

## **Norbert Elias's concept of the 'drag-effect': implications for the study of the relationship between national identity and sport**

### **Abstract**

In this paper Norbert Elias's (1991) concept of the 'drag-effect' is argued to be important for exploring the complexities of the relationship between national identity and sport. Elias's distinct sociological perspective is briefly outlined before the importance of Elias's drag-effect is considered alongside other much more popular concepts commonly used in the study of nationalism and sport. The concept of the drag-effect is then applied to help make sense of the relationship between contemporary English national identity and sport, using specific examples from the sport of association football. Future researchers are encouraged to make greater use of Elias's drag-effect for studying the complex relationships between other national identities and sports.

### **Introduction: The sociological perspective of Norbert Elias**

Elias's figurational or process sociological approach focused specifically on "how human beings and societies interconnect and develop" (Smith 2001, 1). Elias (1978, 15) contended that, "people make up webs of interdependence or figurations of many kinds, characterized by power balances of many sorts." These figurations are fluid and ever changing depending on the dynamics of the relationships people form and the situational context within which they exist. Elias (1978, 74) created what he termed 'game models' to help explain how power pervades in all human relationships.

Through regarding power relations as analogous to invasion games (team sports) - like association football (referred to hereafter as football), rugby or hockey - Elias was able to show that all relationships are processes subject to change. In such sports, the relationship between teams and the individuals which make them up on the field of play is constantly changing depending on a number of related factors, including: who has possession of the ball; where players are positioned on the field; and, so on. Here Elias conceives of the way power operates as: processual; fluid; multi-dimensional; relational; and, situational, instead of being static; fixed; one-sided; and, uni-directional, as for example a classic Marxist conception of class relations maintains where members of the proletariat are always subordinate to the dominance of the bourgeoisie (cf. Marx and Engels 1967). For Elias (1978, 93), in any given figuration all individuals have a degree of power in the interdependent relationships they form:

We depend on others; others depend on us. In so far as we are more dependent on others than they are on us, more directed by others than they are by us, they have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them by their use of naked force or by our need to be loved, our need for money, healing, status, a career, or simply for excitement ... all relationships—like human games—are processes.

Since the European Middle Ages, if not before, webs of interdependency (figurations) have gradually increased in size to such an extent that in the modern world, “millions of people may have some relationship to each other and be dependent on each other” (Elias 1978, 100). The task for sociologists, according to Elias, is to study these figurations in order to make them more transparent. This requires a necessarily

developmental sociological approach because “people’s interdependencies change as societies become increasingly differentiated and stratified” (Elias 1978, 134). Thus, it is important to conceive of figurations as if they are in a constant state of flux because people form interpersonal bonds with one another as well as with larger units of which they have become part (such as nation-states) because of the ways in which societies have developed. Elias (1978, 137) states that people’s “attachments to such large social units is often as intense as their attachment to a person they love.” Elias argues that throughout history units or alliances of people have always held the function of survival units or attack and defence units. Whereas they have previously been in the form of smaller groups such as tribes or clans, at the present stage of human development nation-states act as the main units into which people are bound. Elias’s (2000) seminal work, *The Civilizing Process*, is essentially concerned with making strong links between large-scale social processes that have occurred in Western Europe over the last millennium and visible alterations in the psychological make-up or ‘habitus’ of individuals.

Habitus refers to a specific set of acquired dispositions of thought, behaviour and actions that are embedded in individuals through long-term socialisation into particular cultures as part of everyday life so that they become second nature (Bourdieu, 1977; Mennell 1994). Elias uses the phrase ‘social habitus’ which he contends exists within the personality structure of any individual human being and the idea of the ‘national habitus’ figures prominently in a number of Elias’s works (Elias 1978; 1991; 1996; Elias and Scotson 1994). Despite Elias’s (1991; 1996; 2000) clear focus on the link between long-term processes of state-formation, the development of national habitus amongst Europeans and the persistence of nationalism within an increasingly global and European age, his work still remains somewhat under-utilised

in the diverse academic study of nationalism. Although Elias (cf. 1991; 2000) specifically theorised about the development of globalisation and its impact on European nation-states as a long-term process, even recent texts focused on globalisation and Europeanisation often pay scant attention to his contributions to understanding in this area. Delanty and O'Mahony (2002, 72) argue that Elias may simply be placed "before his time". Nevertheless, through focusing on both structure (in terms of European state formation processes) and agency (in terms of the affective impacts of national culture building on citizens within states) Elias

is the theorist par excellence of the national habitus, a position that insofar as nationalism is increasingly seen as intrinsic to modernity, places his work at the core of the theorisation of modernity itself (Delanty and O'Mahony 2002, 71).

The aims of this paper are two-fold. First, to provide an argument to suggest Elias's (1991) concept of the 'drag-effect' should not be overlooked alongside other much more popular concepts commonly used in the study of nationalism and sport. Second, that the drag-effect can be applied to understanding the complexities of the relationship between sport and contemporary English national identity, using examples from the popular sport of football. In the remainder of this paper each of these two arguments are discussed in turn before a conclusion is provided.

### **The importance of Elias's drag-effect in relation to theories of nationalism**

Smith (2010) suggests that there are many theories to explain how nations and their national identities have developed. In order to begin to appreciate why Elias's drag-

effect can be considered important alongside more commonly used concepts within the study of nationalism and sport, it is important to briefly consider the latter.

*Commonly used concepts within the study of nationalism and sport*

In sociological terms, a 'nation' is a community of history and culture, possessing a compact territory, whilst a 'state' has a unified economy and common legal rights and duties for its members (Smith 2010). 'Ethnic' nationalism refers to ideas of the 'nation', and the 'civic' nationalism refers to ideas about the 'state'. Essentially, 'nationalists' operating within modern nation-states have aimed to put the 'roof' of statehood over the nation or multiple nations—as is the case in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK), whereas others have pointed to the 're-invention' of traditions that are symbolic of the cultural and often ethnic history of the nation—for example, 'Celtic' ethnicity is used to underpin the nationalism of the Republic of Ireland.

The 'modernist' paradigm of nationalism contends that nation-states; nationalisms; and, the national identities evident in contemporary Europeans, need to be viewed as completely 'modern' in that they have been developed since the 'Enlightenment' of the mid-seventeenth century, which led to the modernising revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries signalling the onset of modernity (Smith 1998). Modernists contend that nation-states and nationalism emerged through the modernisation of western society and state politics of the elite classes and are therefore *not* deeply rooted in history. This is recognised as the most dominant paradigm of nationalism to date and has largely stemmed from influential scholars like Gellner (1964; 1983) and Kedourie (1960).

Smith (1996) describes how most (but not all) modern nation-states are simultaneously and necessarily 'civic' and 'ethnic'. He observes that it is often assumed, by liberal theorists in particular, that ethnic sentiments of collective belonging that enter into the life of a state inevitably breed exclusiveness and intolerance leading to conflict. Marxist theorists often tend to claim that states are modern capitalist inventions that seek to divide workers of different nations and disguise their common interests. Hobsbawm's (1983, 1) is an example of a Marxist

interpretation of the production of nationalism as a political ideology because he regards the practices that are associated with modern nation-states as 'invented traditions', which he describes as a term

taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.

In later work, Hobsbawm (1990) proposed that the ruling political elites who had power throughout the industrial and modernising periods created or 'invented' certain 'national' symbols such as flags and anthems to symbolise particular nation-states. Though, as Smith (1998) clarifies, Hobsbawm does not adequately explain that traditions are not only invented by elites and neither are they always successful in binding society as if it were a homogenous community. Traditions also need to appeal to the majority of people within a nation in order to be successful. It is important not to divorce romantic symbols from historically lived experience and, therefore, because national traditions necessarily need a connection to the past, it is perhaps more accurate to conceive of them as 'selected' rather than completely 'invented'.

Stemming from a similar Marxist position, Anderson (1991) sought to emphasise the cultural and subjective aspects in producing modern feelings of national belonging or sentiment, which Hobsbawm leaves aside to some extent. Instead of nations and their nationalisms being 'invented', they are actually 'imagined' according to Anderson. Therefore, nations are modern cultural artefacts and not ideological for Anderson (1991, 5), who states that it "would, I think, make things easier if one treated it [nationalism] as if it belonged with 'kinship' and 'religion', rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism'." Anderson (1991, 6) defines the modern nation-state as being "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." According to Anderson, the reason the nation is 'imagined' is because citizens will rarely meet or hear about the majority of other people existing within their nation. Still they will imagine similarities between themselves and the wider community of people existing within the limited boundaries of their country.

Billig (1995) helps one understand how what Hobsbawm termed 'invented traditions' are used to maintain the 'imagined national community' Anderson theorised.

Billig conceives of national 'identity' as constructed through the nation being 'flagged up' in many areas of everyday life, including sport. Billig recognises that representations in the national media and other areas of everyday life, although not overt, still act to 'flag the nation' on a subtle but routine basis. He argues that it is by continual reference to national symbols, such as flags or anthems, and aspects of a nation's history, such as successes in wars, that what he terms 'banal nationalism' occurs. In this regard, Billig (1995, 93) contends that small "words, rather than grand memorable phrases, offer constant, but barely conscious, reminders of the homeland, making 'our' national identity unforgettable."

The opposing paradigm to modernism is that of traditionalism. Taking this perspective, primordialists have the view that ethnic ties, often from the ancient past, explain that 'nationalism' has been apparent for as long as people have been in existence. Clifford Geertz (1994) notes how post-colonial societies have created a shared sense of collective belonging through six essentially ethnic elements, including: assumed blood ties; race; language; region; religion; and custom. These are what he calls 'primordial' ties. Perennialists, being similar to primordialists, derive modern nations from fundamental ethnic ties rather than from the processes of modernisation (Smith 2010). Perennialists locate myths that relate to the ethnic majority in society and may often be formalised through civic commemoration in order to make certain citizens feel more like a community.

Finally, there are post-modernist approaches which focus upon how the modernist paradigm needs to be adapted or extended to include more recent themes, including: post-colonial perspectives; feminist critiques; and, the impact of globalisation processes on national cultures (Smith 1998; 2010).

### *Elias's the drag-effect*

Now that some of the most popular theoretical concepts commonly used to study nationalism and sport have been briefly outlined, the goal of this section is to provide an explanation of Elias's concept of the drag-effect. A more thorough examination of

Elias's ideas relating to nationalism can be found elsewhere (see Delanty and O'Mahony 2002; Smith 2001).

Elias is neither a modernist nor a traditionalist. Nor is he even a postmodernist. Elias (2000) posits that nation-states are not entirely modern, and in fact, state-formation processes extend to a far earlier time than the onset of modernity. According to Elias's (2000) empirical research, modernisation is part of the overall process of state-formation, but it is reductionist to see it as *the only* process within state-formation, often the argument of the Modernist paradigm of nationalism (James 2006).

In the second volume of *The Civilizing Process* Elias (2000) investigated how personality structure and standards of behaviour are linked to the broader structure of society in his enquiry into the 'Sociogenesis of the State'. This is where Elias differs significantly from Marx himself, as well as the Modernist theorists of nationalism alluded to above. Marx saw the rise of nation-states as a particular outgrowth of the modern period and especially of the rise of industrial capitalism, thus viewing it in purely economic terms. Unlike Marx, Elias's (2000) discussion of processes of European state-formation neither reduces this process to economics alone, nor does he see the rise of the nation-state idea purely as a consequence of capitalism. Instead Elias posits that such a process is not only more complex than a mere reflection of capitalism, but also that it occurred much earlier than the onset of modernity. Elias (2000) contends that it is more accurate to accept that state-formation, the social division of functions and lengthening of interdependency chains, the growth of towns, trade and money, all intertwine and reinforce one another. Any attempt to separate out one strand as the prime cause, or to represent history as a sequence of static stages, distorts the essentially processual character of social reality.



The monopoly mechanism is one of three principal elements in Elias's (2000) discussion of state-formation and refers to two intimately related processes: the gradual concentration of the means of violence and taxation in the hands of a single ruler and administration in each territory; and, the enlargement of the territory through competition with and elimination of neighbouring rulers. Another is what Elias terms the royal mechanism, which refers to the internal balance of social forces within the developing state. The third of these elements is the transformation from private to public monopolies. These are not successive stages, all intertwine and other strands including the growth of towns, of money economy and trade, of intermediate bourgeois strata, are also tied together within this overall process of development. This relatively blind or unplanned complex set of processes can be traced back as far as the beginning of the European Middle Ages, the end of the Roman Empire, where there were great migrations of people across Europe (Roche 2010).

For Elias, individuals and their figurations (collectives of individuals or groups such as: families; clans; tribes; ethnic groups; or, nations/states) complement one another in that they are part and parcel of the same phenomenon, what Elias (1991) called the 'society of individuals'. In short, Elias (1991) contended that the involvement or commitment expressed by the use of the pronoun 'we' is probably usually strongest in relation to family, domicile or native region, but it has also grown to be just as strong in relation to an individual's affiliation to a nation or state.

According to Elias (1978, 128), long-term and largely unplanned processes shape the figurations which link people, groups and institutions interdependently to one another and this means that the habitus of individuals is also impacted. Elias (1991; 2000) considered the fate of European nation-states in the expanding European project (European Union) in this way. He argued that a central aspect of the

development of Europe over the last millennium has been a tendency towards increasingly dense and complex figurations. Elias (1991, 222) terms the conflict between newer and older planes of habitus the 'drag-effect' but expects that incorporation into larger and more complex integration planes will gradually increase over time.

In a case study on the Germans, Elias (1996) referred to the national habitus as a particular form of we-group identification noting that the fortunes of a nation become internalised and deeply embodied as part of the second nature (or habitus) of its citizens. As such, he contended that one of the most potent 'I-We' identities belonging to individual citizens in modern European nation-states like Germany, France and Britain, is that associated with their nation. Elias also recognised that people in contemporary European nation-states have come to develop multi-layered identifications that are simultaneously: local; regional; national; European; and, even global. It is these overlapping affiliations that form the flexible and complex network of the habitus of a person (Elias 1991). Thus, instead of viewing a person's habitus as fixed and immovable, it is perhaps more appropriate to view habitus as a process that may be subject to change.

Anderson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1983) have been used by many scholars to suggest that national communities are continually re-imagined or re-invented in the face of more recent political developments such as European integration. Although this may be true, few have realised the potential of Elias's contribution to this area. Elias (1991, 202) observed as a general trend that "in the earlier stages [of human existence], the we-I balance first tilted strongly towards the we. In more recent times it has strongly swung towards the I." Furthermore, in a study on a small community in England, referred to as Winston Parva, Elias and Scotson (1994) came up with the

theory of established–outsider relations, which can help explain what Elias refers to as the we-I balance. Elias and Scotson (1994, xliii) noted how a

person's we-image and we-ideal form as much a part of a person's self-image and self-ideal as the image and ideal of him- or herself as the unique person to which he or she refers as "I".

Thus, wider group identities (such as a nation, class or religion) cannot often be separated from an individual's personal habitus, meaning that in the same moment any individual is both an 'I' and a 'we'.

Elias (1991, 209) also contends that powerful as the advance of individualization has been in recent times due to globalisation processes, "in relation to the nation-state plane we-habitus has actually strengthened." This is because people regard themselves as individual representatives of a we-group (an Englishman or Welshwoman for example). In fact, the traits of national group habitus—what we call the national character—are a layer of the social habitus built very deeply and firmly into the personality structure of an individual (Elias 1991; Fletcher 1997, 99).

Elias (1991; 2000) urges that the state's role as nation-state, is of relatively recent date and he posits that the emergence of European states happened gradually and in complex stages, not all of which were linear. It is of importance to note that absolutist states such as France at the time of Louis XIV (1643-1715) were ruled autocratically by kings and nobles. England, although never absolutist, was still ruled largely by the monarch with the aid of the upper classes at this time. They alone, as the established group, formed the state and the mass populace were perceived only as a they group and as outsiders (Elias and Scotson 1994). Even in the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries, parts of the populace in France—first peasants, then the industrial proletariat—were excluded from the citizens' *we habitus* by the ruling classes—the nobility and the rising bourgeoisie (Elias 2000).

Thus, these outsiders perceived the state as a 'they' rather than a 'we' group. The more complete integration, or what Elias (2000) terms 'functional democratisation', of all citizens into the state within European multi-party states really only happened during the course of the twentieth century—only with parliamentary representation of all classes and both genders did all members of the state begin to perceive it more as a *we-unit* and less as a *they-group*. Democratisation can be defined as "the gradual historical tendency towards more equal—though not wholly equal—power balances between different groups and subgroups in society" (Murphy, Sheard and Waddington 2000, 94). For Elias (2000), this is part of the process of movement from private to public monopolies.

Furthermore, Elias observed that it was only during the course of the two great wars of the twentieth century that the populations of the more developed industrial European states—Britain, Germany and France—took on the character of nation-states in the modern sense of the word. This leads him to suggest that nation-states, "one might say, are born in and for wars" (Elias 1991, 208). For Elias this is the reason why, among the various layers of *habitus*, the nation-state level of integration today carries such an emotional charge. The integration plane of the nation-state, more than any other layer of *habitus*, has in the consciousness of most members, the function of a survival unit, a protection unit on which depends their physical and social security in conflict between human groups.

In this section, I have argued that Elias's concept of the drag-effect should not be overlooked alongside other much more popular concepts commonly used in the

study of nationalism and sport. In the following section this argument is substantiated through the application of the drag-effect to help make sense of the relationship between contemporary English national identity and sport, using examples from the popular sport of football.

### **Using Elias's drag-effect to understand the relationship between contemporary English national identity and sport**

The place of sport in regard to the rise or resurgence in national consciousness amongst contemporary Europeans is significant since this extremely popular social practice has the power to both unite and divide large numbers of citizens. Recent figurational studies have demonstrated this to be the case (see for example Liston and Deighan 2019; Liston and Kitching 2019; Liston and Maguire 2020). Throughout the history of British sport one can observe division between the nations of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) in terms of the organisation of international sporting contests, including for instance, football, cricket and rugby World Cups as well as the Commonwealth Games. Yet, at the same time, the nations of the UK have also united as Great Britain and Northern Ireland, perhaps most significantly as 'Team GB' in the Olympic and Paralympic Games as well as in many other sports, such as the British Lions rugby union tour.

Sport has often been used in attempts to integrate Europeans, yet due to the drag-effect of national identity within the habitus of European citizens, such attempts have been unsuccessful. British identity politics in media coverage of football were discussed by Maguire and Poulton (1999) in their seminal figurational study of the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) European Football Championship

tournament hosted by England in 1996 (known as EURO 96). Here Maguire and Poulton demonstrated how the British (England-based) national press sought to reinforce national stereotypes and xenophobia in relation to their reports of other European nations, reinforcing division rather than integration between the nations of Europe.

Fast-forward a quarter of a century and one can observe that attempts to integrate Europeans through the EUROS have become even more pronounced. EURO 2020 was moved from the summer of 2020 to the summer of 2021 following the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time in its 60-year history, the tournament matches would be held in 12 cities in 12 countries across Europe rather than in just one or two host countries. As such, UEFA dubbed the tournament a 'EURO for Europe' (FA 2019). Two of the host cities include Glasgow (Hampden Park) and London (Wembley). Wembley Stadium is host to three Group D matches (the other three being staged at Hampden Park), as well as a round of 16 match, two semi-finals and even the tournament final.

The irony of this situation is that by that point the UK will have been out of the European Union for over a year (since 31 January 2020), a result of the Brexit negotiations which began following the UK EU (European Union) membership referendum on 23 June 2016 in which 51.9% Brits voted to leave the EU (see O'Rourke 2019 for more on the historical processes underpinning Brexit). Added to this, the reality of Brexit has recently re-ignited the possibility of a second referendum on Scottish independence (following the first one on 18 September 2014 in which 55.3% voted for Scotland to remain part of the UK), considering a majority in Scotland (62%) voted to remain in the EU (Wishart 2019).

A key question asked by many a sports fan, athlete and pundit at the time of writing is: 'How will the British compete in sport following Brexit?' It is doubtful whether the longstanding divisions within the UK regarding international sporting competition will be altered unless absolutely necessary and demanded by international governing bodies. Such a case became a huge issue in the lead up to the 2012 London Olympics. Bringing the UK nations together under the Team GB banner for the men's football competition at the London 2012 competition was extremely controversial (see Gibbons et al. 2015). The British Olympic Committee and the four separate UK Football Associations each formally recognised in world football – the (English) Football Association (FA), the Scottish FA (SFA), the Football Association of Wales (FAW) and the governing body for the Northern Irish football team, the Irish FA (IFA) - were forced to comply because it was demanded by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that the host nation must field a team in every event. Yet, the actual Team GB football squad was not representative of the UK *at all* as it contained 13 English and five Welsh, but no Scottish or Northern Irish players (Ziegler 2012). A British football team for a FIFA World Cup or UEFA EUROs is inconceivable in the minds of football fans in the UK given the history of competition as separate national teams since 1950 (see Gibbons 2014).

The Brexit situation and how it relates to the relationship between sport and competing national identities within the UK (English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish) highlights the complexities underpinning the relationship between sport and national identity politics within Europe, and within the UK specifically. Here we have four 'national' identities within one nation-state. Whilst sport has the potential to overcome national divisions between European nations, those political divisions are continually reinforced through sporting competition, as has often been the case

between England and Scotland national football teams for example (Whigham and Gibbons 2018). Whilst EURO 2020 represents an attempt to unite the nations of Europe, ironically it could be regarded as reinforcing their division both within Europe and the UK. The supranational layer of identity has not (yet) engendered the emotional habitus of citizens within European nations meaning that competitions like the EUROS act to highlight and even reinforce the kind of drag-effect that Elias (1991: 222-223) contended is symptomatic of the persistence among citizens of contemporary European nation-states;

the feeling that the fading or disappearance of a ... state as an autonomous entity would render meaningless everything which past generations had achieved and suffered in the framework and in the name of this survival unit.

What Elias explains here in relation to the drag-effect has similarities to Anderson's (1991) conception of nations as imagined communities that survive in the minds of the people partly due to having continuity with a nation's past achievements. Sport, like war, as George Orwell famously alluded, helps to maintain this continuity (Maguire, Poulton and Possamai 1999).

For the English, the fate of the national team or individual athletes who represent Britain or England in international competitions in a variety of sports has been regarded as a major source of national pride. Examples include: cricket (Malcolm 2009; Malcolm and Velija 2017); tennis (Lake 2017); cycling (Griggs et al 2014; Groves and Griggs 2014; Rees et al 2017); both rugby codes (Falcous 2017); and of course, football (Bowes 2017; Gibbons 2007; 2010; 2011; 2014; 2015; 2017; Gibbons, Dixon and Braye 2015; Griggs and Gibbons 2014; Whigham and Gibbons 2018). Nowadays



the St George Cross becomes ubiquitous whenever the English are involved in international sporting competitions. However, if one looks more closely, this is not the only flag on display when an England team/English athlete competes. Nor is it the only layer of the English national habitus on display.

Research on media representations of English national identity during World Cup coverage (Gibbons 2010; Griggs and Gibbons 2014); observations of fans at subsequent international football tournaments (Gibbons and Lusted 2007; Gibbons 2014); surveys of fans' views (Gibbons 2011) and analysis of discussions between fans (Gibbons 2014; 2015; Gibbons, Dixon and Braye 2015; Griggs and Gibbons 2014; Whigham and Gibbons 2018), has revealed that multiple layers of English place-based identity have been manifest surrounding the men's England national football team. These layers are: the *specifically English*, the *British*, and the *local/regional* (see Gibbons 2014 for a detailed explanation of each layer). Whilst the complexity of the identities that exist within the UK was not a topic Elias himself wrote about in any detail (Fletcher 1997), his concept the drag-effect is useful to explain how identities of many different ages and sizes – i.e. for the English: city/town/village, region (e.g. north vs. south), nation (England), state (Britain) and supra-nation (Europe) - conflict with one another and how national identity is challenged by global integrative forces.

Perhaps the clearest example of the conflict between different layers of identity and the drag-effect for the English can be found in the (con)fusion of British with specifically English layers of identity. This has endured for centuries yet it is something the English have only recently been forced to think about. The English character depicted in media coverage of World Cup competitions has often been defined by references to British achievements rather than specifically English ones (Gibbons 2010; Griggs and Gibbons 2014). Whilst the distinctively English national symbol of St

George continues to be ubiquitous when the national team play, English fans have always been reminded of aspects of British history, including: the singing of the British national anthem 'God, Save the Queen' prior to each England match; the strong presence of the British union flag (Union Jack), particularly prior to the 1990s; the winning of the two world wars; and, the once globally dominant (now former) British Empire. Press reports regarding the presence of British figureheads such as members of the British Royal family at England matches has also been used by certain sections of the media to remind English readers of their strong attachment to all things British.

Similarly, the behaviour of English fans surrounding the national team has also been based on British attachments rather specifically English ones. For example, the song *Ten German Bombers* has often been sung when the England team have played Germany. Its lyrics, according to the version in Locken's (2009, 14-15, emphasis added) *The Best England Football Chants Ever*, specifically state: "There were ten German bombers in the sky..." ending with "The RAF from *England* had shot them all down!" Parsons (2005), writing in the British daily national newspaper *The Mirror*, argued that a "residual resentment of Germany remains in our national consciousness" and that the *British* cannot forget the war because "it is just too soon". This evidence echoes Elias's (1991; 1996; 2000) argument that the identities of individuals living in European nation states is rooted in their national pasts, despite political attempts to integrate all Europeans (Chrysochoou 2001; Guibernau 2011; Roche 2010).

## **Conclusions**

Elias (1991) argued that there has been a very-long unplanned trend-line in the development of human society towards integration into larger and more diverse

networks of interdependent people organised into more and more interlocking layers. This is clearly observable in the long-term unplanned movements in the size and complexity of figurations into which human beings have been socialised throughout history. Whilst Elias (2000) has previously been criticised for showing a preference for civilizing processes (van Krieken, 1998), in seeking to highlight the importance of Elias's simultaneous recognition of decivilising processes, Mennell (1990) gave a number of examples of de-civilised spurts throughout history. Among other aspects, decivilising processes are "marked by ... shorter chains of social interdependence" according to Mennell (1990, 205). Elias's (1991) concept of the drag-effect is a particularly good example of the possibilities for reversals in the direction of the civilising process—a process that is still widely misunderstood by many sociologists both within and outside the study of national identity and sport, who suggest it simply follows a linear incremental trajectory. On initial inspection, the persistence of the national we-image in the face of a more European we-image (the drag-effect) appears to be moving in the opposite direction to the civilizing process Elias (2000) theorised. However, essentially the civilizing process entails a necessary transitional phase involving conflict between three interrelated layers of identity distinguished by their different vintages – *the nation, the state and the supranational*.

At the time Elias (1991) was writing in the mid-late twentieth-century, the European community consisted of only twelve member states (Chryssochoou, 2001). The European Union (EU) currently consists of twenty-seven member states and this is clear evidence that centripetal forces are still advancing, and 'Europe' is expanding, at least on the 'political' level, but importantly, perhaps not so much at the 'emotional' level (Guibernau, 2011; Roche, 2010), and this helps explain why the majority of citizens within the UK voted to leave the EU in 2016. Elias (1991) succinctly explained

how individuals living in nation-states within Western Europe at the latter end of the twentieth century were in a 'double-bind'. Whilst they were being moved towards increasing assimilation into a 'united' Europe politically via virtue of various agreements between the ruling elites of leading Western European nations, at the same time the personality habitus or 'we-image' of individual European citizens was still firmly rooted in their national contexts. Hobsbawm's (1983) idea of how 'invented traditions' such as flags and anthems were created by ruling elites to instil emotional attachments to nations; Anderson's (1991) understanding of how nations became 'imagined communities' in the minds of individuals; and, Billig's (1995) notion of how the national ideology is maintained on an 'everyday' basis via 'banal nationalism', all highlighted the significance of the nation to citizens living in many nation-states in late twentieth-century Europe. In the twenty-first century sport still holds the emotional attachment of European citizens to their nation rather than to the larger supranational unit of Europe.

Despite the strength of the national layer of habitus, Elias (1991) suggested that the European political unit had already taken over from the nation-state as the principal survival unit for Western Europeans in the late twentieth century and that this was evidence that Western European society as a whole was undergoing a civilizing spurt. Yet, as always with the civilizing process, Elias was careful to note that it is *not* simply a uni-linear process. Elias recognised that Western European nations were in a transitional phase as the habitus of the vast majority of European citizens, aside from some elites, was still clearly dragging along the baggage of 'nationalism'. This drag-effect was therefore emotionally holding European citizens back from further integration into a united Europe which has thus far failed to instil anything like as deep a 'we' feeling as has 'nationalism' (Elias 1991; 1996).

Although he fails to mention the work of Elias (1991), Guibernau (2011, 303), argued that the EU had still, at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, only succeeded in generating a 'non-emotional identity' amongst the vast majority of European citizens largely because it has thus far been "a top-down project designed and carried out by selected intellectuals and political leaders after 1945." Guibernau (2011, 311) states that "Europe shares a history of internal confrontation and war that is more conducive to enmity and distrust than to collaboration", a point which Elias (1991; 1996; 2000) often made when explaining how the European civilizing process did not always follow a linear trajectory and necessarily involved various de-civilizing spurts. Even though he was writing towards the end of the twentieth century, Elias's (1991) drag-effect can be used to help explain the late twentieth/early twenty-first century rise or resurgence in a national consciousness amongst citizens within European nations. The latter is something which a number of scholars have recently highlighted (see for example Crescenzi et al. 2019; Dijkstra et al. 2019), though none have made use of Elias's theoretical contributions to explain why this may be happening.

Elias (1986, 19) recognised the value of studying sport to help understand wider social processes in detail, stating that "knowledge about sport was knowledge about society." Elias (1986, 26) noticed that there are "specialists in the study of sport, specialists in the study of society ... each group working as it were in its own ivory tower", and he sought to stimulate further sociological studies using sport as a lens through which to make particular aspects of societies more transparent. For these reasons, future researchers are encouraged to make greater use of Elias's drag effect for studying the complex relationships between other national identities and sports.

## References

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Billig, Michael. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (originally published in French 1972, trans. Richard Nice). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bowes, Ali. 2017. "England's Lionesses: English women and sport." In *Sport and English National Identity in a 'Disunited Kingdom'*, edited by Tom Gibbons and Dominic Malcolm, 110-124. London: Routledge.

Chrysochoou, D. N. 2001. *Theorizing European Integration*. London: Sage.

Crescenzi, Riccardo, Ugo Fratesi and Vassilis Monastiriotis. 2019. "Back to the member states? Cohesion Policy and the national challenges to the European Union."

*Regional Studies*. Advance online publication:

[doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1662895](https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1662895)

Dijkstra, Lewis, Hugo Poelman and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose. 2019. "The geography of EU discontent." *Regional Studies*. Advance online publication:

[doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1654603](https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1654603)

Delanty, Gerard. and O'Mahony, Patrick. 2002. *Nationalism and Social Theory*. London: Sage.

Elias, Norbert. 1978. *What is Sociology?* London: Hutchinson.

Elias, Norbert. 1986. "Introduction." In *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process*, edited by Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, 19-62. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elias, Norbert. 1991. *The Society of Individuals*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elias, Norbert. 1996. *The Germans*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Elias, Norbert. 2000. *The Civilizing Process* (Revised Edition). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elias, Norbert and John, L. Scotson. 1994. *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Inquiry into Community Problems*. London: Frank Cass.

Falcous, Mark. 2017. "Rugby league and the negotiation of Englishness." In *Sport and English National Identity in a 'Disunited Kingdom'*, edited by Tom Gibbons and Dominic Malcolm, 79-92. London, Routledge.

Fletcher, Jonathan. 1997 *Violence & Civilization: An introduction to the work of Norbert Elias*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Geertz, Clifford. 1994. "Primordial and Civic Ties". In *Nationalism*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, 29-34. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gellner, Ernest. 1964. *Thought and Change*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gibbons, Tom and Jim Lusted. 2007. "Is St George enough? Considering the importance of displaying local identity while supporting the England national soccer team." *Annals of Leisure Research* 10 (3/4): 291-309.

Gibbons, Tom. 2010. "Contrasting representations of Englishness during FIFA World Cup Finals." *Sport in History* 30 (3): 422-446.

Gibbons, Tom. 2011. "English national identity and the national football team: the view of contemporary English fans." *Soccer & Society* 12 (6): 865-879.

Gibbons, Tom. 2014. *English National Identity and Football Fan Culture: Who are ya?* London: Routledge.

Gibbons, Tom. 2015. "Fan debates on English national identity surrounding the Almunia Case." *Soccer & Society (Special Issue celebrating 150 years of the FA)* 16 (2-3): 344-359.



Gibbons, Tom. 2017. "Is St George Enough? The relationship between English national identity and football." In *Sport and English National Identity in a 'Disunited Kingdom'*, edited by Tom Gibbons and Dominic Malcolm, 34-48. London, Routledge.

Gibbons, Tom, Kevin Dixon and Stuart Braye. 2015. "The GB football team for London 2012: What's all the fuss about?" In *The Impact of the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games: Diminishing Contrasts, Increasing Varieties*, edited by Kevin Dixon and Tom Gibbons, 35-55. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Griggs, Gerald, Tom Gibbons, Anthony Rees, and Mark Groves. 2014. "'Allez Wiggo': a case study on the reactions of the British print media to Bradley Wiggins's victory in the Tour de France." *International Journal of Sport Communication* 7 (1): 113-125.

Griggs, Gerald and Tom Gibbons. 2014. "'Harry walks, Fabio runs': A case study on the current relationship between English national identity, soccer and the English press." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 49 (5): 536-549.

Groves, Mark and Gerald Griggs. 2014. "Riding in the shadows: The reaction of the British print media to Chris Froome's victory in the 2013 Tour de France." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 51 (4): 428-445

Guibernau, Montserrat. 2011. "The birth of a united Europe: on why the EU has generated a 'non-emotional' identity." *Nations and Nationalism* 17 (2): 302-315.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1983. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." In *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1990. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

James, Paul. 2006. "Theorizing Nation Formation in the Context of Imperialism and Globalism." In *The SAGE Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, edited by Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar, 369-381. London: Sage.

Kedourie, Ellie. 1960. *Nationalism*. London: Hutchinson.

Krieken, Robert van. 1998. *Norbert Elias*. London: Routledge.

Lake, Robert J. 2017. "'Tennis in an English garden party': Wimbledon, Englishness and British sporting culture." In *Sport and English National Identity in a 'Disunited Kingdom'*, edited by Tom Gibbons and Dominic Malcolm, 49-64. London, Routledge.

Liston, Katie and Matthew Deighan. 2019. "Whose 'wee country'?: identity politics and sport in Northern Ireland." *Identities* 26 (2): 203-221.

Liston, Katie and Niamh Kitching. 2019. "'Our wee country': national identity, golf and 'Ireland'." *Sport in Society* 23 (5): 864-879.

Liston, Katie and Maguire, Joseph. 2020. "Making sense of 'Ireland', sport and identity: the craft of *doing* sociology." *Sport in Society* 23 (10): 1587-1605.

Locken, Eric. 2009. *The Best England Football Chants Ever*. Interviewbooks.com.

Maguire, Joseph and Emma Poulton. 1999. "European Identity Politics in Euro 96: Invented Traditions and National Habitus Codes." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 34 (1): 17-29.

Maguire, Joseph, Emma Poulton and Catherine Possamai. 1999. "Weltkrieg III? : Media Coverage of England Versus Germany in Euro 96." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 23 (4): 439-454.

Malcolm, Dominic. 2009. "Malign or benign? English national identities and Cricket." *Sport in Society* 12 (4-5): 613-628.

Malcolm, Dominic and Philippa Velija. 2017. "Cricket: the quintessential English game?" In *Sport and English National Identity in a 'Disunited Kingdom'*, edited by Tom Gibbons and Dominic Malcolm, 19-33. London: Routledge.

Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. 1967. *The Communist Manifesto* (with an introduction and notes by A.J.P Taylor). London: Penguin.

Mennell, Stephen. 1990. "Decivilising Processes: theoretical significance and some lines of research." *International Sociology* 5 (2): 205-223.

Mennell, Stephen. 1994. "The formation of We-Images: A Process Theory." In *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 175-197. Oxford: Blackwell.

Murphy, Patrick, Ken Sheard and Ivan Waddington. 2000. "Figurational Sociology and its Application to Sport." In *Handbook of Sports Studies*, edited by Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning, 92-105. London: Sage.

O'Rourke, K. 2019. *A Short History of Brexit: From Brentry to Backstop*. London: Penguin

Parsons, Tony. 2005. "Forget the war? It's far too soon." *The Mirror*, December 12. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/columnists/parsons/2005/12/12/forget-the-war-it-s-far-too-soon-115875-16474483/>

Rees, Anthony, Kevin Dixon and Tom Gibbons. 2017. "'We are just going to draw the raffle numbers': The English history of the cycling time-trial." In *Sport and English National Identity in a 'Disunited Kingdom'*, edited by Tom Gibbons and Dominic Malcolm, 65-78. London, Routledge.

Roche, Maurice. 2010. *Exploring the Sociology of Europe*. London: Sage.

Smith, Anthony D. 1996. *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Smith, A.D. 1998. *Nationalism and Modernism: A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism*. London: Routledge.

Smith, Anthony D. 2010. *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Second Edition). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Smith, Dennis. 2001. *Norbert Elias and Modern Social Theory*. London: Sage.

Wallerstein, I. 1974). *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press.

Whigham, Stuart and Tom Gibbons. 2018. “‘The Auld Enemy’? Exploring the England vs. Scotland rivalry from the perspective of soccer fans.” *Soccer & Society* (Special Issue ‘Face to Face: Enduring Rivalries in World Soccer’) 19 (5-6): 673-686.

Wishart, Ruth. 2019. “A second referendum on Scottish independence is suddenly very likely.” *The Guardian*, October 18.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/18/second-referendum-scottish-independence-brexit-scots>

Ziegler, Martyn. 2012. “No Scottish or Northern Ireland players as Team GB football squad is announced for the Olympics.” *The Independent*, July 2.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/no-scottish-or-northern-ireland-players-as-team-gb-football-squad-is-announced-for-the-olympics-7904093.html>