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Impact Factor: 4.428

Figurational Social and Cultural Sciences (II)

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Abstract: This case study introduces and discusses 'the *homo clausus* self-experience of contemporary people in Western European societies' — a central conceptualization result of the so-called 'Amsterdam School of Sociology,' based on the insights and works of philosopher and sociologist Norbert Elias.

Keywords: Juliette Roding (1953). Norbert Elias (1897-1990); Henk Flap (1950); Johan Goudsblom (1932-2020); Paul Kapteyn (1942).; Jozef Keulartz (1947); Yme Kuiper (1949); John Reader (1937); Cas Wouters (1943). Figurational sociology; Figurational social and cultural sciences; *Homo clausus* self-experience; The Civilizing Process; Therapy and training groups.

Introduction

In an earlier paper reference was made to two Dutch researchers who have provided an overview of the research program of figurational sociologists. Flap & Kuiper (1979, pp. 238-239) mentioned eighteen phenomena that Norbert Elias, the founder of the figurational social and cultural sciences research school, had presented in his works as themes for further research, pointing to research themes such as 'the level of painfulness and shame thresholds,' 'the degree of separation between the private and public 'area' in thinking and acting' or 'the sensitivity (the pleasure and aversion) that one has when doing (seeing of, thinking about) physical activities and when using physical violence.'

Several of the research themes were illustrated by discussing the processes of introducing 'wastewater disposal' in Western European cities more than a century and a half ago (Staring, 2023). Through legal regulations, city residents were forced to 'entrust' their feces and urine to sewers that were constructed in the cities. At the same time, through the threat of punishment, feelings of guilt were evoked about and among those who did not comply with legal regulations relating to the removal of human excreta.

Postponing physical actions, directly related to habitudes and taboos is also a theme of research for figurational social and cultural scientists. For example, city dwellers had to learn in a short time (20 to 30 years) to control their emotions when defæcating or urinating. This has not only increased the social distance between individual people, but the coercions and restraints from municipal administrators (coercions and restraints from others) also increasingly turned into self-restraints, because city dwellers became increasingly afraid to 'conduct their business' in public (wherever this might happen, or it announced itself, or was possible). The *praxis* of privatizing of their defæcating and urinating activities of individual people was a part of many 'processes' which were all intertwined and interdependent (see *Note 1*).

A number of important developmental trends emerge from the explanation of the themes that figurational sociologists, anthropologists and also historians investigate. Flap and Kuiper (1979, 240-241) mentioned research themes that follow lead in the work of Norbert Elias. For example, they spoke of an 'increasing humanization of human relationships.' This trend can be recognized, for example, in what was discussed above: in a socio-psychological sense, people increasingly took other people into account when

fulfilling their needs. Another developmental trend is that of 'an increasing differentiation of functions, that is, division of labor, specialization, and also differentiation towards coordinating functions.' For example, differentiation of functions came about because the construction of sewers and the canalization of cities (and later also of villages) became a fact in Western Europe: factories were built that made sewer pipes; municipal inspectors were appointed at construction and wastewater sites; ceramics for toilet bowls and toilet tiles had to be made by workers in the ceramic industry; others earned their living from the production of toilet fragrances.

But there is one developmental trend that Flap and Kuiper did not discuss in great detail in their overview of the research program of figurational sociology. This concerns the phenomenon of *homo clausus* self-experience of people in Western Europe.

Homo Clausus Self-Experiences of People in Western Europe

Norbert Elias believed that sociologists, historians, psychologists, philosophers and other human scientists in their studies paint a picture of individual people as if they are separate from the society of which they are a part. While people form and maintain societies, practitioners of the humanities present us with isolated people who can be seen and studied independently of the (form of) society to which they belong. Thus, on the one hand, societies (or smaller figurations) are reduced to 'social facts,' to entities, to things without history. Societies are presented as things that obey their own laws, apart from the people who form and shape these very societies. On the other hand, those who form the societies, *i.e.*, the individual people, are seen as billiard ball-like, shadowy egos. Individual people are presented by such researchers as if they were objects separate from societies they form, who in turn obey their own logic, separate from others, and separate also from the history of the societies to which they belong. Individual people have also become a kind of thing in the studies of these scientists.

According to Elias (1991), the strict separation between individual and society, or between 'man' and society, as if the people who form societies and the societies formed by individual people were things that can coexist completely separately, underlies many sociological theories. One starts to use concepts that have static, historyless contents, and that reflect static, unchanging views. People come to be seen as individually acting, experiencing and thinking egos. People are seen as individuals who are not dependent on other people, and who do not influence other people. One starts talking about 'man,' and not about people. But these sciences are not *human* sciences! This speaking and thinking about people in the singular form ('man'), in the social sciences, but also in everyday life, reinforces the feeling of being separated by an invisible wall from everything that is 'outside.'

But what exactly is that — invisible, inner — wall? Elias (1978a, p. 249) stated,

> But the nature of this wall itself is hardly ever considered and never properly explained. Is the body the vessel which holds the true self locked within it? Is the skin the frontier between "inside" and "outside"? What in man is the capsule, and what the encapsulated? The experience of "inside" and "outside" seems so self-evident that such questions are scarcely ever posed; they seem to require no further examination.).

Elias gave us a history of the origins of this phenomenon. According to him, people in the Middle Ages (and before) in Western Europe lived in a rather spontaneous and thoughtless, self-oriented way. From the Renaissance onwards, conscious reflection on 'nature,' 'our fellow man' and on 'themselves' more and more developed and became increasingly clear.

Still, the study of natural phenomena, but also of different forms of society, disenchanted many. The earth was no longer the center of the universe, the own form of society was not the only high culture. With the long development of a more fact-based understanding of 'nature,' and of 'fellow human beings' and of 'themselves,' there also emerged, closely linked, a better and increasing control over 'nature,' 'fellow human beings' and 'themselves:'

> A heightened control of the affects, developed in society and learned by the individual, and above all a heightened degree of autonomous affect control, was needed in order for the world-picture centered

> on the earth and the people living on it to be overcome by one which, like the heliocentric world-picture, agreed better with the observable facts but was at first far less satisfying emotionally […]. (Elias, 1978a, p. 255).

From the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance onwards, the 'internalization' of social coercions and social restraints towards self-coercion, self-restraint and self-management accelerated. There was an increase in the extent to which people used self-control and affect management.

In the (second half of the) nineteenth century, at a time of accelerated urbanization and large-scale industrialization, there even was an increase-acceleration in social coercions and restraints towards self-coercion, self-restraint, and self-management.

These two large accelerations in the process of increasing self-control and self-management of the people of Western Europe, should be studied as intertwined with accelerations in the process of better control of 'nature.' The better and more nuanced control of 'nature' was in fact accompanied by a better and more nuanced control of 'one's own nature' of the people involved. They had to realize that they increasingly had to be able to oversee longer terms. They had to learn to increasingly suppress their immediate emotions. They had to be able to plan and foresight better and more often. For example, in factories people had to work punctually; observe hygiene; not interfere too much with other workers; show up on time; work hard for hours, and so on. The working people had to know their place; not be lazy; be clean and become civilized. More and more children had to receive education. From the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards, children could no longer escape discipline (to start with, for example, toilet training).

With all these pressures from others on people in different professions and on people of different ages, a greater control of 'one's own nature' emerged. We have already seen that a kind of 'dampening' has occurred in the sphere of immediately satisfying physical excretory needs when they arise. With all this, people increasingly distanced themselves from others emotionally. Many affective impulses were no longer allowed to be expressed immediately, on the spot and spontaneously; people had to 'restrain themselves' in all kinds of situations. This led to people experiencing themselves as separate from others. This self-experience was reflected in their thinking and in their words.

Dutch sociologist Goudsblom stated,

> People are social individuals: everyone lives with their own needs and desires but at the same time those needs and desires are inspired by others and focused on others. The in the Western society highly developed individualization, which can give rise to the self-experience of 'man' as autonomous and isolated individual, is itself a product of the way how people learned to get along with each other. (Goudsblom, 1974, p. 106; translation J.S.).

Dutch sociologist Paul Kapteyn (1980, 1996) has described a third acceleration in civilizing processes: the years after the Second World War in Western European societies. In the Netherlands, for example, the trend towards decreasing power differences between different population groups, and between people in, for example, family, school or working conditions, increased again (after an interruption during the war years). Power relations between people, human groups, but also between different sections within Dutch society changed dramatically. Young people broke all kinds of taboos of civilization, created new forms of living together (communes, for example), but also had to meet higher standards of self-control. Making love freely was certainly not without self-control; it actually demanded more from the members of the post-war generations. Not only did they more or less 'force' the elderly into many forms of democratization, they, the young, developed other forms of social needs while experimenting with other forms of socializing (new genres of music were introduced; differently designed relaxation areas were created; young people experimented with smoking hash). However, as they did and learned, experimented and learned, they subjected themselves to higher demands of self-restraint and self-control, according to Kapteyn.

Once again, the 'socio-psychological distance' between individual people seemed to increase. The term 'alienation' emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. It is this concept and similar words that testify to the

increased distance between individual people. The young felt more closed off, or even closed. Although young people learned to deal flexibly with their self-control, self-restraint and self-direction, their levels had risen considerably since the war years, according to Kapteyn (1980, p. 264 ff.). Terms like 'alienation' clearly articulated the 'own' experiences of young people. The young people's feelings of being closed (off) and 'alienated' people were reflected, for example, in their using of 'mind expanding' substances; or in their participating in sensitivity training groups; or meditation sessions; or other therapeutic group meetings.

Kapteyn's book *Taboe, macht en moraal in Nederland* (Taboo, power and morality in the Netherlands) provides a good overview of the changes in interpersonal relationships that have occurred in the Netherlands between the Second World War and the late 1980s, showing these changes from a figurational sociological perspective, that is, in relation to changes that were observable at the psychological level of those involved. Other figurational social and cultural researchers also paid attention, in their writings, to developments at a social and individual human level. I will not go into depth about this here. I would like to refer to only one work because its contents relate to matters also discussed in the previous paper.

An illustrative work on 'the cultural history of the bath and toilet' by Dutch art historian and archeologist Juliette Roding ends as follows:

> Even the alternative movements of the 60s and 70s have the toilet, however, left intact. How difficult it still is to simply talk about pooping and peeing is evident from the advertisements from manufacturers who, in forced turns of phrase, have now finally introduced the bidet trying to get it introduced and what to think of advertisements for 'wet' toilet paper. […]. Even though we are allowed to go to the sauna and the nudist beach together, it is precisely there that it becomes painfully clear how great our self-restraint has become. In a swimming pool, wearing a bikini and swimming trunks, we suddenly behave much more exuberantly and dare much more. […]. The process of becoming more prudish is not over yet. (Roding, 1986, p. 83; translation J.S.).

The last line in Roding's booklet is a clear reference to the closing sentence of Elias' book *The Civilizing Process*: "[…] 'la civilization ... n'est pas encore terminée.'" It is a quote; Elias derived it from the work of "old Holbach" (Elias, 1982a, p. 333).

In the previous article in this series on figurational social and cultural sciences (Staring, 2023) we saw that 'hygiene in the home and city' developed in connection with a multitude of feelings of shame, embarrassment and fear. However, I would not use Roding's term 'becoming more prudish,' because this phrase obscures developments that are closely related to 'becoming more prudish' in question. We can talk about changes in self-control and self-restraint, or about changes in the level of shame and embarrassment thresholds, but when we start talking about 'becoming more prudish,' personal appreciations of the processes of change that are taking place (can) quickly emerge. After all, the 'prudishness' of which Roding speaks does not exist as an isolated phenomenon that needs a separate name. It is important not to deviate too much from Elias' theory, to prevent interrelated developmental processes from being reduced to situations that hang together like loose sand. Such 'state reductions' are expressions of what Elias understood by the concept of *homo clausus* self-experience that he coined. In the above I have referred several times to precisely this self-experience of current people in Western European societies (see *Note 2*).

Elias defined the view of people who suffer from such a self-experience as follows:

> This is the perspective of the individual person who experiences himself as alone in the center, while everything else is outside him, separated from him by an invisible wall, and who as a matter of course attributes the same experience to other individuals. (Elias, 1971, p. 133; translation J.S.)

According to him, many contemporary sociologists let such *homo clausus* self-experiences, "and the image of the individual corresponding to it [be] the untested basis of their theories. They do not detach themselves from it in order to confront it and call its aptness into question" (Elias, 1978a, pp. 249-250).

Elias proposed to think more in terms of ever-changing human networks, in human figurations, and to adjust our use of terms, concepts and phrases and our thinking about individual people accordingly. The many (inter-)dependencies between people and the many mutual influences between them would then be

better understood. We would gain a better understanding of social relationships and psychological processes. Furthermore, according to Elias, many concepts used by sociologists (and other academics) are, as it were, expressions of *homo clausus* self-experiences of those who use them. For example, when the terms of 'individual' and 'society' are used as if they were concepts denoting something at the same level of abstraction, developmental processes are reduced to states. That is why he advocated thinking in figurations, as a condition for achieving breaks "with fossilized traditions of thought and action." One should therefore also see oneself as "a part of such figurations, as one among others, as an interdependent individual" (Elias, 1971, p. 136; translation J.S.), He put the problem very sharply:

> One can reasonably assume that the experience of oneself as a closed system with all conceptual indications thereof, is symptomatic of the strength, the evenness and the ubiquity of the social constraints placed on the growing individual in our kind of societies, both through certain types of social pressure and through deliberate family training. (Elias, 1971, p. 137; translation J.S.).

According to him, the solution to this problem lies in taking a further step of self-distancing. This step should consist of actually viewing people as social beings from birth to death, from head to toe, past and present. Precisely in this way one combats the all-encompassing problem of the *homo clausus* self-experience, that is, the self-experience of contemporary Western European people that also finds expression in all kinds of sociological, anthropological, historical and other theories (including in the concepts that people use):

> People who experience themselves in this way — as a kind of closed box, as *Homo clausus* — find this immediately obvious. They cannot imagine that there are people who do not perceive themselves and the world in which they live in this way. They never ask themselves which part of them actually forms the dividing wall, and which part is shut away inside it. Is the skin the wall enclosing the true self? Is it the skull or the rib-cage? Where and what is the barrier which separates the human inner self from everything outside, where and what the substance it contains? (Elias, 1978b, p. 119).

Recognition, Praise and Criticism

In the second half of the 1980s, Norbert Elias was in the public and scientific spotlight. On his ninetieth birthday, in June 1987, he was appointed Commander of the Dutch *Order of Orange Nassau*. In honor of the great work he had done since the 1930s, a special issue dedicated to him ('Norbert Elias and Figurational Sociology') of the journal *Theory, Culture & Society* was published. On his ninety-first birthday, Elias received the European Amalfi Prize for sociologists from Professor Momgardini of the University of Rome, Italy for his book *Die Gesellschaft der Individuen* (Elias, 1987, 1991). The first real biography of Elias (*Das Werden eines Menschenwissenschaftlers*) was also published in 1988 — by the German sociologist Hermann Korte. In 1989, British researcher Stephen Mennell published an extensive discussion of Elias's writings under the title *Civilization and the Human Self-Image*, while German sociologist Artur Bogner published his thesis *Zivilisation & Rationalisierung* in a trade edition in the same year. And while Berliners danced on the infamous Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart — *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall*, at the time the German Democratric Republic (East Germany) phrase for the Berlin Wall — and 'wall woodpeckers' made gaping holes in the Berlin Wall, a collection of articles by Elias appeared at the end of 1989 under the title *Studien über die Deutschen*. In January 1990 he received the Italian Nonini Prize.

Norbert Elias died in Amsterdam on August 1, 1990, at the age of ninety-three. Short or longer obituaries of Elias appeared in newspapers, often full of praise for the scientific legacy he left behind. Elias' work had no shortage of praise and honor in the 1990s. But there was also no shortage of criticism since the late 1980s. Elias and other figurational social and cultural scientists were heavily 'bombarded.' In 1987, the Dutch newspaper *NRC-Handelsblad* published *De Sociologie van Norbert Elias*, a fierce attack by literary scholar Kornelis Poll on a collection of articles by Dutch figurational sociologist Johan Goudsblom. Between 1987 and 2002, a five-volume work by German philosopher and ethnologist Hans Peter Duerr on the civilization theory of Elias and others was published. Duerr fiercely attempted to unveil *Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß* (the myth of the civilizing process). Others also provided sociological, anthropological and philosophical criticism of Elias' work. I will not consider those considerations here. I wish to focus on the criticism of the works of figurational social and cultural scientists as formulated by Dutch philosopher

Jozef Keulartz in his book *Van bestraffing naar behandeling* (From punishment to treatment). In this introductory work in the sociology of care, Keulartz summarized Elias' position on 'diseases of civilization' as follows:

> The transformation from '*Fremdzwänge*' to '*Selbstzwänge*,' which takes place under the influence of the monopolization and democratization processes in the field of state bureaucracy and the market economy is accompanied by all kinds of 'civilization diseases.' In the course of the civilizing process, man develops an increasingly stronger and more differentiated '*Selbstkontrolleapparatur*.' A gap gradually grows between this control apparatus ('*Ich*' and especially '*Über-Ich*') and the drift center ('*Es*') in people's personality structure: their own feelings penetrate less and less into their consciousness, they become 'alienated' from themselves and therefore from each other. Man thus becomes 'homo clausus,' closed off and separated from himself and others. (Keulartz, 1987, p. 79; translation J.S.).

Figurational social and cultural scientists can immediately comment on this quote, which is essentially a brief summary of Elias' *homo clausus* self-experience concept. An important comment on Keulartz' text will concern "Man thus becomes 'homo clausus,' closed off and isolated from himself and others," since in such choice of words the entire *homo clausus* self-experience problem is already expressed with clarity. The reifying character of Keulartz' use of terms (for example, 'Man') will certainly not go unnoticed by figurational social and cultural scientists, and they will 'defend themselves' against such choice of words, concepts and phrases. After all, according to them the use of the term 'Man' already expresses the "ethos of *homo clausus*" (see *Note 3*).

But this 'defense' is premature, because Keulartz had fundamental things to say. He noted that Elias had not systematically dealt with civilizing processes that have been taking place in Western Europe. That is why Keulartz, in his criticism of the work of figurational social and cultural scientists, switched to a treatise by Dutch sociologist Cas Wouters (1976), in which civilizing processes that have taken place since the Second World War are discussed:

> Wouters's thesis roughly boils down to the fact that the current informalization process represents a phase in the civilizing process in which the level of control of people has increased again compared to earlier stages. […]. Due to the increase in self-control, the gap between Es and Über-Ich grows once again and the 'homo clausus' experiences and inner fears and insecurities also increase. According to Wouters, this explains the recent rush to all kinds of therapies and training, in which people learn to access and express their own emotions. Wouters interprets terms such as personal growth, self-actualization or self-development as psychobabble, as an 'ideological indication' for self-restraint can reasonably assume that the experience of oneself as a closed system with all conceptual indications thereof, is symptomatic of the strength, the evenness and the ubiquity of the social constraints placed on the growing individual in our kind of societies, both through certain types of social pressure and through deliberate family training. (Keulartz, 1987, pp. 80-81; translation J.S.).

It is clear that Keulartz wanted to indicate that Wouters had addressed research themes such as 'increasing self-control and self-discipline' at a theoretical level and distilled from his analysis that the "'homo clausus' experiences" and civilizational fears had increased, but that, according to Keulartz, Wouters failed to make these observations on a practical level.

No, that is not the path Keulartz would like to take. Using Habermas' theory of communicative action (mainly) and Foucault's theories of power (to a lesser extent), Keulartz opposed the work and conclusions of scholars of the so-called 'Amsterdam School of Sociology,' that is, the figurational social and cultural scientists. His criticism amounts to making the statement that the primacy in figurational social and cultural sciences research lies with the observer perspective. In contrast, Habermas' explanations in his *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns* (very aptly named 'Blue Monster') would be more grounded in the participant perspective. This is the lever with which Keulartz tried to open the joints in the figurational scientific structure. He stated, speaking about the figurational social and cultural sciences such as that of Wouters,

> Communicative action is presented as a new — subtler — form of strategic action. Self-determination and self-determination reality are just other — veil — words for self-restraint and self-control. (Keulartz, 1987, pp. 156-157; translation J.S.).

Please note, this is about the *homo clausus* self-experience problem of contemporary people in the 'Evening Land,' and the remedy that they are looking for in therapies and training groups. If figurational scientists continue to adopt this attitude — we must read carefully between the lines of Keulartz's comments — then we cannot expect figurational social and cultural scientists to provide solutions to the *homo clausus* self-experience problem of contemporary people in Western Europe. Here Keulartz gets my little nod of approval, because the steadfast attitude of figurational scholars is taking revenge. Elias and students of the 'Amsterdam School of Sociology' have paid far too little attention to an investigation into the scope and relevance of the concept of *homo clausus* self-experience. The early research of figurational social and cultural scientists was already, and rightly so, disputed around the 1990s with 'Blue Monsters,' and what else was to come. In this regard, I wholeheartedly agree with Keulartz's conclusion:

> So, the fate of the health movement has already been decided at the level of basic concepts. Further empirical research is unnecessary. The curtain may fall. (Keulartz, 1987, p. 157; translation J.S.).

It is indeed the position of figurational social and cultural scientists. Much research has not been conducted since Wouters (1976) wrote his article *Is het civilisatieproces van richting veranderd?* (Has the civilizing process changed direction?), published in the *Amsterdam Sociologisch Tijdschrift*. But has the last word on the *homo clausus* self-experience problem really already been said, and has the search for solutions to this category of human problems also stopped? No. The curtain has not yet fallen, and in the following, as well as in the coming episodes of this series about the 'Amsterdam School of Sociology' I will try to demonstrate my statement.

Homo Clausus Self-Experiences among Dying People in Western Europe

Homo clausus self-experience problems are clearly expressed in Western European culture surrounding dying and death. Norbert Elias (1982b) himself has devoted an essay to the problem: *Über die Einsamkeit der Sterbenden in unseren Tagen*, three years later translated in English: *The Loneliness of the Dying* (Elias, 1985). He stated that people in Western Europe generally live longer compared to earlier times. They therefore share a higher average life expectancy. That is why they can put off thinking about their own death and keep it away from themselves for many years. Increased general hygiene and improved procedures and medications used by doctors and paramedics are seen by many as means by which, in due course, one's own death can be postponed by medical experts and other healthcare providers. This strengthens feelings of physical security. The low violence to non-violent and tolerant social setting of the 'welfare state' after the Second World War also did this. For many their own death disappears from their immediate field of vision. Yes, thinking about (one's own) death is even repressed, stated Elias (see *Note 4*).

This 'suppression of death' from the lives of contemporary Western European people takes place on an individual and a social level. As always in Elias's historicizing figurational sociological analyses, these two levels are closely linked in his arguments. But while people's social levels of fear of death had increased, their compassion for others had actually decreased. Elias reinforced this statement by pointing out a number of further explanations. For example, the fear of guilt about punishment after death was more exposed in the past than in the present:

> Nothing is more characteristic of the present-day attitude to death than the reluctance of adults to make children acquainted with the facts of death. This is particularly noteworthy as a symptom of the repression of death on the individual and the social pla. (Elias, 1985, p. 18).

Dying and death are therefore veiled from children, according to Elias. Such obscurations also manifest themselves, for example, in the very small vocabulary relating to these life experiences. People in our time have low thresholds for pain and shame around dying people. You do not express yourself spontaneously around someone's deathbed, was Elias' opinion. Dying people are now not only literally, but also figuratively 'pushed backstage.' There is, as it were, a regime of silence surrounding the dying. Elias also stated that the significance of corpses and graves as a focus of feelings has more and more diminished.

The cremation of bodies, and the scattering of cremated ashes on lawns, or the burial of urns in nameless mass graves, is erasing entire cultures around funerals, cemeteries and memorial days of the dead. With the 'secularization of death,' all kinds of rituals surrounding dying and the dead disappear. All this shows a certain connection with the *homo clausus* self-experience problem of contemporary people in Western European societies, which is also discussed in other works by Elias:

> Nothing In more developed societies people see themselves broadly as fundamentally independent individual beings, as windowless monads, as isolated 'subjects', to whom the whole world, including all other people, stands in the relationship of an 'external world'. Their 'inner world', it seems, is cut off from this 'external world', and so from other people, as if by an invisible wall.
>
> This specific way of experiencing oneself, the self-image of *Homo clausus* characteristic of a recent stage of civilization, is closely linked to an equally specific way of experiencing, in anticipation of one's own death and probably in the actual situation, one's own act of dying. (Elias, 1985, p. 52).

It also finds expression, for example, in the fear of dying (or having to die) alone, as Elias rightly pointed out. Perhaps, however, it finds its expression much more clearly visible these days in the much subtler, but also more blurred, vaguer, fears of being mentally veiled and thus demented; fears of being a burden to relatives and strangers; fears of being completely unaware of everyone and the environment (*i.e.*, of time, place and person); and fears of having to die alone and misunderstood, but also incomprehensible, abandoned by everyone and oneself. This is, as it were, about fears of a 'socio-psychological death.' Perhaps such fears even surpass in their intensity the fears of definitive (biological) death.

Hiring members of the rapidly growing group of professional 'death counselors' for help is also a form in which civilizational taboos regarding death and dying are expressed. To better manage and control all the emotions associated with dying (or assisting a dying person), help, advice and comfort are sought from the members of this new branch of the agogic tree.

All this concerns the end of human life, in which the problem of *homo clausus* self-experience can be observed very clearly.

Homo Clausus Self-Experiences among Pregnant Women in 'the West'

In passing, Elias also mentioned the beginning of human life in his booklet about the loneliness of dying nowadays. Speaking of earlier times, he noted:

> Birth and death — like other animal aspects of human life — were more public, and thus also more sociable, events than today; they were less privatized. (Elias, 1985, p. 18).

Elias has not published any work on childbearing, or on human birth. But since he indicated that childbirth has also become more privatized, we can briefly discuss this here. After all, having children and giving birth, just like death and dying, constitute major biosocial dangers in people's lives. Theoretically, we can notice analogies when comparing dying and death with labor and birth. In fact, birth and childbearing went hand in hand with death and dying until well into the last century. Position abnormalities, infectious diseases, diabetes or pre-eclampsia, puerperal fever and other pathologies threatened the life of mother and child, or fetus. When we compare earlier days with the present time with the same inductive power as Elias in his works, we can observe that life and survival expectations during pregnancy and childbirth for both children and mothers have increased over the last century. Nowadays, thinking and speaking about the death of fetuses, newborns, pregnant women or women giving birth is kept far away from the maternity bed. Here too, a connection can be recognized with higher levels of general hygiene and medical skills and knowledge of doctors (and other health care professionals).

In a sense, in this specific context, feelings of physical security have increased enormously. Spectacular developments in general hygiene and medical technology surrounding pregnancy and birth have occurred over the past decades. Ultrasound scanning, amniocentesis, and the many successes in the application of techniques to increase the chances of survival of premature babies: there was virtually nothing to hinder progress in medical practice. Infant mortality rates followed the mortality rates of women in childbirth to almost the absolute minimum possible. There was a trend from home birth to outpatient birth,

especially since the 1960s and 1970s (see *Note 5*). All the most modern monitoring and labor management devices, for example the equipment to monitor the cardiac activities of the unborn child, were used in the maternity rooms of obstetric outpatient clinics, in order to minimize the risks for mother and child(ren) — thereby firmly medicalizing childbirth. Doctors now fire a battery of medical techniques at expectant mothers. All kinds of prenatal examinations are associated with a 'normal' pregnancy: from a thorough anamnesis to a gynecological examination, from blood group and rhesus factor determination to lues examination, from pelvic size determination to regular measurement of the fundus height. Dietary instructions are given to pregnant women and pregnancy gymnastics, or yoga courses, are highly recommended to expectant mothers. The 'heart sounds' of the fetus are measured, and where necessary, registered, and weight tables are carefully maintained. It is almost too much to mention what pregnant women have to undergo in the medical pregnancy circuit. Doctors and other healthcare professionals cannot be accused of negligence. And pregnant women cannot be blamed for deriving feelings of physical security from all the care they receive. It is like two hands on one pregnant belly.

It has not always been this way. Older people in Western Europe may still remember the time when, for example, positional deviations could have fatal consequences for the child, for the mother, or even for both. Those were scary times!

And rightly so, because from an evolutionary perspective the female pelvis is heavily loaded. Over millions of years, during the process of natural selection so beautifully described by Darwin and many others with him, 'adaptations' (to put it perhaps too plainly) of the female pelvis have occurred to give way to children with larger skull sizes — from the time of *Australopithecus* to the period of the current human species *Homo sapiens sapiens*. American anatomist and paleoanthropologist Owen Lovejoy has pointed out the links between the evolutionary developments of larger brains, some decline in the efficiency of upright walking and posture in humans, and 'adaptations' of the female pelvis. In a retrospective on the search for "*Missing Links*," photojournalist and John Reader summarized the results and conclusions of biomechanical studies on fossilized remains of early hominids and humans conducted by Lovejoy and associates:

> For a time, the progressive enlargement of the brain could have been accommodated by a progressive broadening of the hips, but there is a limit to the total pelvic breadth that can be maintained in a biped of any given stature, beyond which rapid locomotion becomes awkward and striding efficiency is lost, says Lovejoy. So as babies with increasingly large heads were conceived, their birth was most satisfactory — both in terms of maternal ease and species evolution — where the size of the birth canal had increased while the overall breadth of the pelvis remained unchanged. This adjustment could only be achieved by the shortening of the femoral neck, thus disturbing the structural and mechanical efficiency of the pelvis, doubling weight stress on the articular ball of the hip joint and rendering modern man less favourably adapted to bipedalism than his ancestors. (Reader, 1981, p. 234).

Again, to put it perhaps too plainly, the development of the process of this specific natural selection with regard to the simultaneous processes of changes in the birth canal, widening of the pelvis and shortening of the femoral neck, were directly related to processes of changes in the size of the brain and skull of fetuses. These interrelated changes at biological and biomechanical levels were in turn directly related to processes of development, 'condensation of complexity' of social relationships in hominids; speech development; perfection of fine motor skills of the hands, as well as eye-hand coordination in hominids and humans (see *Note 6*). It is important to note that, hand in hand with developments at the 'social-cultural' level, developments took place at the biological, and therefore (also) at the biomechanical level. Reader further stated,

> By comparison with the fetal development of other mammals the human infant is born six months earlier than it should be so that the relatively large head may pass through the birth canal. Even so, the head is severely squashed during birth, and the bones of the skull may overlap as it is squeezed through the pelvic opening. And of course, many difficult births, especially among those achieved by Caesarian section or with the aid of forceps, are instances of the evolutionary conflict between brain size and bipedalism that natural selection would resolve more drastically in the absence of modern medical practice. (Reader, 1981, p. 234).

Until recently, positional abnormalities were life-threatening pregnancy complications, and from a biological-evolutionary perspective this makes sense. But Reader's story also shows that every birth presents difficulties, less so for some women and even requiring a Caesarean section for others. Biomechanically speaking, there is no wiggle room left. This obviously has consequences for medical-technical pregnancy and birth support, as already indicated. However, this does not alter the fact that despite the knowledge of difficult births, physical feelings of security have increased in recent decades — indeed have increased so much that ideas about infant mortality or maternal death during childbirth, in the maternity bed, or after childbirth, virtually no longer exist in our days in Western Europe. Such a thing can actually only happen in the so-called 'Third World,' or in emergency situations, or in times of war. It is no longer a major danger for women and their fetuses and/or newborn babies in Western European societies to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or *postpartum*/*postnatal*. People in these societies today have fully 'adapted' to those facts and medical-technical advances, in their thinking and through their actions, manners of acting and behavior.

So far there is an analogy with what Elias wrote about death and dying in our time. We can also describe similarities between death and dying on the one hand, and birth and childbirth on the other, on a social-psychological level. As Elias noted, childbearing and birth have also become more privatized moments in human life in Western Europe. Births are taking place less and less often at home, but increasingly in outpatient settings. Frequently, births no longer take place under family supervision, but increasingly under the care of strangers, less protected by warm affection, but more under the clinical gaze. This trend can also be observed during current pregnancies: more and more strangers (such as doctors, clinic staff and fellow pregnancy yoga students) influence the self-image and self-experiences of pregnant women with their diagnoses, comments and new-fangled etiquette about pregnancy and being pregnant.

Does — despite this excessive attention to pregnant women in 'the West' in our time — the observation of 'more privatized,' as Norbert Elias pointed out, apply here?

Yes. The circle of intimates has become smaller and has been replaced by a coaching staff of experts. Distance-enhancing control and living techniques strengthen the experiences of pregnant women of being at the mercy of these and similar experts and instruments and procedures. The entire trend of efficient, medical-technical pregnancy management by doctors and paramedics, via devices and tests and measurements and the completion of tables and blood tests and weight determinations, and..., and..., and..., points in the direction of well-managed (and therefore also well-controlled) affect management during the emotionally charged time of pregnant women (and other people who are directly emotionally connected to the pregnant women). Each of those involved is increasingly guided by diagnosis, test results and indicators and displays of measuring equipment, rather than by interested parties and family members and their affection.

Here too, all kinds of rituals disappear in step with increased levels of control of strong and charged emotions. This concerns the rituals surrounding pregnancy and the preparation for giving birth. For example, you no longer have to stock up on birthing supplies; everything is available in abundance in the outpatient maternity room. One does not need help from relatives; after all, family helpers do everything much more efficiently, and they create no long-lasting obligations.

Asking questions about pregnancy problems is experienced as painful by pregnant women. People feel therefore ashamed to provide too direct information about the well-being of pregnant women; and when this does happen, it is done in more or less medically formulated (therefore distant, distancing) terminology. Here we see circumstances emerging where there is a strong tendency to individualize and 'isolate' pregnancy experiences. To some extent this sounds like establishing the fact that a cow is a cow, but the significance of this assessment can be easily understood. After all, the horrors of childbirth are 'silenced' or downplayed. Expectant mothers feel lonely and abandoned with their fears and painful feelings because talking about them openly hurts and shames others.

Children today are informed about the baby/babies in Momma's belly (this is in positive contrast to the facts of several decades ago), but Momma's worries, fears, uncertainties, pains and discomforts are hidden from them out of false piety. Although the pregnancy of Mom (and Aunty or neighbor) cannot be

hidden from children, this is the case with childbirth through outpatient deliveries. The involvement of all kinds of specialists, from doctors to laboratory technicians and possibly also practitioners of so-called 'alternative medicine;' the disappearance of childbirth from the home (and partly from the public), *i.e.*, away from children; as well as the containment of intense emotions and their concealment in medical terminology: these are all signs that modern pregnancy and childbirth are increasingly taking place 'behind the scenes.' Within the trend of individualization, expectant mothers also experience their unborn offspring as cut off from the 'outside world,' the *extra-uterine* world. This trend has clearly emerged in recent decades. And with their babies-to-be, expectant mothers also feel disconnected from family traditions, relatives, socio-cultural birthing traditions, under expert and specialist eyes, almost like clinical cases. The "ethos of *homo clausus*" (see *Note 3*) is everywhere, even among pregnant women.

Conclusions

In conclusion, let us return to Dutch philosopher Keulartz who pointed out that figurational social and cultural scientists have not conducted further research into basic concepts forged by themselves, and that they apparently consider this unnecessary. Keulartz seeks the reason for this in the fact that the primacy in the school of figurational sociology, anthropology and history lies with the observer perspective, and not (as it perhaps should be according to Keulartz) with the participant perspective. This means that terms like 'self-determination' or 'self-realization,' which are highly acceptable in the alternative medicine movement, are referred to by figurational social and cultural scientists merely as 'obfuscating words for self-restraint and self-control.' Keulartz based this observation on an assessment of a passage from the aforementioned article by Wouters:

> The tensions between controls and impulses in individuals and the tensions between individuality and solidarity […] were and are for many reasons to seek therapy. Also, the large influx into all kinds of (sensitivity) training, in which people learn to gain more access to their own emotions and learn to express them, can be understood in this light. (Wouters, 1976, p. 350).

This passage follows a disquisition in which Wouters indicated that relationship problems between men and women have become more pressing, partly due to the increase in *homo clausus* experiences. According to him, this, in turn, was related to the increase in self-restraint of people in Western Europa after the Second World War. Those involved and people surrounding them do not recognize this, is Wouters' statement; that is why problems of individuality and solidarity are expressed in mystical terms (the vocabulary from the 'sensitivity' training groups). The concepts that Keulartz mentioned must therefore, in Wouters' eyes, be only 'obfuscating words for self-restraint and self-control.' That relationship problems and difficulties regarding individuality and solidarity exist for pregnant women in the present in Western European societies is evident from the above argument. We have also noted an increase in *homo clausus* experiences among pregnant women. And indeed, in recent years, 'self-help' groups, 'self-development' courses such as pregnancy yoga classes and other 'self-actualization' training sessions have developed around contemporary Western European pregnant women and their bearing of children. According to Wouters' theory, this should also be the case. That is the end for Wouters, because on the one hand it is clear what can be expected theoretically. On the other hand, there will be no question of acquiring insights into relationship problems and the difficulties surrounding individuality and solidarity in these and similar classes, courses, groups and training. All one would (could) learn are strange mystical terms for such problems. This is entirely in accordance with the tenor of the theories of figurational sociological and cultural sciences. Tensions between controls and impulses in individuals and tensions between individuality and solidarity, *i.e.*, the tensions related to *homo clausus* self-experiences of modern people in Western European societies, disappear or change only when the interpersonal relationships of dependence on and interaction with each other undergo changes.

The *homo clausus* self-experience problem seems to be, purely and merely, a socio-psychological phenomenon for figurational social and cultural scientists. For them, the scope of the *homo clausus* self-experience concept covers only social and psychological areas. The relevance of this concept lies in no other area.

The next paper in this series will deal with the (socio-psycho)physiogenesis of *homo clausus* self-experiences.

Notes

1. For arguments for using the term *praxis* here instead of the concept of *process*, see Ingleby, 1980.

2. Compare also Blumenthal, 2014; Kemple, 2001.

3. Compare Elias, 1982b, p. 100.

4. Compare also Wouters, 1989.

5. Compare also Brinkgreve, 1986.

6. Compare also Staring, 1988, 1995.

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