fieldwork in a suburb of Leicester (South Wigston) which soon began to focus upon the inter-group dynamics of two working class communities within the region. Scotson’s study found a set of ‘figurational dynamics’ (to use the Eliasian conceptualisation) that followed the contours of those typically encountered in the conflict-ridden struggles between nations, ethnic groups, and social classes. What was particularly interesting in the case of South Wigston (aliased, in the book, as ‘Winston Parva’) was that the two groups ostensibly differed very little: their members shared similar levels of educational attainment, had comparable occupations, and had broadly equivalent levels of wealth and income. Nonetheless, Scotson’s research found, one group was clearly dominant, ‘the established’, while another, ‘the outsiders’, clearly subordinate and, *within the specific dynamics of this figuration*, deemed to be of lower social standing and accordingly subjugated. The principal axis of difference between the groups was the length of association with the neighbourhood. Members of the established group typically had familial ties that allowed them to trace their residence in the region back by several decades; the outsiders were relative newcomers.

This seemingly curious set of dynamics forms the starting point for Elias and Scotson’s analysis. Their central concern is the question of how this set of dynamics *came to be* (Dunning and Hughes 2013). More specifically, how was it that such a seemingly superficial basis for differentiation – length of association – came to be such a powerful basis for group distinction? What other power resources made it possible for the established group to dominate the outsiders? How were such resources employed to denigrate the subordinate group? For Elias, Scotson’s study afforded an opportunity further to develop some of the ideas he originally formed in his earlier work on civilising processes (Elias 2012 [1939]). Chief among Elias’s concerns was an exposition and extension of his concept of power, particularly in relation to his critical departure from Marx and Weber. The case of Winston Parva allowed Elias to demonstrate axes of power not merely dependent upon (and to a degree independent from), say, the possession of the means of production, or, for instance, the primary monopolisation of particular non-human objects such as weapons. Rather, the established and the outsider group figuration in South Wigston served to illustrate the significance of the immanent dynamics of the constellation of groups themselves. In the case of the established group, their greater length of association with the region enabled them to become more cohesive and normatively

consistent, serving as a basis for stronger mutual identification with one another and distinction from their perceived social inferiors in the outsiders group. In turn, these dynamics underpinned the established group's ability to monopolise influential positions in local groups and associations and so reinforce their dominance, utilising such posts to stigmatise outsider group members and reinforce their own sense of superiority.

At the time of *The Established and the Outsiders*'s first publication in the 1960s, the term 'the established' had a particular set of connotations. In the UK, it was typically employed to refer to an elite (and secretive) group of public-school educated business and political leaders drawn from a narrow range of families who, generation after generation, 'ran' the country (Wouters 2008: xi). Indeed, such ideas persist today. A recent example is Owen Jones's *The Establishment and How They Get Away With It* (Jones, 2015). In the 1960s, the notion of a shadowy conspiracy through which an unaccountable group had seized the levers of power and, through various means, would at all costs avoid relinquishing or ceding their power chances to other groups chimed with proto-Marxist and socialist sentiments which were at that time becoming more influential in British popular politics (Dworkin 1997). As Cas Wouters (2008: xi) observes, such normative connotations were not coincidental: they formed an important backdrop to Elias and Scotson's study. Social scientists of the period were widely concerned with discussion of elite groups and the question of who 'really runs Britain'. The title of Elias and Scotson's work played into this zeitgeist so as to indicate that a study of inter-group relations in a provincial community might have much broader sociological significance (Wouters 2008: xi), particularly to those concerned with the operation of social power dynamics.

Similarly, the concept of 'the outsiders' was likely also related to the intellectual milieu of the time. Howard Becker's classic study of deviant careers, entitled *Outsiders*, first published in 1963 (Becker 1997 [1963]) followed a series of essays and a more general body of 'Chicago School' work exploring the plight of groups who typically understood – and sometimes consciously defined – themselves in opposition to 'established' and 'mainstream' 'society'. Again, this utilisation of a term on the ascendant, at least in intellectual circles (and arguably beyond these: Becker's work soon gained considerable traction outside of the academy) was probably intentional. Scotson in particular, whose interest in juvenile delinquency would likely have made him aware of Becker's work, may well have employed the term with such connotations quite consciously. Indeed, there are corollaries to Becker's discussion of labelling in Elias and Scotson's discussion of blame and praise gossip and the observed tendency for 'outsiders' in some cases to accept the negative attributions imposed upon them by a dominant group. However, consistent with Elias's figurational sociology, *both* established *and* outsider groups were considered together as parts of a whole. Instead of distinct groups understood to be held together through a bond or an interrelationship, Elias and Scotson's key contri-

bution was to see groups such as ‘the established’ and ‘the outsiders’ *as aspects of* a particular set of relational dynamics (for a further consideration of parallels in Becker and Elias’s work, see Hughes 2015). Thus, in their study of Winston Parva, Elias and Scotson had developed an empirical-theoretical model which facilitated a simultaneous consideration of the ‘macro’ concerns of various social conflict theorists; ‘meso’ considerations of community relations analysts; and the rich ‘micro’ sociological work in the tradition of the Chicago School: all contained within a unified scheme that was readily amenable to empirical study. It is clear then, that the sociological ambitions of *The Established and the Outsiders* extended considerably beyond the modelling of a discrete set of community relations; involved a significant extension of Elias’s relational sociological theorizing; and were intended perhaps implicitly to speak to defining concerns of the time, particularly through the scope the model of established-outsider relations offered for analytical extension to major sociological themes and topics.

Thus far we have focused on *The Established and the Outsiders* as principally, if not exclusively, an Eliasian intellectual product. However, this is by no means an entirely accurate portrayal of the study. We are now in a much better position than was previously the case to begin to identify the relative influence of Elias and Scotson over the ideas developed in the text. Until very recently, Scotson’s MA thesis upon which *The Established and the Outsiders* was based, was thought to have been lost and as such, no comparison between the thesis and the book could be undertaken. As the first paper in this HSR Special Issue explores (Goodwin, Hughes and O’Connor 2016), that situation has now changed radically with the recent rediscovery of Scotson’s thesis. As suggested above, the extent of Scotson’s influence on the work has tended to have been played down, with the intellectual direction and shape of the book clearly accredited to Elias (see, for example, Dunning and Hughes 2013). And yet Scotson’s influence is nonetheless apparent, particularly in relation to the empirical foci of the study: the concern with local praise and blame gossip is arguably a case in point. We would suggest that a more accurate portrayal would be of the *Established and the Outsiders* as very much a combined intellectual endeavour. Indeed, to suggest otherwise would be profoundly at odds with some of the core tenets of figurational sociology which compel us to recognise the fundamental interdependence of Elias and Scotson in the development of the study. Such interdependence does not simply extend to the degree to which Scotson’s thesis forms the basis for the book, but also the extent to which Scotson’s thesis can be deemed solely his own intellectual product. Indeed, the sociological concerns, intellectual architecture, and analytical trajectory of Scotson’s thesis reflect both the defining influence of Elias’s supervision and the distinctive empirical sensitivities and communal investments of Scotson.

A particular characteristic of Elias’s collaboration with Scotson was that the study of Winston Parva was in many ways an empirical departure from Elias’s

earlier work. As a case in point, Elias's work on civilising processes – which involved detailed and painstaking time-series analysis of a range of documentary sources, interweaving the minutiae of, say, subtle changes in treatises on table manners with an unfolding thesis on the distinctive traverse of different European nations – is extremely difficult to emulate. It necessitates a considerable command of global history, the ability to speak several languages, and the considerable skill required to keep 'micro', 'meso' and 'macro' level developments consistently and simultaneously in the analytical frame. By contrast, *The Established and the Outsiders* involved rather more accessible (and for many, rather more familiar) research methods and analytical techniques. Moreover, the model lent itself to a range of contemporary issues which could be studied over considerably shorter time spans and through the primary collection of ethnographic as well as contemporary archival data. In *The Established and the Outsiders*, Elias and Scotson had provided an accessible model of 'figurational analysis', and with it a means to extend and contribute towards the model of sociology Elias was at this point seeking to disseminate.

Elias for the largest part was resistant to the labelling of his sociology, but towards the final decades of his life came to accept the naming of his approach as 'figurational'. For Elias, figurations are the proper primary focus of studies within the social sciences. A figuration is synonymous neither with groups or societies – though both are examples of figurations – but rather, refers at once to the structure and process dynamics of the complex webs of interdependencies people form together, and how these come to develop over time. While Elias never developed an explicit 'methodology' for his figurational analysis, his work nonetheless contains a number of 'methods' which take shape through his analytical practice. Elias was, in fact, highly critical of the concept of 'methodology': he suggested there could be no 'science of method' divorced somehow from concrete social phenomena, since problems of method were fundamentally inter-related to the problems of study, and were indeed germane to those very topics (Dunning and Hughes 2013).

Nonetheless, in essence, Elias's figurational analysis can be boiled down to a series of orienting questions which have major 'methodological' significance. These are as follows: 1) an orientation towards sociogenetic questions, for example, *how did 'this' come to be?*; 2) an orientation towards relational questions, for example, *in what ways are 'these' inter-related?*; and 3) an orientation towards pluralities of people 'in the round', for example, *what broader chains of interdependence are involved in 'this'?* Elias's concept of 'interdependence' itself did not refer simply to 'mutual dependence', or somehow a state of harmony, but of the fundamental ties human beings are inevitably bound within across time and space, albeit that these interdependencies are frequently asymmetric, contested, and motile. The concept of figuration, and indeed, Elias's figurational approach more generally, therefore is fundamentally attuned to questions of 'power' and 'agency', but always as aspects of relation-

ships, not individual ‘properties’ set against a context of ‘social ties’. Overall, the approach as a whole has particularly utility to exploring the development of long-term processes in comparative perspective permitting history and biography; macro and micro; power, structure and human agency; to be contained within a singular approach.

Previous discussions of Elias’s figurational methods and problems of methodology have characteristically focused on the model of time series analysis of informal data sources best exemplified in his magnum opus, *On The Process of Civilisation* (see, for an exemplary account, Kuzmics 2001). More recently, other writers have sought to formalise Elias’s methodological approach as a whole, distilling the key elements of his various methods to a number of core analytical procedures (see, in particular, Baur and Ernst 2013). Here our aim with this special issue is to complement and extend such existing work, considering the enduring reach and breadth of Elias’s ‘figurational’ analysis through our focus on research on established-outsider figurations. As suggested above, the model of established-outsider relations has been extended to *inter alia* the development of inter- and intra-state conflicts; the formation and collapse of supranational entities and authorities; plus the tensions between globally distributed communities. Elias’s model of established-outsider relations, together with his more general analytic model of reconstructing the ‘sociogenesis’ of particular ‘figurations’, provides an exemplar of a hitherto somewhat explored approach to historical and comparative research.

Furthermore, an adjunct to the issue of applying Elias’s model of figurational research through a focus on established-outsider relations is the question of what constitutes the ‘proper and legitimate’ sources of data for such social scientific research. In line with his more general approach to social analysis, in his work on established-outsider figurations, Elias explored somewhat unconventional sources of data: accounts of the development of various forms of gossip between rival communities; parish records and informal local area data; ethnographically-derived network depictions; newspaper archives and criminal court records; first-hand observational and biographical accounts derived from ethnographic immersion within specific locales. Recent discussions of ‘everyday life’ and the so called ‘quotidian turn’ within the social sciences have railed against the tendency to neglect informal sources of data such as those explored by Elias (see Goodwin and Hughes 2011). Thus in exploring his figurational approach, this collection of papers also examines in different ways the status of documentary/cultural artefacts as sources of evidence. Principal among such issues is the question of whether, for example, medieval manners texts; literature and art works; and, by extension, latter-day equivalents – television, film, social media, blogs, etc. – can be treated as reliable informants on the social universe. In the case of established-outsider relations, it is these informal sources of data which, arguably, are likely to be most useful in highlighting axes of inter-community tensions – the throwaway references to ‘bar-

barism' and 'civilised society' in a TV news report on ISIS and the Islamic State; the reference to a 'feral youth' in newspaper reports of urban riots; the allusions to social class through the language, tenor, and orientation of personal correspondence – all are examples of potential potent historical data. The use of such sources of data, nonetheless, raises important questions concerning the extent to which certain kinds of documentary and cultural artefact can be used as reliable sources of evidence for comparative/historical analysis.

The papers in this collection each in a different way explore such substantive, conceptual and methodological questions through examining the utility of the established-outsiders model as a platform for contemporary social research. At the same time, a number of contributors also seek critically to extend or revise certain aspects of the model on the back of their own investigations. The first of these contributions, *Goodwin, Hughes and O'Connor's* 'Return to Winston Parva' considers in greater depth questions relating to the empirical field-work involved in Elias and Scotson's study of established-outsider relations, recounting in detail the story of the missing Scotson thesis, and reflecting on the new insights that can be gleaned from its rediscovery, including the prospects for a restudy of 'Winston Parva' more than five decades later. Here questions concerning the methods used in the study are a central preoccupation.

In his discussion of 'Brutalisation Processes and the Development of "Jihadist Terrorists"', *Dunning* focuses centrally on how 'double-bind' processes – processes in which opposing groups become locked into struggles neither can fully control – can emerge in relation to established-outsider dynamics. Dunning considers the historical ascendancy, or 'sociogenesis', of 'Jihadist Terrorism' as an exemplar case to explore such questions. Here, Dunning's extension of the established-outsider conceptual architecture includes some particularly worthwhile reflections on the implications of the model for how we address particular social problems, including in this case the possibilities of better 'incorporating' outsider groups through disrupting certain facets of the othering and stigmatisation processes that have endured as a characteristic of this particular double-bind dynamic.

Fyfe's consideration of 'Established-Outsider Relations in the Sociogenesis of the Museum' is a particularly fascinating account of the emergence of museums, supporting Elias's thesis that certain facets of later modern bourgeois habitus have their origins in the dynamics of early European courts: expressing a particular kind of consciousness formation that emerged in tandem with civilising processes. Fyfe traces an enduring established-outsider tension rooted in this historical emergence that typically finds expression in a contradiction between a museum's appeal towards universalism and its 'latent capacity to stigmatize some visitors as uncivilized outsiders'. Such tensions, Fyfe argues, are also linked to the crucial role of nineteenth century museums to act as a kind of conduit between an earlier aristocratic habitus and a later set of bour-

geois sensibilities, tastes, psychological restraints, and bodily orientations that were disseminated to other social strata.

Lacassagne's analysis of the complexities of colonisation processes in Canada is one of a number of papers in this HSR Special Issue which apply the established-outsider models to questions of migration, processes of exclusion/inclusion, and enduring ethnic hierarchies that can be traced to a particular line of historical ascendancy. Lacassagne's analysis illustrates the intra- as well as inter-group tensions that characterise established-outsider relations. For example, those which relate to the social power hierarchies between Anglophone and Francophone communities of established white groups are an exemplar in this respect. Lacassagne uses the case of colonisation processes in Canada also to challenge certain aspects of Elias and Scotson's model. In particular, she finds a 'stupefying permanence' of Aboriginal peoples as outsiders in Canada, with a persistent and dramatic power differential between them and established groups, which in this case is not diminished by the length of residency. Here, unlike Winston Parva, length of residency has not been able to serve as a basis for greater internal cohesion and power chances. She offers a series of tentative reflections upon the more general significance of this observation and the chances of 'bridging' figurational research with postcolonial analyses.

In their study of 'Established and Outsider Relations among Students involved in a Health Promotion Intervention in a Danish High School', *Nielsen, Ottesen* and *Thing* seek centrally to explore how established-outsider power relations are in fact typical of small communities. Here, their example is of the emergent relationship between those students who engage with a health promotion intervention, and those who are more inclined to not participate. An unintended consequence of this emergent dynamic was the difficulties encountered by those who engaged with the initiative who came to be identified as 'sports students', sometimes to the detriment of their social lives within the school. In this case, the self-definition as 'outsider' served somewhat paradoxically to align students with an 'established' (among peers) identity defined in opposition to being healthy, interested in sport, and engaged with extra-curricular initiatives. Their study serves further to problematize any simplistic reading of established-outsider relations as comprising one-way processes of domination-subordination.

Perulli's discussion of 'Everyday Life in Figurational Approach: A Meso Level for Sociological Analysis' centrally focuses on Elias's contribution to the sociology of 'everyday life' – a term to which Elias had strong objections on the grounds that it assumes and implies another kind of life that is somehow not 'everyday', plus the tendency for this vein of sociology to be concerned typically with face-to-face 'interactions' (rather than interdependencies, which is a considerably more encompassing concept). Perulli centrally explores Elias and Scotson's ideas about established-outsider relations in this context, focusing on the role of group charisma and group disgrace in the everyday maintenance of group boundaries and power differentials. Her core argument is that *The Estab-*

lished and the Outsiders contains a model of degrees of group approval and disapproval which are best understood as a single continuum which are effectively played out in the ‘figurational game’ of everyday life. She explores the implications of this model for how we might rethink the ‘everyday’.

In ‘Gypsy-Travellers/Roma and Social Integration: Childhood, Habitus and the “We-I Balance”’, Powell introduces another of Elias’s conceptual architectures allied to his analysis of established-outsider relations: that of the personal pronouns model (here, the ‘we’-‘I’ balance). Powell focuses initially on Elias’s sociology of childhood – his observations concerning the sociogenesis of an increasing distancing of childhood and adulthood; the growing distinction between the life-worlds of children and parents; the civilising of parents, and so forth. He argues that there is scope for greater internal consistency between such aspects of Elias’s sociology and his arguments concerning outsider groups. Powell posits the concept of ‘variable trajectories’: how the processes of individualisation, and, say, the differentiation of childhood, play out in relation to outsider groups in ways that are potentially different from those of the established. Here the case in point is Gypsy-Traveller/Roma peoples in Europe. Powell explores how distinct processes of childhood, social habitus formation and we-I balance have helped Gypsy-Traveller/Roma groups to maintain a distinct culture and identity, which, he argues, helps explain the relatively low levels of social integration of these groups across Europe.

Rees’s chapter, ‘From Outsider to Established – Explaining the Current Popularity and Acceptability of Tattooing’ centrally considers the transitions over time involved in ‘outsider’ cultural practices gradually becoming ‘established’. Here the case in point is tattooing. Long associated with social outsiders, tattooing, particularly since the 1970s, has in recent decades enjoyed a renaissance that has involved a rapid expansion in the popularity and acceptability of a bodily practice that was once severely circumscribed. While recent cultural sociologists have come to investigate the identity politics surrounding this resurgent practice, few, Rees argues, have sought to address the question of how it has *come to be* resurgent. Rees centrally considers four inter-related developments that underpin the sociogenesis of the tattooing renaissance, and with it, a potential model of analysing the shifting historical statuses of particular cultural practices linked to established and outsider groups.

Finally, Rommel’s chapter explores the ‘Culturalism of Exclusion in an Established-Outsider Figuration’. Rommel centrally considers the recent development in Germany of anti-muslim antagonism, principally through an exploration of the debates surrounding Thilo Sarrazin’s (2010) book *Germany Does Away with Itself*, here treated as a paradigmatic example of established-outsider relations which pivot on the axis of a discourse about the ‘West’ and Islam. Rommel’s focus is on how processes of group charisma and group disgrace employed by the likes of Sarrazin (and Samuel Huntington) can be understood in the context of established-outsider power relations as an unconscious strate-

gy by established groups to protect their elevated social position in relation to outsiders through positing a 'natural' superiority of themselves compared to their perceived inferiors, the outsiders. Her analysis thus highlights how double-bind figurations serve to 'debilitate' the evidence (and thus an effective means of orientation towards) the tensile conflicts involved in established-outsider relations, here those that follow the discourse surrounding the 'clash of civilisations'. Following Elias, Rommel's proposal is that such conflicts might only be de-escalated, perhaps even reconciled, if a more 'reality-congruent' understanding of these dynamics is employed and extended.

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