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**How to Study the Politics of Armed and Unarmed Interest Groups? A
Toolbox for Figurational Analysis in Peaceful and Unpeaceful Settings**

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[How to Study the Politics of Armed and Unarmed Interest Groups?] A Toolbox for Figural Analysis in Peaceful and Unpeaceful Settings

Introduction

In current studies of the political realm, the focus has more and more shifted from the analysis of institutions to an examination of governance in networks. The general public is aware that politics is nowadays reaching far beyond the institutions of the nation-state. However, when we look at charity initiatives of U2 frontman Bono or the Scandinavian writer Henning Mankell, do we also consider them to be protagonists in politics?

Are civil society actors like Greenpeace part of the political realm? What kind of role do they play in social life? What about the violent struggle between armed groups in failed states – is this still politics or rather mere criminal action? Could the behavior of interest groups like Greenpeace and the Palestinian Hamas have possibly something in common apart from the obvious differences? These questions form the backbone of this method paper which rather aims at presenting a common framework of analysis than giving concrete answers. It will show how to look and not what to see.

As the focus is often laid at the content of politics, we argue in this paper that the relations between different political agents, their position in the figuration they form together, matters most for what is actually happening “on the ground”. This emphasis on form instead of content has a long tradition in political sociology and was accentuated in the work of Norbert Elias. Not only has he shown that the quality of social relations is the product of a long historical process; he also introduced the issue of time and change into the general analysis of social relations.

While we have to concede that social network analysis does have a head-start in outlining its methods (Schneider, Janning 2009), we are convinced that it cannot compete with the underlying theoretical foundation of figural analysis. While most other approaches to social network analysis remain somehow static (Emirbayer, Goodwin 1994; Burt 1995; White 2008), the concept of figuration is able to capture both the effects of different structural arrangements and the changes which are derived from their evolution over time. The result is therefore a livelier image, a film rather than a Polaroid picture. However, there is no real guideline anywhere to be found on *how to do* figural analysis. In the original work of Norbert Elias, especially in *What is Sociology?* (1970), *The Civilizing Process* (1939a), *The Court Society* (1969) and *Established and Outsiders* (1965), the theoretical foundations are laid. And yet, the true potential of the concept of figuration still remains implicit and waits to be uncovered.

There are good introductions to the sociology of Norbert Elias, but they stay too close to the context of discovery without exploring systematically the methodological potential of process sociology (to just name a few: Baumgart, Eichener 1997; Mennell 1992; Treibel 2008). There is a “circle of friends” (Goudsblom 1992; Korte, Nowotny 1993; Mennell 2007) who is working on showcasing the legacy of Elias, especially

with publishing his complete works in German, English and Dutch – all projects are finished or about to be finished.

Furthermore, there are studies that use the concept of figuration as a heuristic tool for social analysis but explore only specific parts of it (Bakonyi 2006; Jung, Siegelberg, Schlichte: 2003; Kaufmann 1996; Schlichte 2009). Finally the methodology of figurational analysis was fruitfully contrasted with other time-related approaches, highlighting that social processes do have different velocities of change (Baur 2005). This rich material needs further elaboration, as the different studies only cover a small part of the wide spectrum of figurational analysis.

Consequently, our question is about the different possibilities of how to apply the method of figurational analysis in order to study political processes. Since we have been both working on empirical research projects on interest groups, some of them armed with guns, others with good arguments, we noticed that most scholars use the concept as intuitively as we did, without reflecting its methodological underpinnings. We argue that especially with interpretative sociological approaches, there is a necessity for methodological rigor, rendering such a reflection necessary.

In this paper we are attempting to put together the different bits and pieces from the literature in order to show starting points for researchers, who wish to do figurational analysis themselves. It therefore aims at students and researchers who would like to analyze the politics of daily life in world society, but it also tries to inspire others to apply figurational analysis to foreign realms of research. Far from defining a new “canon”, we would like to provoke further thoughts on how to define and improve this method.

In order to reduce the current confusion over the concept, we will first clarify in which way figurational analysis differs from “standard” procedures of research in the social sciences (King, Keohane, Verba 1994). Second, in order to show multiple entry points for the analysis, we will create a typology of different approaches from the available primary and secondary sources of figurational sociology. Third, we compare the frameworks of our own research projects in order to provide contrasting examples of how to apply figurational analysis: one shows different structural constellations while the other concentrates on temporal change. A brief discussion outlines implications for future developments of figurational sociology.

A. General methodological remarks

Even though Elias wrote a detailed introduction to figurational sociology, there is still a large amount of confusion about the differences in comparison to other methodological approaches (Elias 1970). For example, there is the impression that it does not differ much from the analytical perspective of methodological individualism in the sense, that both approaches share basic assumptions (Esser 1984). However, this idea is quite misleading and the paragraph is therefore designed to shed some light on the main differences to the “standard model” of science.

What is a figuration?

We believe that it is a good way to get a basic understanding of the idea of a figuration by imagining a football game. During the match, all players are interdependent and their behavior cannot be understood without their specific role in the game. As a team, the players have to cooperate with each other in order to



be able to compete with the other team. While coordinating their moves during the game, the members of one team constantly have to react towards the actions of the members of the other team.

Each team as such then represents a figuration and one could analyze for example, how members compete with each other for the position of the play-maker on the field or even for the position of the captain. In this case, the structure of the figuration varies according to the possibilities of how to place the different players on the field. Therefore all players have specific functions for the team, e.g. striker, midfielder or goalkeeper. They also find social roles, such as ambitious fighters, funny jokers, experienced warhorses, those who run a lot and those who have the ability to decide a game with a stroke of genius. However, in contrast to this image, the structure of a figuration is usually more inflexible and difficult to change, as Norbert Elias has shown in his analysis of a royal court (Elias 1969).

But also the football game as a contest between two teams is in itself a figuration. The difference to the first perspective would be in this case, that the main focus rests on the relationship between the two team-figurations. Their balance of power (possession of the ball and ability to score goals) and the history of their struggle, also in other games before, then shift to the center of the analysis. An example of this kind of analysis is Elias's study of established and outsider groups, where group boundaries and in-group solidarity become a central theme (Elias, Scotson 1965).

Last, one could also look at the long history of football, how rules emerged and then became institutionalized. This process gave birth to explicit rules (i.e. foul play) and implicit norms (i.e. fairness) which regulate the game and keep it entertaining. For the players, this means, that they have to be disciplined and capable enough to play the game without systematically violating these restrictions. For example, if a bad foul provokes an overall brawl among the players, the game as such ends and the situation asks for an intervention of third parties. How figurations evolve over centuries was best shown in *The Civilizing Process* (Elias 1939a; Elias 1939b).

As we have seen, figurational analysis can have different perspectives and only the research problem defines, which one is the most suitable. Much confusion probably stems from the fact, that the figuration is a sensitizing and not a definitive concept (Blumer 1954). The latter is rooted in the analytical tradition of philosophy and tries to define an object as precise as possible by separating it from others. The concept therefore defines what to see, as the analytical categories are predefined. The sensitizing concept instead is less defined and more adaptable to the huge variety in the empirical world. As a figuration is always interconnected with other figurations, it is logically impossible to determine where a figuration ends and a new one begins. This adaptability makes it fuzzy and raises suspicion of whether or not the concept is really scientific. However, we believe that the heuristic power of figurational sociology lies exactly in its ability to grasp the interconnectedness of different social realms. With such a concept, it is possible to analyze small parts of society and nevertheless have the rest in mind. As a sensitizing concept, it shows a specific perspective of how to look at social reality.

Characteristics of figurational sociology

Situated in the large picture of social sciences, figurational sociology can be understood as reconstructive social research which is oriented towards the ideographic pole. Therefore, not only the concept differs from the nomothetic “standard model” of science, but also the procedure of the analysis, the type of explanation, the notion of causality and the nature of the data.

First, when Elias introduced the procedure of figurational analysis, he tried to overcome a still dominant tendency in social sciences, which is to produce a lot of tiny and unconnected research findings. This

tendency further aggravates with the specialization of the disciplines and calls for an equal emphasis on synthesis. Analysis and synthesis always come along together when pursuing figurational sociology. As the figuration is nothing else than a web of relations between (functionally) interdependent human beings, its parts cannot be understood without conceptualizing the whole and vice versa. The logic of the football game, for example, cannot be grasped without a simultaneous analysis of the order of rules, the history of the game itself and the structure of both teams. The approach is dialectic as it constantly shifts between analysis and synopsis. And it is a procedure that is both deductive and inductive (Elias, Scotson 1965: 75). It ends when the researcher has acquired a sufficient understanding of the figuration he had focused on.

Second (and following upon the first point), figurational analysis uses an interpretative explanation of society that is at the same time semantic and syntactic (Abbott 2004: 29). It is semantic in the sense that it tries to foster a comprehension of how the whole and their functional interdependent parts interact in specific figurational arrangements. But it is also the same time syntactic as it aims at explaining how figurations change in historical processes. Even though the researcher might concentrate on either structure or process, as we will demonstrate, these cannot be separated and both have to be treated in the analysis. In this procedural and relational perspective rests the biggest difference to other approaches and it can be characterized by certain principles (Goudsblom 1977: 6). Individuals do only exist in plural and their existence cannot be differentiated from the multiple figurations they are part of. The figurations themselves are in a constant flux, because the individuals try to change the power balances by strategic action.¹ In contrast to other approaches, the figuration comes first and the action of the individual last, because all individuals are socialized into one or multiple social groupings that cultivate their actions to a certain degree. A figuration is then not simply a context of individual action which then retroacts on itself. Action only takes place inside of figurations which means that agency and structure can only be analytically differentiated. Figurational analysis in principle does neither differentiate between structure and agency, nor between micro and macro, nor between individual and society. It rather tries to explain change by pointing to different processes that combine these seemingly opposing categories.

Third, this perspective leads to a different notion of causality. While it is still possible to define causal mechanisms, these mechanisms do not link anymore analytical categories like those mentioned above. They rather try to explain specific changes in a structure of a figuration in order to capture its overall logic of reproduction and transformation. Figurational analysis therefore reconstructs the evolution of a particular figuration from history instead of using standardized models which aim at predicting outcomes. The type of explanation and also its type of causality are then not universal, but rooted in time and space. The analysis has to be sensitive towards the fact that research and the production of human knowledge in general also take place in figurations. It acknowledges that concepts, terms and definitions used in research co-evolve with societal development and therefore do have a history themselves.

Last, almost everything can become data which is somehow connected to the figuration under examination. Here, the procedure resembles very much that of historians. Even though fieldwork is often necessary, giving preference to primary sources and conducting interviews, the need for synopsis also demands a thorough review of secondary sources. Sometimes, it may be necessary to rely foremost on the latter, if there is an enormous amount of unconnected research findings or if one wants to reinterpret

¹Power balances are usually asymmetrical and open for dynamic changes. Interdependencies can be differentiated in affective (like/dislike and bonds of moral obligations), social (entanglement of individual actions), economic (competition) and spatial interdependencies (access to local resources) (Baumgart, Eichener 1997: 110). Power itself then can be conceptualized as being omnipresent, relational, mutually enabling and constraining, with tilted balances, possibly transitory and enforced indirectly, existing also between groups and bases on different «sources of power» (*ibidem*: 114-117).

existing material. In a nutshell, one could say that when it comes to figurational analysis, history is its dataset.

B. Different angles of figurational analysis

In this section, we will present a typology that shows different ways of how to use the concept of figuration in research. It facilitates the location of individual research projects in a larger framework and may help to synthesize formerly unconnected research findings in broader studies. The typology itself is the result of a comparison and synthesis of different approaches in Elias' and other researchers' works that take on figurational analysis.

However, the literature will be mainly used to illustrate the typology and this section therefore does not constitute a thorough review of all major works published. Rather, we would like to highlight different methodological angles which can be found across the literature. As it was impossible to fill every category with literature, the typology also points to research questions that are still waiting to be addressed in upcoming research projects.

The typology shows different analytical perspectives on social processes of figurations by mapping them out in the dimensions of time and structure. While interlocking figurations can have different velocities of change, there are also at least three different ways to look at them in a structural perspective.

First, temporal change will be conceptualized according to established distinctions between processes of long, medium and short duration (Braudel 1982: 25-82). Second, in each temporal category, we can then differentiate between three perspectives on the structural dimension. We may observe developments within a figuration, relations between two (sub-) figurations and relations across figurations, between different levels of figurations and subfigurations.



Table 1

Structural dimension and temporal dimension	Within a figuration	Between subfigurations	Across figurations and subfigurations
Long-term processes “epochs”	The Civilizing Process RQ: overcoming cleavages? Polity formation?	Humana Conditio (Conflict of superpowers) RQ: cleavage building? Cleavage consolidation?	New Polity-Formation (FN on the “Europe” in PdZ) RQ: integration of consolidated polities on higher level?
Mid-term processes “generational change”	The Court Society RQ: emergence or transformation of habitus?	Established and Outsiders RQ: gossip flows, group charisma and group disgrace?	Mozart: Life of a Genius RQ: “new” identities; hybrid identities
Short-term processes “events/moments”	Monopoly Mechanism RQ: cooperation? Centralization or decentralization?	Football-Game Dynamics RQ: conflicts, alliances and coalitions?	Royal Mechanism RQ: institutionalization of power-relations; emergence of domination?

Processes of long duration

If we consider figurational analysis as processes of long duration, we can focus on changes within figurations, between figurations and across figurations. We look at an epoch and the sociogenesis and psychogenesis that define such periods.

What Elias points out in the beginning of the master piece *The Civilizing Process* (Elias 1939a: LXXVII-LXXX) is the problem of «*where to begin*»? Long-term processes change societies so slowly that it is impossible to become aware of them if one is only analyzing daily life in contemporary society; and yet they are important, because contemporary figurational change is always directed by its long-term historical trajectory. It is also necessary to have these trajectories in mind when one tries to do comparative research. Different world regions have had different paths to modernity (Mennell 2007). To describe long term process within a figuration, we think that Elias' analysis of sociogenesis from his *Civilizing Process* is a splendid beginning.

Elias shows how the structures of societies transform when stable interdependencies between human beings are being created and widened. At the heart of his explanation of figurational change lies the



monopoly mechanism, which unfolds in two phases. At first, in Europe, a process of feudalization occurred, in which a multitude of fiefdoms achieved autonomy from central warlords, sustaining themselves from their occupied land while defending it with their own capacity of physical force.

In constant struggles for domination, some feudal lords gained supremacy over others and established monopolies of violence. In such pacified realms, trade could flourish and functional differentiation of professions replaced the old economy of mere subsistence-farming. These new economies provided a more stable income for feudal lords in the form of tax money that was helpful in creating bigger armies and more capable administrations, thus strengthening their position of dominance. It led to different individual habits and a new type of political subject emerged. Elias took lengths to outline how social structures became individually incorporated and formed habits; - and how certain habits became idealized and could shape and cultivate manners that also informed institutions. For him, the interplay of processes of sociogenesis and psychogenesis are important.

When we only focus on processes of sociogenesis for outlining our typology of figurational studies, then we have to keep in mind that these processes stretched across many generations. Within the feudal figuration, slowly another phase started to build upon the prior one. Violent competition for dominance was no longer directed at destroying neighboring feudal realms. It became economically sensible and lucrative to take it over from competitors. Consequently, stable figurations of physical coercion and financial extraction emerged, which contributed to the power of whoever was in charge of these proto-states. Social transformations started from these pacified units of physical protection, which were the most enduring aggregations of human interdependency (Elias 1939b: 352). Even long-distance trade between cities, as e.g. the Silk Road or the Hanseatic League, could not create stable interdependencies without being secured by strong monopolies of violence.

Elias himself condensed such processes within a figuration in his concept of *survival unit*. It is central to his figurational analysis, because functional interdependencies could only develop in pacified realms, where humans are relatively constrained in their violent behavior and where the use of force is less arbitrary and more rationalized. In these pacified realms the survival unit not only provides security, but also guarantees economic reproduction and symbolic orientation for its members (Elias 1983). The transformations of survival units, however, are processes of long duration in which Nation-states slowly take over powers and responsibilities formerly situated at the lower level of families and tribes.

Using this perspective, the *Hamburg School of War Studies* (Jung, Siegelberg, Schlichte 2003) argues that processes of state formation are at the heart of most internal conflicts nowadays. While the European model of the state emerged as the main organization of social power during the colonial and imperial periods and spread around the globe, these states are more inserted as an image of order than a ruling principle in daily practice (Bayart 2007). In many world regions, the state only plays a marginal role and its authority is regularly contested by non-state actors like armed groups, gangs, warlords, local strongmen and tribal families (Migdal 1988). In the case of foreign interventions and civil war, the legitimacy of state authorities might be restrained to the international scene of diplomacy, while exerting only limited territorial control. If one likes to analyze politics of interest groups and the transformation of social conflict, the most important long-term process to focus on is the development of the Nation-state system. It already represents a figuration on a higher level of aggregation which is a direct result of the process of monopolization.

Analyzing long-term processes between figurations has been a concern of Elias' works in the 1980s. In *Humana Conditio* (Elias 1985), he comments on the tension between the two figurations of the opposing superpowers of the Cold War. In some regards, he has also used comparative analysis in the annex of *The Civilizing Process*, commenting briefly on the sociogenesis in Britain and Germany, to contrast different

developmental processes from the French historical experiences. He has shown, how the House of the Capetians gained a monopoly that later became visible on maps as the Hexagon of the French State.

Already many years earlier, Elias also talks about figurational developments across figurations on different levels. In an extensive footnote in the German re-edition of *The Civilizing Process* (Elias 1939a: 396), he refers to the European «polity in the process of formation» and mentions how figurations may merge onto a higher level. Indeed, the figuration of the supranational polity that became the European Union survived the Cold War conflict, while the Warsaw Pact fell apart. Its former members are now partially integrated in NATO. Russia is the solitary remaining force outside NATO that takes an opposing stance in the European power-balance. The economic integration within an interdependent capitalist world society, however, has largely pacified former military confrontations. The IR discussion of survival units may cast new insights on dynamics between figurations (Kaspersen, Gabriel 2008). The discussion on supranational polity building has so far not taken up figurational analysis.

Processes of medium duration

If we consider figurational analysis that is linked to changes of medium duration, we can again focus on changes within figurations, between figurations and across figurations on different levels. We look at an era and the generational and habitual changes within such time periods. At this level, reproduction and change of legitimate domination take place in processes of socialization and social conflict.

The most clarifying example for an analysis within a figuration comes from Elias himself. In *The Court Society* (Elias 1969), he works almost like a historian, except that he blends in sociological analysis into his historical material.² His exercise results in a spatial-temporal synthesis of social dynamics in a political field – he described and analyzed the position of Louis XIV within the figuration of his court. Power-balances and the “pressure” of the life at the court are a result of the multipolarity of power centers. The way of playing or becoming accustomed to these surroundings then starts to form a certain habitus – a term also Elias used and which later was taken up by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 2008: 97-146).

The king has the highest position in the closely knit *Verflechtungszusammenhang* (network of interdependencies), but he is far from being truly sovereign; instead his position of power has to be constantly defended, reinstated and stabilized against allies and rivals alike, resulting in a specific pattern that Elias named the “royal mechanism” – roughly summarized as *divide et impera*. Life in the political domain had to be managed, and while each one tried to manage what he was capable of doing from his respective position in the power-grid, a collective dynamic emerged that had neither been planned nor strategically and purposefully been implemented.

In doing his research on *The Court Society*, it is interesting to see how Elias actually did his research. He asked sociological questions to empirical data, to documentary sources such as encyclopedias, memoirs, letters, and aphorisms, often from those members of a society who found themselves in precarious or declining positions. 40 volumes of memoirs by the Duc de Saint-Simon offered him unique insights for reinterpreting the dynamics at the King’s court. He was interested in them, not because they would be objective accounts of what happened, but precisely because they were subjective accounts – they conveyed

² *The Court Society* is both a precursor to *The Civilizing Process*, as Elias had written it as his *Habilitation* until 1933, and it is also a weighty extension as the manuscript only resurfaced in 1966 when Elias rediscovered it during moving houses and thoroughly reworked it for eventual publication in 1969 (cf. preface by Mennell in *The Court Society* 2006). In style, tone and diction, it is rather close to *Established and Outsiders* (1965). Also one can see the same roots in his discussion of charisma in both works.

the cultural and social source code of those times and places. The analysis of etiquette for example conveyed that those were not empty rituals and boisterous ceremony, as we like to believe today, but they were rather a set of techniques and flexible instruments of the King's art to exercise his power and stay in his position. Elias also took clues from the geography and the architecture of power. Analyzing the court palace allowed him to relate social distances and spatial differentiations. Providing a very elucidating example with *The Court Society*, Elias showed how figurational analysis can explain shifts in power-balances.

Consequently, his study also serves as a blueprint for similar approaches that seek to unveil the dynamics of political power. For example, the annex to his study contains a comparison of the royal court to power struggles within elites in the national-socialist fascist regime in Germany. Another intriguing application of a figurational analysis can be found in *The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat* (1984) by the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński. In his portrait of the last Ethiopian Monarch, Haile Selassie, he could show similar figurational dynamics that had been identified by Elias, but were now unfolding in a different location and time. Even in the reception by the Polish audience, the story about the Emperor was largely understood as a parable on power that helped to understand and criticize the then ruling socialist-communist nomenclature in Poland. In today's IR literature, the approach of the Hamburg School to study the state in the non-OECD world takes up many aspects of figurational analysis (Migdal, Schlichte 2005; Schlichte 2005).

When we shift the focus on dynamics between sub-figurations, the empirical study *Established and Outsiders* serves as a "how to do" guidebook. In the very beginning, Elias outlines some «Consideration of Procedure» (Elias, Scotson 1965: 1-12) that help us to understand the methodological approach he takes for analyzing dynamics between figurations. He chose a quasi-experimental design. By taking one specific example and researching it in deep, he aimed at creating a tentative figurational model that would allow identifying social dynamics in similar settings. And indeed, this model already appeared in his sociogenesis of the state in *The Civilizing Process*, when former outsider-groups were slowly gaining power in the course of political struggles (Elias 1939b: 412-433). In Winston Parva, the fictive name for the site of his study, he takes a closer look at the dynamics of a specific conflict.

What are characteristics of that conflict and how does Elias tackle them methodologically? The only categorical difference between the groups in conflict is their duration of residence. The residents of Winston Parva come from different generations. There is a core group from the old village; there is a newer residential middle-class area and there is a very recent working class settlement. The demarcations of group boundaries between these three groups are drawn by symbolic ascriptions ("group charisma" and "group disgrace") and reinforced through constant gossiping. In exploring the dynamics between sub-figurations of the larger town figuration, Elias summarizes:

[I]t soon became quite obvious that the answers which one received in interviews or elsewhere, particularly those concerned with configurations within and between the various neighbourhoods, were not the expression of ideas formed in the first place by each individual separately. The individual answers formed part and parcel of common beliefs and attitudes maintained by various forms of social pressure and social control [...]. They represented, in other words, individual variations of standard beliefs and attitudes current in these neighbourhoods. (Elias, Scotson 1965: 5)

Using a behaviorist perspective, Elias heavily criticizes an understanding of agency as based on intentions and proposes a non-individualistic stance to reflect human agency as bound up in figurations. Elias phrases his conception of agency as resulting from group habitus as follows:

Opinions about a person's own and about other related neighbourhoods were, in this setting as in many others, not formed first by each individual for himself; they were formed in connection with a continuous interchange of opinions within the community in the course of which individuals exercised considerable pressure upon each other

to conform to the common image of the community in speech and behaviour; within this pattern of neighbourhood control the most highly respected family networks held a key position; as long they had enough power they acted as guardians of the community image and the approved opinions and attitudes. (*ibidem*: 6)

When we now start to look at mid-term figurational changes across figurations, we believe that Elias' works on *Mozart: the Sociology of a Genius* (Elias 1991) is a good example. In *Mozart*, Elias explains the genius of a musician who is "avant" his time. The transformation of society becomes visible through the struggles that Mozart experiences. He, the gifted but non-aristocratic musician of a bourgeois background, is economically dependent on courts and aristocrats. He was an outsider to these circles because a market for freelance artists and therefore a social group for which he could provide cultural products did not yet exist. Mozart's fate is that of a pioneer of freelance artists, whose work would only later be appreciated by economically well-off city-dwellers that came to rise in the European cities from the 18th century on. It is interesting how Elias makes social change visible through Mozart's biography. This remarkable artist was embedded in an outsider position of a courtly figuration and died before a bourgeois figuration emerged that could provide for him. In this sense, we may read the study as a conflict across figurations, about an artist who fails to move from one figurational level to another, where the latter figuration can be classified as a more highly integrated synthesis of the prior one.

Such processes of identity formation that are embedded in newly emerging social structures are sometimes referred to as "hybrid" identities. They are often studied, but seldom addressed by figurational analysis. Remarkable exceptions to this may be Abram de Swaan's work (1997) on widening circles of identification and in some regards also a related case study on the de-radicalization of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Endres, Jung 1998). Much of the postcolonial literature touches upon these social developments that we classify here as changes across figurations. In some aspects, also the German reunification could be analyzed as a multilevel figurational transformation. Two states merged into one and this newly united Germany embedded itself firmly into an enlarging and deepening European Union. However, many Germans still have a "wall in the head" and as can be seen from innumerable Eurobarometer public opinion surveys, the emergence of a supranational European identity lags behind and may possibly only catch up within the generations to come (Meyer, Eisenberg 2009).

Processes of short duration

As Elias became foremost known for long-term historical analysis, only limited attempts were made to apply figurational analysis to short-term processes and daily practice. If we now look at short term processes, however, the historical dimension has to stand in the background and the structural dimension is moving to the front stage. Within the existing structural conditions that are defined by stable long-term figurations, power-balances are constantly in flux as individuals interact and play their strategic power games in daily life. As figurations refer to interdependencies between human beings, it is thus a micropolitical level that becomes most important. In fact, it is actually here, where all of the figurational dynamics unfold: in the actual present and presence of human interactions. Again it makes sense to differentiate these studies according to dynamics within a figuration, between (sub)figurations and across figurations.

First, in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, we find the most pronounced extension of figurational sociology towards daily social practice in his notion of a social field:

My Elias is not the one of great historical transformations, *The Civilizing Process* etc. but rather the one who, as in *The Court Society* discovers the hidden, invisible mechanisms that rest upon objectively existing relations between individuals or institutions. The royal court, as Elias describes it, is an impressive example for what I call *field*,

within which the actors - as in a gravitational field - are drawn by insurmountable forces into a constant, essential movement to stabilize rank, differentiation, distinction towards others. (Bourdieu 1989: 35)

Another well-known French researcher who was very much inspired by Norbert Elias' studies is Jean-Claude Kaufmann, who, in several works, combined long-term with short-term dynamics (Kaufmann 2008; Kaufmann 1996; Kaufmann 1994). While at first sight his work does not seem to be related to big politics, one could nevertheless argue that he grasps the small politics of every-day interactions. For example, in his work on women's top-less sunbathing on French beaches, he has shown that this practice in fact requires a high degree of self-control, being therefore the result of a late stage in the European civilizing process (Kaufmann 1996). From intense interviewing he could show a very subtle order of exposing and onlooking which defined adequate modes of behavior for both sides in order to limit shame and embarrassment. For not becoming a voyeur, the onlooker need to evade "staring" while the exposing woman has to limit exaggerate movements of exposed body parts. However, besides the rigidity of the order, some game remains for young groups of men to tease on the one hand and beautiful women on the other hand, who can risk a more sensual exposure than others.

Second, if we look at dynamics between figurations, we can refer again to the metaphor and image of a football game (that, as we all know, may of course last longer than 90 minutes). Furthermore, a remarkable study on short-term dynamics has been done by Wolfgang Sofsky and Rainer Paris (1991) who defined elementary figurations of social power in the three types of authority, delegation and coalition. Authority arises when a group of individuals considers someone to be superior because of charisma, knowledge or managerial skills. In order to keep a superior position, however, the person in authority has to balance the power of subfigurations inside the group, thus not only benefiting one side when conflict arises. Delegation transfers the bargaining power of a group to one person which then negotiates with another group. A delegate or representative then becomes an intermediary between two figurations. Finally, coalitions are figurations that are created by a group of individuals in order to be able to compete with already established and rivaling figurations.

Last, also structural aspects across figurations can be analyzed on a micropolitical level. Figurations on different levels can often be characterized as triadic figurations that bring political representation to life and link different hierarchies and political sites (Jentges 2010). The dilemma of delegation was well described with the Ugandan president Museveni, who found himself being challenged by his voters that expected him to be fulfilling a certain role, whilst that role collided with the impression he had deliver to international donors and agents of international political arenas. He thus had to perform a skilled double-talk to integrate and connect the two figurations that were situated on different levels of a political hierarchy, namely the local and the global level (Schlichte 2005: 261-275).

What remains in need to be studied are internal "psychogenetic" changes that should be accompanying structural "sociogenetic" short time processes. In some regards, Kaufmann (2010) has opened up the way by renewing psychoanalysis beyond Freud, shedding some light on identity formation processes of persons within figurational settings of different kinds. And yet there is still much room left to continue research on humans from a process-perspective.

C. Comparison of two distinct approaches to the study of interest groups

After having outlined or rather “mapped” possible research approaches and the core themes for research questions, we now seek to ground the theoretical considerations in our own empirical work. Our research projects may provide contrasting examples of how to apply figurational analysis in order to study the politics of interest groups. The comparison follows the most dissimilar design as both projects differ considerably in their methodological approach as well as in the type of examined interest group and political environment. One approach focuses on different structural constellations between civil society interest groups in a highly institutionalized political environment. In contrast, the other one concentrates on temporal change in the organization of armed interest groups during violent conflict.

However, at first, it is necessary to clarify that our understanding of interest groups is broader and more procedural in contrast to the meaning commonly used in Political Science. According to the standard social movement paradigm, we see interest groups as organizations that are the institutionalized results of historical processes in which self-organized social groups articulate their demands in struggles with other groups, usually trying to gain more autonomy and sovereignty, almost accidentally resulting in a push towards democratization (Tilly 2003). A functional definition is thus at the core of our comparison of interest groups, a definition which allows us to include armed groups, political parties, lobby groups, the mafia, and civil society organizations. Accordingly, the definition is free of normative aspects as it is unimportant whether or not their claims or actions are morally legitimate or legally justifiable.

Seen from the multidimensional perspective that was outlined in the previous section, the emergence of specialized interest groups such as civil society organizations is rooted in the evolution of political fields in world society. The multitude of specialized interest groups that populates Brussels and other EU-policy-making arenas indicates that these groups are embedded in a highly integrated and differentiated political field. What they say and how they act is very much constrained by their shifting position in the structure of that field. A structural analysis thus provides an insight into the way how these interest groups gain and maintain their legitimacy (Jentges 2010). But in order to exercise pressure or be invited into consultation procedures, specialized interest groups rely on the existence of capable state structures and other established political organizations that are able to put their policy into practice. A central characteristic of interest groups in the Middle West is thus that they do not attempt to take over the state.

In the Middle East, this is different. In the Palestinian context, legitimacy of established statehood is fundamentally contested in violent conflicts. Therefore, interest groups of all sorts regularly resort to armed combat in their struggle with other groups, who disapprove of their claims. Nevertheless, conflict itself changes the nature of their violent struggle and also transforms the organizational structures of the groups involved. Only through process analysis, for example, can the emergence of Hamas from the Muslim Brotherhood movement and finally its transformation into a state-like structure be made comprehensible (Winkelkotte 2009). In contrast to the political field in the EU, here in the PA, the impact delivered from the barrel of a gun still dominates over the argumentative power of civil-society-discourse.

“Unarmed” interest groups: civil society organizations in Europe

To talk about civil society organizations (CSOs) as “unarmed” interest groups certainly sounds odd in the beginning. The term CSO is deeply entrenched in normative democratic theories and often used synonymously with the positively connoted non-governmental organization (NGO). Quite often, it simply refers to the *good guys*.



Civil society organizations (CSOs) share three central characteristics with other types of interest groups: political orientation, organization and informality (Beyers, Eising, Maloney 2008: 1106). Orientation refers to their focus on monitoring and influencing policy processes. Organization relates to the fact that they have a certain institutionalized infrastructure, often with paid staff. Informality means that they refrain from claiming public offices and retain informal ways of working in the political field. What makes these associations civil is their claim to belong to civil society, a claim which is uncontested even by critics. They put forward a reference to cosmopolitan utopias. To bolster their legitimacy, they often narrate their creation myths as being rooted in social movements. They claim to promote public interests and seek to strengthen democracy. And the dominant modes of behavior are "civil" in the sense that they prefer peaceful protests, debates, dialogues and other non-violent modes of solving conflicts. Stripped bare naked from their democratic rhetoric, what remains is that via representative claims-making (Saward 2006) CSOs can create "felicitous performances" (Alexander 2009) and receive recognition of their self-image; civil society is thus "talked into existence" (Eder 2009).

Once CSOs are seen as peculiar types of interest groups, they can be approached within a figurational analysis that puts the focus on structural aspects. In my research, I try to take into account three different "zoom"-levels. First, interest groups are political organizations with an internal hierarchy. Any interest group can itself be seen as a figuration of interdependent individuals. For almost every association, we can usually assume that there are mutual dependencies between the leadership and the office staff as the "core executive" of a CSO. But these organizational figurations have a rather low salience; they usually do not constitute a "survival unit". If a person is expelled from the group, the person is usually "unemployed" but not in a direct situation of life-threatening circumstances. Changing group membership is usually possible, although not always unproblematic.

Second, we can expect the core executive of the interest group to be embedded in a larger figuration when we take into account the existence of members or donors and possibly hierarchically superior umbrella organizations in the immediate *internal* organizational environment. Other relevant players of an *external* environment of the organization such as political decision-makers with whom the CSO leadership can negotiate, or political opponents such as companies that can be criticized, are part of the organizational environment as well. It is for this reason that interest groups are generally conceived as *intermediary organizations* that link members, supporters or donors at their base with decision-makers in political arenas. Organizations can be placed in the middle position of a triadic figuration. Depending on the power-relations and identifiable dependencies (e.g. does a CSO depend on membership-fees or on government funds?), different types of triadic figurations can be conceptualized (Jentges 2010).

Third, interest groups often concentrate their activities on few policy fields but not on all of the state affairs. This allows framing them with regard to certain policies and identifying them as members of specific policy communities. They may be closely cooperating with state institutions and be accepted as insider groups, they may be partially cooperating here and there, or they may be in confident outsiders and in open opposition. Of course, they may also be marginalized outsider-groups and feel excluded from the relevant policy-processes. CSOs are embedded in specific figurations of agents and it helps to look for established-outsider figurations and their variants when mapping the sections of a political field.

At the heart of doing the research are classical sociological methods. And while these three zoom-levels are rather concerned with structures of power-relations, mutual observations of the agents involved and their reciprocal assessments of their respective abilities to make, influence, or spin and frame policies, the historical process should not be neglected completely. Some IR scholars try to capture it with process-

tracing (Checkel 2005).³ It merely means that what needs to be done is to contextualize and to outline the historical roots of the emergent figuration(s) under study. What needs to be done in writing up the research results is, I believe, to consider the words as instruments and to find the narrative that helps best to convey the complex interplay of interrelations without becoming disoriented. The big picture should not be missed.

What is the big picture for interest group research in Europe? The three different zoom-levels on figurations of interest groups can again be embedded in a larger meta-frame. It may make sense to talk of a europolitical field, a political field (in Bourdieu's sense) that is enlarged to include European decision-making arenas and that unfolds in the European integration process that has the formation of a supranational polity-formation (the European Union) at its core. Even though it is a bold stretching of the original concept, for me, it is within the logical development of the field concept to include relevant EU-decision-making arenas and to then rephrase it as a europolitical field. For Bourdieu, the political field can be found at those places where agents are engaged in a «competition for power, which is a competition for the lay citizens, more precisely: for the monopoly to the right to speak and act in the name of a fraction or the totality of the lay citizens» (Bourdieu 2001: 13, translation EJ).

Taking into account the varying degrees of EU-competencies for particular policy areas, it does furthermore make sense to map such the europolitical field with several sections in respect to the policy issues concerned. Such policy-specific subfields are populated by different agents that compete for influence in national and EU-arenas; sometimes simultaneously, sometimes with a time-lag caused by "uploading" or "downloading" policies to or from the EU to the national level. A political field can thus also include different political time zones. The agents on the field, EU institutions, political leaders of EU member states, national government agencies, interest groups, CSOs etc. form alliances and articulate opposition; they become interdependent and entangled in figurational constellations. In most cases, variants of established-outsider figurations can be found.

“Armed” interest groups: Hamas and Fatah

Armed interest groups differ considerably from CSOs due to the fact that the whole organization is built to the purpose of using physical force in order to achieve their particular interests. With some considerable exceptions, armed groups nowadays are often considered to be terrorist organizations and the general public commonly refers to them as the *bad guys*.

Additionally, in the current scientific debate on the organization of insurgencies there is a lot of confusion over the question if they should be considered as mere social banditry, as rooted in social movements, as being close to military organizations, or as acting alike state institutions. However, this question is difficult to answer a-priori because the same armed group can shift its appearance from one category to the other as the conflict develops. While some armed groups like the Italian mafia remain in the informal sector of politics like CSOs, many do have some kind of a public political agenda and are therefore closer to political parties who fight for taking over government rule. Previous studies, who conceptualized armed groups as figurations pointed therefore to their character as survival units (Bakonyi 2006; Schlichte 2009).

Yet, despite the obvious difference to CSOs, some commonalities with armed groups do emerge when both are seen from a figurational perspective. The beforehand mentioned zoom-levels also apply for armed

³The buzzword “process-tracing” is still attached to the evaluation of strictly causal mechanisms that are based on existing assumptions about dependent and independent variables. For those not so concerned with DV and IV, basically the same method has always been used and is integral part of the constructivist methodological tool kit.

groups. First, they have to stabilize the power relations between leader, staff and followers by common belief systems, hierarchy and discipline in order to be able to compete with the enemy. Therefore, as armed organizations develop like in the case of the Angolan *Unita*, they tend to become greedy institutions which try to colonize the whole life-world of their members, thus preventing them to use the exit-option when the struggle gets rougher (Beck 2009).

Second, they are also embedded in the larger figuration of the conflict and bound to both supporters and opponents in a distinct but nevertheless equally important interdependency. Armed groups are desperately in need for financial resources from diaspora communities, material support from foreign governments, constant arms supply and an influx of new recruits. Here, a figurational perspective can shed some light on sometimes irritating reports from war zones that regular army soldiers sell their weapons to insurgency members on one day and fight them on another. The notion of shifting coalitions and a look on the political economy in conflict is central to figurational analysis.

Third, many armed groups are already a figuration on a higher level which means that they are representing a particular social group. Political goals are often put forward in order to benefit a certain reference group which is based on a national, ethnic, religious or class category. Despite the frequent occasions of pure rhetoric, armed groups are always threatened by a loss of legitimacy if they are incapable of pretending to be the true representatives of their reference group. Consequently, the detrimental effect of their own violence towards those represented was found to be most harmful to an armed groups' political success (Schlichte 2009).

These different zoom-levels are therefore very important for an understanding of the Palestinian conflict in general. However, my project focuses primarily on the violent struggle between Hamas and Fatah in the Palestinian camp. How these two parties were themselves transformed during the conflict can only be understood if one puts an emphasis on temporal change in the analysis. Yet, in the conflict, there are different processes at work, which have to be distinguished. In order to be able to explain, why Hamas established itself as a third state in Israel/Palestine, one has to trace back the development of the political field over a long period of time. The analysis distinguishes accordingly between processes of long, medium and short duration which are responsible for this event.

As a process of long duration, the formation of modern statehood in Palestine started during the Ottoman Empire as a result of the region's integration into the world market under European dominance. However, state borders in that region were by large defined later, when European Imperial powers took over their territorial mandates between the First and the Second World War. In that period, Zionist settler colonialism was gaining importance as the settlers began buying land from Arabs and establishing their own state institutions. Due to their Western heritage, the settlers' organizational skills were far superior to those of their Arab counterparts. Their dominance was finally proven by the successful establishment of the state of Israel and the expulsion of a large proportion of the Arab population.

Because neither Israel nor the surrounding Arab states successfully integrated the Palestinian population, armed resistance movements emerged when Israel finally occupied the Territories of Gaza and the West Bank. They began establishing their para-state institutions first in the neighboring countries and turned then to the Occupied territories due to their lack of success. By finally creating a legitimate and independent Palestinian state, the peace process aimed at ending the colonial situation, but achieved that goal only to a limited extend. On the one hand, the dynamic of the old Zionist project is still at work in the continuous construction of West Bank settlements. On the other hand, inside the Palestinian camp, the Hamas movement directed their force against all attempts to create a Palestinian state based on an acceptance of Israel as a legitimate state. However, as the struggle of Hamas was proven unsuccessful as well, the

organization finally no longer fought the monopoly of the Palestinian Authority but sought to take it over by winning parliamentary elections.

Relevant processes of medium duration concern the generational change in the Palestinian territories and the rise of Palestinian nationalism as part of the struggle for statehood. With a large number of followers stemming from an impoverished camp existence, Hamas rather represented those who could not directly benefit from Fatah rule (Mishal, Sela 2000: 25). The struggle between Hamas and Fatah can therefore be analyzed as a figuration between established and outsiders. Both parties were not only striving for dominance in Palestinian society but also pursued different nationalist projects. Because Palestinian national institutions like courts, schools and universities are only partly developed, the shaping of a Palestinian national character is still in flux (Kimmerling, Migdal 2003: 399). With a limited sovereignty, no movement so far achieved the goal to liberate the Palestinian people. Therefore, the Palestinian resistance seems to move in cycles as an unsuccessful movement is regularly displaced by an even more radical new one (Baumgarten 2005).

Processes of short duration mainly concern the shifting balance of power between Hamas, Fatah and the Israeli Government and the transformation of the parties themselves. With the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, for example, Israel's ability to pressure Fatah in fighting armed militias augmented considerably. Furthermore, the movements are internally divided with moderate fractions struggling with more radical ones in Hamas (Mishal, Sela 2000: 77), a younger generation who would like to replace the old guard in Fatah (Shikaki 2004). Over time, these internal power balances also do change and have an impact on policy.

Discussion

The core discipline for studying interest groups is political science. In general, Norbert Elias' theory is however hardly known in other domains than political theory. Consequently, a lot of confusion arises when one tries to implement figurational analysis in one of the other domains as its distinct methodological underpinnings remain unknown or misunderstood. However, in his numerous works, Norbert Elias did show how his process sociology differs considerably from nomothetic methods in the procedure of the analysis, the type of explanation, the notion of causality and the nature of the data. As the latter are still dominant in the discipline, it was our aim to clarify these differences in the first part of the paper, not as an attempt to create new boundaries, but to build bridges to those who are unsatisfied with the current topics and methods in political science.

It is for them, that a typology with different entry points to figurational sociology was set up and illustrated by Elias' oeuvre, the work of those who were inspired by his approach and our own research projects. It maps a multitude of possibilities to start such an analysis and shows interconnections between different levels, both structural and temporal. The aim was to clarify that while figurational analysis can have different perspectives, the figurations under examination are always realistic in the sense that they can be empirically observed or reconstructed from historical material. We wanted to show that the necessity to define a certain angle of analysis only arises from the fact, that the mere complexity of interlocking figurations demands a starting point in order to identify processes and mechanisms. It is important to understand, that only the research question can help to define, which perspective is most suitable. In the table, we gave some examples of possible research questions while situating them the same time in the logic of the typology.



Additionally, we wanted to show that figurational analysis can shed light on some political realms which remained understudied so far by political scientists. Its strengths lie in highlighting commonalities between very disparate subjects: in this paper we could cover similarities in figurational dynamics among *good guys* and *bad guys* in contemporary politics. But there are no limits towards further analysis of daily practices, far away from what most observers consider to be “politics” nowadays.

Last, there was a need to work on the tensions which are inherent to the methodological approach of Norbert Elias. We acknowledge that figurational analysis builds on a joint application of analysis and synopsis which should be applied as a dialectical procedure. With this procedural approach he wanted to replace the «deceptive finality of inferences based on quantitative analysis alone which is often mistaken for precision» (Elias, Scotson 1965: 9) with an exploration of social dynamics, seen from different angles. In uncovering social dynamics, figurational analysis therefore takes into account both the structural and the temporal dimension.

However, our cooperative work on the paper has shown in practice, that it is almost impossible to cover all aspects of figurational analysis in one project. A need for a specific perspective remains. A question that then arises is: how should the different projects be organized and put together? If one would like to overcome the fragmentation of topics and disciplines, a need for a common framework arises. With our tentative typology, we wanted to provide a first small step towards such an endeavor. And we hope to have been able to show that even case studies on unarmed and armed groups in very different political environments can be researched within such a framework. If we could provoke further thinking on this particular problem, we have already made quite a leap towards our stated goal.

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