**Ilya Neustadt, Norbert Elias, and the Leicester Department: Personal
Correspondence and the History of Sociology in Britain.**

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Abstract

The central aims of this paper are: (1) to explore the utility of using personal correspondence as a source of data for sociological investigations into the history of sociology in the UK; (2) in relation to this undertaking, to advance the beginnings of a figurational analysis of epistolary forms; and (3), to provide an empirically-grounded discussion of the historical significance of the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester (a University largely ignored in ‘standard histories’ of the subject) at a formative phase in the development of the discipline within the UK. The correspondence drawn upon in the paper is between Norbert Elias and Ilya Neustadt between 1962 and 1964 when Elias was Professor of Sociology at the University of Ghana and Ilya Neustadt was Professor of Sociology and Head of the Sociology Department at the University of Leicester. From an analysis of this correspondence, we elucidate an emergent dynamic to the relationship between Neustadt and Elias, one which, we argue, undergirds the development of sociology at Leicester and the distinctive character of the intellectual climate that prevailed there during the 1960s. The paper concludes with a consideration of whether it was a collapse of this dynamic that led to a total breakdown in the relationship between Neustadt and Elias, and by extension, an important phase in the expansion of sociology at Leicester.

Keywords: History of British sociology; Norbert Elias; Ilya Neustadt; epistolary forms; correspondence; figurational methods.

Introduction

A number of authors have provided authoritative accounts of the history of sociology within the UK. Principal among these are A. H. Halsey's *A History of Sociology in Britain* (2004); A. H. Halsey and W. G. Runciman's edited collection *British Sociology: Seen from Without and Within* (2005); and J. Platt's *The British Sociological Association: A Sociological History* (2003). Together, these studies — which have drawn *inter alia* upon 'insider' and 'outsider' accounts of sociologists working in key departments, professorial surveys, interviews with key sociologists, individual biographies, and documentary analysis — constitute what is here referred to as the now 'standard history' of the development of sociology in the UK. However, this standard history is by no means a fully complete nor an uncontentious one. For example, as Bulmer (2005) suggests, such accounts of British sociology are limited because of an over concentration on the 'golden triangle' of Oxford, Cambridge, and London (in particular the LSE). While there are passing references to the departments at, for example, Manchester under Gluckman and Worsley, Edinburgh under Burns, Liverpool under Simey, and, indeed, Leicester under Neustadt and Elias¹, these are characteristically presented as, comparatively speaking, secondary developments, the details for which are relatively sparse (Bulmer 2005: 37). The significance of the Leicester sociology department, in particular, has thus far not been given the empirical attention it arguably deserves, particularly given that it is now increasingly recognized as one of the most important departments in the training and intellectual formation of UK sociologists (see, for example, Banks 1989; Brown 1987; Rojek 2004; Turner 2006; Dunning 2006a). Key figures involved in the department as either staff or students include some of the most notable names in British sociology, such as: Martin Albrow, Sheila Allen, David Ashton, Clive Ashworth, Mike Attalides, Joe and Olive Banks, Anthony Barnett, Richard Brown, Chris Bryant, Percy Cohen, Chris

Dandeker, John Eldridge, David Field, James Fulcher, Mike Gane, Anthony Giddens, Miriam Glucksman, John H. Goldthorpe, Paul Hirst, Sydney Holloway, Keith Hopkins, Earl Hopper, Jennifer Hurstfield, Geoff Ingham, Nick Jewson, Terry Johnson, Mike Kelly, Richard Kilminster, Derek Layder, Mary McIntosh, Gavin Mackenzie, Rob Mears, Nicos Mouzelis, Pat Murphy, Chris Rojek, Graeme Salaman, Ken Sheard, Dennis Smith, John Scott, Dominic Strinati, Laurie Taylor, Ken Thompson, Ivan Waddington, Dave Walsh, Rod Watson, Bryan Wilson, Ian Varcoe and Sami Zubaida

Another characteristic of the standard history of sociology is the tendency to neglect, with some notable exceptions, personal correspondence as a source of data. Following the ground-breaking work of writers such as Stanley (see, for example, Stanley 2004; 2010) and others interested in the analytical and methodological value of life writing or 'documents of life' (Plummer 2001; Roberts 2002), there has been a growing interest in letters and other forms of personal correspondence as referents of the social universe. In relation to the history of sociology, such 'informal'² sources have typically been used to document individual biographies. For instance, Mills and Mills's (2000) edited collection of the correspondence of C. Wright Mills provides a fascinating insight to the work of one of America's most influential sociologists. Likewise, Oakes and Vidich (1999) draw heavily on the same correspondence to examine the working relationship between Mills and Hans Gerth³, highlighting some of the realities and complications of academic collaboration and publishing (see also Brewer 2005). There are also many other intellectual biographies/autobiographies drawing upon 'informal' sources such as personal correspondence which yield insights of considerable import to the history of sociology more generally (see, for example, Homans 1986; Elias 1994; Johnston 1995; Chriss 1999).

The relative neglect of personal correspondence and other ‘documents of life’ as sources in analyses of the history of sociology in Britain may simply relate to problems of access rather than, say, any deep-seated or axiomatic epistemological proclivities on the part of the authors of such work. Yet a chance discovery of a lost research project (see Goodwin and O’Connor 2006), and its supporting correspondence, provides us here with an opportunity firstly, to explore the insights that such sources might yield; secondly, to document more concretely aspects of the rise of the Leicester sociology department in the 1960s under the now little known figure, Ilya Neustadt; and thirdly to begin to document the more general influence of this department on successive waves of British sociologists.

The remainder of this paper is split into two broad sections. In the first we consider the value of using the Neustadt–Elias letters as a source of sociological data, and provide an exposition of our analytical approach towards these documents — one which draws upon the ideas of Elias himself. In the second section, we present our analysis through, broadly speaking, a move from more specific to more general themes as follows: firstly, the relationship between Neustadt and Elias; secondly, the expansion of the Department of Sociology at Leicester; and thirdly, a consideration of the more general growth of the sociological labour market with the UK during the early to mid 1960s.

‘Just a line to let you know’: ‘figurational’ starting points

In recent years there has been a growing sociological interest in the use of ‘documents of life’ (Plummer 2001; Roberts 2002) or ‘naturally occurring forms of life writing’ (Stanley 2004: 224) such as diaries and letters (Letherby and Zdrodowski 1995; Roper 2001; Smart 2007). The value of letters is that they can yield a great deal of insight, providing both factual and substantive information relating to the writers of such material and their

implied readers and audiences. However, the use of letters as sources of sociological data equally presents a series of epistemic risks. On the one hand, there is a temptation to treat such sources as unproblematic referents of social reality. That is: to adopt a naïvely empiricist orientation which holds that biographies, life stories, and letters unproblematically reflect an objective ‘external’ reality (Roberts 2002; Gerber 2005; Poustie 2010). When presenting their thoughts, reflections, observations, comments, ideas, and so forth in personal correspondence, letter writers are typically under no particular, necessary, or inevitable constraints to be ‘truthful’ or ‘accurate’ with regard to what they write. Indeed, if anything, letter writing is often characterized by highly selective and partial accounts of specific ‘life worlds’, often in a manner which involves a degree of self-censorship, perhaps even ‘artful misrepresentation’ (Stanley and Dampier 2006: 25). Moreover, particularly with regard to material that has survived historically contingent and sometimes arbitrary processes of ‘archival selection’, the very availability of some documents, and not others, means that present-day researchers often have only a fragmented collection of extant material from which to develop their observations (Steedman 2001; Poustie 2010). Beyond such issues, there are a number of perennial epistemological problems concerning the balance between discursive ‘production’ and ‘reproduction’ involved in the processes by which researchers form interpretations and understandings of the documents they consider, whilst seeking simultaneously to avoid merely the ‘discovery’ of their own projections reflected back at them (Certeau 1998; Stanley and Wise 2006; Poustie 2010).

Equally dangerous, however, is a tendency towards a collapse into subjectivism — where letters and similar forms of personal correspondence are treated as hermeneutically-sealed, independent vessels of uniqueness, without any sustained consideration of the social conditions within which such documents were produced *and of which they form part*.

The task, to employ a metaphor favoured by Elias, is to steer research between the ‘Scylla of philosophical absolutism and the Charybdis of sociological relativism’ (Elias 1971: 358)⁴. Elias’s (2001) own theoretical work allows us to view letters not as ‘static’ and ‘fixed’ self-contained fragments, but instead as themselves (part and parcel of) ‘processes’ involving relationships past, present and (possible) future, and as referents of changing balances of power and shifting human interdependencies. Letters thus are indicative of, constitutive of, and embedded within, dynamic webs of relationships or ‘figurations’ that extend considerably beyond those pertaining to the words on the page.

Of particular importance in this connection is Elias’s critique of *Homo clausus* or ‘closed personality’ models of perception (Elias 1978). Briefly, Elias’s model of *Homo clausus* arises from his more general thesis on the sociogenetic development of a particularly dominant self-experience and psychic formation that, he proposes, emerges in tandem with broader social changes, notably those relating to state-formation, and, in turn, ‘civilizing processes’, which involve a *social constraint towards self-restraint* (Elias 2000). Under such figural conditions, Elias argues, there typically emerges a dominant socially-instilled existential reification of a dividing line between ‘me’ ‘in here’, and ‘society’ ‘out there’, and many other perceptual and conceptual divisions which relate to this fundamental distinction (Elias 2000: 472). Sociologists and philosophers are by no means conceptually immune to such a self-experience. Consequently, their approaches to ‘the social world’ (including the very notion that they themselves somehow stand apart from ‘it’) tend to be grounded within this restrictive conception of humans. With regard to writings about auto/biography, the dangers of *Homo clausus* orientations are realized in a tendency to focus exclusively upon uncovering and reflecting upon the significance of ‘the individual’, glimpsing into ‘their’ ‘unique and private world’, their personal thoughts,

feelings, attitudes and ideas, and without recourse to the broader sets of interdependencies within which these take form.

In place of *Homo clausus* models and orientations, Elias advocates the alternative adoption of *Homines aperti* as a guiding image of humans and the societies they form: of open, pluralities of bonded and interdependent individuals — a model which has important implications for how letters are perceived in sociological analysis. As Stanley and Morgan (1993) suggest, sociologists need to reject ‘any notion that “a life” can be understood as a representation of a single self in isolation from networks of interwoven biographies’ (Stanley and Morgan 1993: 3). As such, analysis of life-writings would be wrongly conceived as being only concerned with ‘the individual’ writer and/or ‘their’ ‘uniqueness’. Instead, letters are historically and spatially constituted — they provide insight into group identity and behavioural standards, both illuminating and involving changing relationships, interdependencies, power balances and, hence, ‘figurations’.

Thus, in this paper we seek to draw upon Elias and his work as both the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’ of our analysis to the extent that we employ his sociological ideas, albeit in a somewhat rudimentary way, in an analysis of his correspondence with Neustadt. Accordingly, we seek here to advance the beginnings of a *figurational analysis of epistolary forms*: an analytical orientation which has a series of implications for how we have approached the correspondence as a source of sociological data. Put simply, by epistolary forms we are here referring to emergent discursive practices — the patterns and dynamics that we have been able to elucidate from the correspondence. Such epistolary forms refer to formal and conventional attributes of the correspondence, such as the authors’ salutations and greetings; their sign-offs and farewells; their use of tone and voice; and so on. However, beyond such conventions, epistolary forms also include

immanent characteristics that emerge from dialogic exchange: the authors' perspectival emphases; their posturing with respect to one another; their linguistic 'footing'; their implicit and sometimes unstated shared understandings; their respective temporal and spatial orientations; each author's imagined reception and readership of what they have written; and so forth. At a more basic level, we are also concerned with the substance and content of the correspondence. Accordingly, both 'form(s)' and 'content(s)' are here treated effectively as 'relational clues': that is, as data which have the potential to yield insights concerning the broader social and sociological landscape. In this way we are explicitly avoiding a tendency to treat as antinomic the 'real' and the 'discursive', and are following in a tradition in which the 'truth', or perhaps better, the 'sociological value', of a letter 'exists in the unfolding relationship between correspondents rather than solely in its content ... [since] truth is often less at issue than entertainment' (Jolly and Stanley 2005: 76). Following Elias's approach, the correspondence will also be treated 'processually', and more concretely, as standing at an historical juncture where sociology was emerging as an increasingly significant academic discipline in the UK. Moreover, it is very much in the spirit of Elias's work to treat a quotidian aspect of human relationships — such as the 'private' correspondence between two close colleagues — as a source of sociological and historical insight, in particular, in the context of this paper, with regard to understandings of the development of sociology as a discipline in the UK.

Our intention here is not so much to follow Elias's 'methodology', but rather to employ aspects of the 'method' that takes shape in his sociological practice. In essence, aspects of his method can be distilled into three kinds of question which we have here used as starting points for our analysis: 1) an orientation towards sociogenetic questions, for example, *how did 'this' come to be?*; 2) an orientation towards relational questions, for

example, *in what ways are 'these' inter-related?*; and 3) an orientation towards *Homines aperti*, for example, *what broader chains of interdependence are involved in 'this'?*

I'm always delighted to read the things you say

The correspondence we draw upon in this paper relates to the period when Neustadt was in Leicester and Elias in Ghana between October 1962 and July 1964. It is made up of some 34 typed letters which were archived by the Norbert Elias Foundation after his (Elias's) death. The archive contained copies of letters from Neustadt and carbon copies of fourteen of Elias's replies. It may be the case that this is not a complete record as the archive only contains those letters Elias chose to save, although, as we have already noted, it is unusual to have a complete set of such correspondence (see Plummer 2001; Stanley 2004). To protect confidentiality, some names, places, or events have been anonymized.

Relationships of interdependence in the Neustadt–Elias correspondence

Neustadt and Elias had a close and personal friendship stemming back to their first meeting at the LSE, where, no doubt in relation to their both being Jewish refugee intellectuals, they found they had much in common (Mennell 1992). Their considerable affection for one another is immediately evident in the correspondence. They would almost always begin with the salutation 'My Dear Ilya...' / 'My Dear Norbert'. They readily looked forward to visiting each other when they could, and expressed enjoyment at having had occasional telephone conversations, with statements such as '*I was glad to hear your voice*'. The personal warmth between Neustadt and Elias is evident, for example, in the following extract:

I think it is absolutely necessary that you should come here over Christmas. I would say it simply because I am missing you, although this is also the case and there are all kinds of things which I cannot do but which you can do. (Elias, October 1962)

Implicit in the above extract is a key emergent epistolary characteristic of the Neustadt–Elias correspondence. Elias’s reference to ‘all kinds of things which I cannot do but which you can do’ is significant. Variations of this expressed dependence appear throughout the correspondence by both men. Here Elias appears simply to be saying ‘I am missing you’. However, viewed in relation to the broader patterns of correspondence between the two men, Elias is also saying something else: ‘I need your help to manage my affairs’; ‘I am still dependent on you for some things’. This too, can only properly be understood as part of a reciprocal exchange with Neustadt in which he (Neustadt) would equally express his dependence on Elias for wise counsel with regard to his institutional duties and the running of research projects in the Department:

My job in the University at the moment is something almost impossible to describe ... I am practically sitting on Establishment Board meetings every day and have to do with masses of appointments in everything... But this is all very unfair and very unkind to churn it all out to you in a letter ... (Neustadt 5th June 1963)

We have had endless discussions and rumpuses in the research committee, and I am afraid that in the absence of someone like yourself who knows thoroughly what the whole investigation is about and who can direct it day by day, and who can give the officers a sense of guidance, it is very difficult to see what else can be done. (Neustadt, May 1963)

Beyond such exchanges where either man would simply express the need for support or advice from the other, the letters also contain many examples of where the authors laid bare and reflected upon their own strengths, weaknesses, concerns and problems, often in a way which involved the unstated assumption that the one man's weaknesses were in part compensated by the other's strengths and *vice versa*. For example, Elias repeatedly admitted that he was never very good at making or maintaining a wide circle of acquaintances, nor was he good at administration. Correspondingly, Neustadt recurrently expressed concerns about his own inability to devote time to writing and research on Africa, and in particular, solicited Elias's advice in relation to his (Neustadt's) inaugural lecture. This reciprocal dialogic pattern is repeated again and again: 'here are my weaknesses, I am greatly in need of your strengths', which implicitly invited the response 'But your strengths are great, and I greatly depend on you for them, and look now at *my* weaknesses':

I am a very bad public relations man as you know. I am far too direct.

(Elias, October 1962)

....I remembered after a while your strictures about my committee antics,
and gave way to what the committee seemed to want, subject to your
being consulted first. (Neustadt, October 1962)

Here the pattern is again a characteristic one: Elias confesses to his inadequacy as a 'public relations man' — (as an opinion leader and university politician); and Neustadt effectively counters this by saying he followed Elias's valuable counsel by 'giving way' to the committee. Again, implicit in the statement is Neustadt's partial admission that he

tends not to ‘give way’ so easily, and that he is often rather more likely to steer opinion within such committees than to be led by them. This emergent informal protocol may in some ways be a familiar one in the sense that it is a characteristic of ‘modern’ European manners not to draw direct attention to an other’s weaknesses, and yet to highlight one’s own in a perhaps self-deprecating manner. However, such exchanges arguably reflected more than simple concerns for ‘courtesy’ and expressions of ‘respect’ (to which, of course, Elias devoted a great deal of sociological attention [see, in particular, Elias 2000]). Viewed within the broader gestalt of dialogic exchanges, such sensibilities are also indicative of a more general pattern of ‘posturing’ between the two men with regard to the character of their personal interdependence and respective political and intellectual roles.

In this respect, we find a measure of empirical support for how the Neustadt–Elias relationship has been characterized elsewhere (see, for example, Rojek’s [2004] interview with Dunning). In such accounts, Elias is presented as the brilliant intellectual with ‘European’ mannerisms and certain eccentricities (Brown 1987; Mennell 1992; Rojek 2004); whereas Neustadt is portrayed as the politically astute manager and administrator, well connected within sociology and within the hierarchy at the University of Leicester. However, it would be wrong to surmise from this characterization that the dependence was largely one-way: that is, to view the relationship simply in terms of Neustadt’s intellectual dependence upon Elias. Rather, our analysis of the correspondence would suggest the relationship was one of fundamental *interdependence*, albeit one that involved a shifting fulcrum and balance, but definitely not one of one-way dependence. Through the prism of present-day standards — particularly those pertaining to a ‘research excellence’ model of intellectual esteem (as has become institutionalized in the RAE/REF within the UK) — Elias’s considerably more developed publications record

relative to that of Neustadt marks him out as the more significant figure.⁵ In such a climate, the importance of being a ‘good teacher’, an astute administrator, or indeed, a pivotal disciplinary champion (arguably Neustadt’s key strengths) have rather problematically become somewhat devalued.

The following extracts are broadly characteristic of how Neustadt and Elias maintained the expression of their on-going and mutual dependence:

My dear Ilya, I want you to do something ... for me. You remember the English translation of Comte’s first chapter which I use so often in my courses? I want you to edit this... All that needs doing is to check the text with the original and to write a short introduction which can concentrate on two or three points... You are the obvious choice to do it and I must *absolutely insist* that you find time for it. It will give you great pleasure when you have done it. And it will give great pleasure to me. (Elias, March 1964)

I was very glad to know that you are getting on with your things, by which I take it that something is likely to be ready for publication — am I right? I hope I am, and I hope that you do keep it in mind that when all is said and done you might as well disregard everything I have said in this letter and get on with what is the paramount thing of all, both for you and for everybody, namely get out as much of your stuff as possible for public use. It is the best possible service you can render at the present time to anybody. (Neustadt, January 1964)

In the first of the above extracts, Elias appears to be soliciting a favour from Neustadt. However, again, viewed in terms of the broader structure of epistolary exchanges between the two men, there are other possibilities. Elias repeatedly sought to have an impact upon Neustadt's levels of written output, with Elias playing a crucial role in encouraging Neustadt to persist with his academic work. The letters show a recurrent, if gentle, encouragement from Elias to Neustadt to write. Thus, in the first of the extracts, Elias is providing an intellectual opportunity for Neustadt to develop a paper on a topic that he (Elias) knew to be of considerable interest to Neustadt: the work of Auguste Comte and its enduring significance to contemporary sociological issues and debates. Effectively, Elias was here providing Neustadt with an excuse to suspend, if only for a short duration, his (Neustadt's) otherwise continuous commitment to teaching and administration, and to pursue for a change an activity that would in fact benefit Neustadt considerably. There are numerous other such examples within the correspondence where Elias offered intellectual and emotional support to Neustadt, in particular in relation to Neustadt's research in Ghana and his inaugural lecture for Leicester.

This encouragement to 'get on with your own stuff for your own sake' was also provided by Neustadt to Elias as can be seen in the second of the above extracts. The extract is from towards the end of a letter where Neustadt had outlined, in the earlier sections, a number of the departmental issues and challenges that he was then facing. It was characteristic of both men not to solicit advice in a direct manner unless, as we have seen, this was actually in the interests of the other to do so. Such requests were typically made more obliquely in the hope that a response would be forthcoming. Often any discussion of problems, difficulties, or 'bad news' was presented apologetically and seemingly reluctantly — as though to say 'I did not want to trouble you with this'. None the less, the requests would still be made, albeit implicitly. For example:

‘I don’t know what I can do without writing in greater detail. The difficulty is that this might embroil me into going over a number of problems in the Department and possible developments which I thought could wait, such as they are. However, here are a few things...’ (Neustadt, January 1964).

Thus, in summary, the pattern of exchanges between Neustadt and Elias involved a recurrent re-assertion of a mutually recognized interdependence between the two men. But this dialogic pattern also involved arguably more than a simple expression of ‘one needing the other’. As we have seen, the exchanges were characterized by a degree of ‘posturing’ around a carefully defined and maintained axis of ‘who was better at what’. That is to say, the correspondence between Neustadt and Elias comprised a means for the men actively to maintain both a personal and professional relationship through a kind of discursive performance of relative weakness, sometimes ineptitude in certain respects, always set against considerable strengths, achievements, perhaps unspoken excellence in others — a ‘jostling’ back and forth that served to maintain a clear sense of respective position. Such maintenance was necessary because, in certain respects, Neustadt and Elias could easily have become professional rivals. For example, when a Chair in sociology became available at Leicester, both Neustadt and Elias applied for the post. It is noteworthy that, even in his application, Elias made it clear that he felt that Neustadt was more deserving of the post than himself. It was important for the two men to find a way of working that suited their mutual strengths, without undermining one another — a pattern that was to prove crucial to the development of the Leicester department. Indeed, this characteristic of the correspondence became increasingly significant in the run up to Elias’s return to Leicester and continental Europe where Neustadt sought

again to find Elias a post a Leicester in the sociology department (eventually as Research Fellow from 1964):

You mentioned the possibility that retired people, according to the Robbins report should be reappointed or re-employed. This is of course an interesting prospect... Leicester, I feel, very much as my home ... I also feel that I must concentrate more on research and writing than on teaching, but of course I like to do some teaching. This is what I am doing at the moment, apart from running the department. (Elias, November 1963)

My dear Norbert, I hope that this next year will be fruitful for you, and needless to say I was also anxious to secure a good financial basis for you so that you may have a year in peace during which to organise your affairs...and finally, to give you breathing space for your further plans. And quite apart from all this, needless to say that I look forward immensely to your being here and being able — I say it quite unashamedly and unreservedly — to have some sensible advice from time to time. (Neustadt, July 1964).

Here, again, we can observe Elias allaying any possible fears that Neustadt might have that he (Elias) would want on his return to Leicester to impinge upon Neustadt's administrative prowess, and Neustadt's correspondent reassurance to Elias that he (Elias) would be able to have the 'breathing space' to pursue his research and writing: their respective roles, once again, remained effectively intact.

Sociology at Leicester

The relationship between Neustadt and Elias is also significant because it arguably formed part of the foundations of the sociology department at Leicester in two key respects. Firstly, their relationship was important in the straightforward sense that the two men together played a crucial role in the rapid expansion of the department in the 1950s and 1960s. However, secondly, the fundamental interdependence that characterized the relationship between Neustadt and Elias underpinned the formation of a distinctive intellectual climate in Leicester sociology. The climate was one in which personal bonds underpinned intellectual bonds and *vice versa*; and in relation to this there emerged a clear ‘established’ sense of what ‘proper sociology’ involved and, indeed, that Leicester was the place where such sociology was undertaken:

I am increasingly impressed by the fact — even though I say so myself of how few people know what sociology is really about ... I am prepared to accept only you, and myself in some ways!! There are, however, I suppose, a few who have an inkling. I am also impressed by the fact how deep anthropological training distorts and simply creates a blockage and deep-rooted inabilities for *sociological* analysis. At the other side we have the do-gooders and the social investigators and the pop sociologists, and finally, the downright cynics — these, of course, are the most enraging of all.
(Neustadt, January 1964)

We have appointed [] to an Assistant Lectureship, also [] the L.S.E. graduate whom you met last year when he applied here for a scholarship — he is now completing his M.Sc. and is a lively though still very immature chap, full of all sorts of LSE-ish notions which I hope [] will knock out of him... (Neustadt 12th June 1963)

We've started the staff seminars, and will also have a few outsiders.

Otherwise the round of committee meetings, etc. is there, and I'm trying to cope as best I can. (Neustadt, October 1962).

Neustadt's mention in the second of the extracts immediately above, of a particular member of staff 'knocking out' of a newcomer 'all kinds of LSE-ish' notions is significant — albeit that it was pitched in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner. Here and in other sections of the correspondence, both Neustadt and Elias convey the distinct impression that (1) they know what 'proper sociology' involves; (2) many of these newcomers or outsiders do not; and (3) most newcomers to the department need a degree of correcting, training, and re-training, in order to facilitate an 'unlearning' and otherwise 'ironing out' of the unwanted, mistaken ideas and 'bad habits' from elsewhere. From the correspondence, there is a clear sense in which both Neustadt and Elias considered the Leicester department to constitute a training ground for new practitioners within what was then a nascent and rapidly expanding discipline. It is noteworthy to mention, in this connection, that Neustadt's inaugural was entitled 'On Teaching Sociology'. Neustadt's emphasis primarily on the teaching of sociology is consistent with his lifetime commitment to help establish (a particular model of) sociology as a discipline and a vocation. He did so often consciously at the expense of his own publications agenda, seemingly at a time where, to the degree that Neustadt's perceptions are accurate, publishers were actively soliciting manuscripts to make up for a shortfall of material relating to this rapidly expanding field: '...publishers at the moment are continually approaching us for manuscripts ... the situation in sociology is such that practically anything would be publishable today' (Neustadt, February 1964).

Neustadt's mention of 'the staff seminars' in the earlier cited extract is also significant. Here he could assume that Elias knew the entirety of what such seminars would entail. They formed an important part of the 'Leicester tradition', and were a principal forum for the open, if often confrontational, exchange of ideas (see Rojek 2004). The reference to 'outsiders' in the same extract may well have contained dual meanings — as referring both to people from outside of the department, but also to those outside of the Leicester 'fold' so to speak. Within the Leicester department itself, there were stark divisions. While a number of people within the department — principal among them Neustadt, Eric Dunning and (latterly) Richard Kilminster — were staunch supporters of Elias's approach; others were to varying degrees opposed to his ideas. In the latter group were such notable figures as Percy Cohen, John Goldthorpe, and Anthony Giddens (Rojek 2004). Such divisions made for an environment characterized by sometimes quite heated intellectual conflict and academic 'sparring', particularly via the staff seminar forum — attendance to which was only notionally voluntary (Rojek 2004). The staff seminar confrontations appear to have formed an important intellectual crucible — a forum which Neustadt in particular viewed as an academic skills testing ground for members of the department, and a platform for the maintenance and development of 'proper sociology':

He talked to me about the [seminar paper] in advance, and I warned him repeatedly as to length and structure. But nothing doing. It was all over the place, and for someone who knew nothing about the research, or very little, it was far from being clear what it was all about. He thinks that he can make up by fast reading and masses of quotations for the absence of incisiveness and focus.

(Neustadt January 1964)

Notwithstanding such a climate, whether or not individual members were in favour or against the ideas of Elias, he (Elias) together with Neustadt had considerable influence over the sociological agenda and the character of the Leicester department at that time. With their shared backgrounds as émigré scholars, Neustadt and Elias brought with them a distinctly cosmopolitan orientation. Part and parcel of this ‘continentalism’ was the fostering of a climate of intellectual paternalism, where senior academic figures held considerable sway over their juniors, and in which newcomers to the department were understood to serve a kind of ‘academic apprenticeship’. Such cosmopolitanism also underpinned the attraction to the department of scholars from the US, Germany, Russia, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Iraq, and South Africa (Rojek 2004). All of this made for a department that was to prove to be a vital ‘seedbed’ for a whole generation of productive and influential sociologists (Shils 1970: 570).

Expansion of sociology in Britain

As Dunning (2006a: 2) has argued, the 1960s was a decade of rapid growth for the discipline of sociology within many Western countries, however, the expansion of sociology at Leicester under Neustadt outpaced almost every other institution in the UK such that it came to rival the LSE as one of the most important institutions for the training of sociological students and university teachers of the subject. Neustadt was keenly aware of the expansion, both at Leicester, and beyond, not least in relation to his own rapidly rising student numbers:

We have 58 students in the second year and 46 in the third — well, do you remember the days when you and I had one specialist for the two of us? (Neustadt, November 1963)

Neustadt's invitation to Elias to 'remember the old days' already has a somewhat familiar ring to it — even as early as the 1960s, Neustadt was recognizing some of the inevitable consequences of the move towards a mass system of higher education, and was accordingly rather nostalgic for an older model of the academy.

Although the long-term impact of Neustadt and Elias's sociological training has been debated elsewhere (see Banks 1989), the grounding sociologists received within the department arguably meant they were equipped with a 'sociology relevant to major problems of the contemporary world — a subject able to provide some real understanding of and purchase on those problems...' (Brown 1987: 535). This training also meant they were well placed subsequently to become significant sociologists in their own right (see Marshall 1982; Banks 1989; Dunning 2006a, 2006b). Coupled with the expansion of higher education and the emergence of sociology departments in other institutions, there was a great demand for academics trained within the discipline. Such a trend is documented extensively throughout the Neustadt–Elias correspondence:

The whole position as regards Sociology in this country is absolutely fantastic. There are Chairs [and] departments being set up all over the place, dozens of posts and all sorts of nonsensical appointments and developments being made and taking place. All this has come in many ways far too soon and far too late. If [] or [] or both go, I shall have two or three Assistant Lectureships to fill, and they are just not to be got. In addition, there will be one or two Tutorial Assistants to appoint, and again it is very difficult to get them, particularly as quite a number of our third-year students are now off to do postgraduate work in Oxford, America, Canada, etc. (Neustadt, May 1963).

Thus, from a straightforward reading of the correspondence, we can see that Leicester sociology graduates went on to positions at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Ghana, Reading, Swansea, Syracuse, and so forth. However, as the above extract also serves to illustrate, the rapid turnover of graduates and staff had a number of detrimental consequences for the Leicester department. Most immediately, there was an issue of retention. Staff and graduate students trained within the Leicester department could move with relative ease into the newer sociology departments. However, these moves were often into much higher grades than those available at Leicester; with assistant lecturers moving straight into professorial, senior lecturer or fellow positions. This led Neustadt to make the comment in related correspondence that it would soon become a mark of ‘distinction to be an ordinary lecturer’ (24th February 1964). The correspondence also reveals Neustadt’s frustration at not being able to offer equivalent posts and grades in order to retain staff. His comment that appointments elsewhere were variously ‘nonsensical’ is, viewed in relation to the broader patterns of dialogical exchange, indicative of his perception that ‘lesser’ departments were able to offer relatively junior (at least in the eyes of Neustadt and Elias) applicants ‘fantastic’ positions that were not necessarily consonant with these individuals’ sociological statures. There is a sense in which Neustadt was sharing with Elias the implicit gripe that ‘anyone can now get a chair nowadays’. Thus, Neustadt was at this time coming increasingly to recognize, on the one hand, the value of graduates and staff who received their training at Leicester, and on the other, his own limitations in being able to retain ‘ownership’ and influence over the intellectual and professional pathways that such individuals were to pursue:

I have to appoint this coming Friday three Assistant Lecturers! ... Two of our best finalists have been accepted by colleges in Oxford. Two others

are going to Canada. In short, while it may be very nice to be such a source of supply, it is a pretty ghastly business just now to find any replacements at any level — nor do we get any post-graduate students... The whole situation in Sociology in this country is becoming quite absurd — for example, I had in my gift, so to speak, the Chair of Sociology in Swansea for next October. I offered it on a plate to [], but he turned it down, very wisely I think. (Neustadt, June 1963)

The position in the country is simply appalling; there is a kind of general round of pinching going on and desperate seeking of personnel. It is quite silly to have started this flood of sociological developments without having prepared the ground properly... Indeed, it is difficult to see how we can go on affording the luxury of ‘training’ would be sociologists. (Neustadt, January 1964)

The situation Neustadt describes and alludes to above is one that had become in some ways self-perpetuating. As graduate students and teaching staff left for other departments, Neustadt experienced increasing difficulty in finding able individuals to teach the Leicester programme. Consequently, those who remained in the department faced an increasing teaching load in tandem with rising student numbers. In turn, such high teaching loads came at the expense of research time, and with it, prospects for promotion; and staff who remained were compelled to seek more favourable conditions elsewhere (see, for example, Neustadt 30th January 1964). Neustadt was also expressing a kind of basic paradox: the more effective Leicester became as a sociological training ground, the more difficult it was to retain staff and students. Effectively, in Neustadt’s

view at least, the benefits of the Leicester department's great investment in the training of new sociologists were being reaped by rival institutions.

Irrespective of the consequences and the cost to Leicester, the letters also reveal the significant role that Neustadt in particular played within the expansion of British sociology – with colleagues from other universities approaching him directly for staff and him seemingly holding positions at other institutions within his 'gift', as he put it. It is difficult to check the veracity of Neustadt's claim on this count, though it is worth noting that it is entirely consistent with data derived from interviews with those employed at Leicester during Neustadt's headship. Nonetheless, it is clear that sociologists who passed through the Leicester department at this time went on to become some of the most significant sociologists in Britain and beyond (see, for example, Dunning 2006a). The influence of Neustadt in particular, and also Elias on the more general development of sociology in the UK should, therefore, not be under-estimated or overlooked.

Conclusion

A central theme in the analysis we have presented in this paper is that of the importance of a distinctive dynamic to the relationship between Neustadt and Elias as it is played out in the epistolary patterns of their personal correspondence, both to the particular character of the Leicester department, and to the sociological training received by a generation of sociologists who were associated with the department during Neustadt's period as head. The dynamic of an expressed mutual dependence around a clearly defined axis of respective personal strengths and weaknesses is indeed a prominent theme in the data we have analysed, and is a characteristic that it would not be possible to discern from the formal histories and sources both of the Leicester department and sociology in the UK more generally. Ultimately, we might speculate, a key point of a later

disagreement between Neustadt and Elias — when the two men had a serious ‘falling out’ in the mid 1970s — could possibly have stemmed in part from a breakdown of the protocol associated with their distinctive relational dynamic. The pattern in which either man had repeatedly expressed his dependence on the other became increasingly undermined and disrupted as Elias became effectively positioned in the later correspondence as the relatively more dependent party; specifically in relation to Neustadt arranging employment for Elias at the University of Leicester. It was one thing to say, again and again, ‘I’m in need of your support’, but quite another to say, or even to imply, ‘you need my support’ — which appears to have been one of the principal causes of the later disagreement between Elias and Neustadt that ultimately led to a total cessation of communication between the two men from the mid 1970s onwards (see Mennell 1992: 286; Elias 1974). It is worth noting that this breakdown in their relationship also coincided with the end of a period of rapid expansion of sociology at Leicester.

Furthermore, the significance of the Leicester department, and in particularly Ilya Neustadt as pivotal figure in British sociology, has thus far been alluded to (see Shils 1970; Dunning 2006a; Rojek 2004), but not so much illustrated through recourse to empirical evidence. The correspondence has allowed us to document more concretely some of the ways in which Neustadt sought, and indeed enjoyed considerable success in, exerting influence over a key generation of sociologists. However, whilst we find some empirical support for how this relationship has been depicted by previous commentators (see, again, Dunning 2006a, 2006b) the correspondence firmly shows that the relationship was one of fundamental *interdependence* both in relation to Neustadt’s running of the department and Elias’s own development as an intellectual figure, and not one of simple dependence.

Finally, we have been able to show how the relationship between Neustadt and Elias underpinned a prevailing cosmopolitanism in the Leicester department, and a distinctively continental European intellectual model, which extended both to the sociological agenda and the academic practices within the department — characteristics that were to prove formative to some of the key sociological figures who migrated to other British sociological departments. Through their relationship, Neustadt and Elias forged a sense of ‘intellectual ownership’, both of what ‘proper sociology’ entailed, and also in terms of having a claim upon the development of a department that served as a platform upon which to advance their own particular model of intellectual stewardship. The correspondence also reveals Neustadt’s frustration at the Leicester department, effectively, becoming a victim of its own success whereby in the context of a rapidly expanding sociological labour market, he and Elias were less able to retain graduate students and key members of academic staff as their very training eased their migration to a proliferation of posts elsewhere. Perhaps paradoxically, it is this migration of so many key sociological figures at a formative phase in the development of the discipline that remains to be, in particular, Neustadt’s greatest legacy to British sociology.

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Notes

¹ In 1949, Ilya Neustadt was appointed as a Lecturer in Sociology in the Department of Economics at the University of Leicester then University College Leicester. Five years later, a separate Department of Sociology was established with Neustadt as the 'senior lecturer in charge'. By 1962 Neustadt obtained a personal chair in sociology and then continued as Head of Department until 1980. Alongside his work in the Sociology Department, Neustadt was Dean of Social Sciences at Leicester between 1962–1965, and was also a Professor of Sociology, and Head of the Sociology Department, at the University College Ghana, 1957–1958. Norbert Elias was appointed as Lecturer in sociology in 1954 and was acting Head of the sociology department between 1957–1958, while Neustadt was in Ghana. Elias was promoted to Reader in 1959, and was offered a 'special post' for the 1962–1963 academic year in lieu of his retirement. He declined this offer and went on to become Professor of Sociology, and Head of the Sociology Department, at the University College Ghana, 1962–1964. Elias returned to Leicester in 1964 as a Research Fellow in Sociology and remained in, or around, the Department until his move to the University of Bielefeld in 1978. For a more detailed account of Neustadt's biography see, for example, Marshall 1982; for notes on Elias's biography see Mennell 1992; Elias 1994; Rojek 2004).

² The distinction we draw here between 'formal' and 'informal' sources is a rather loose one. By 'informal' we are referring to sources that are characteristically not contained within the official record — particularly the 'formal histories' of specific departments or disciplines. More particularly, this follows a more general resurgence of interest within the social sciences, particularly classical and modern history, of the enterprise of epistolography see, for example, Chartier 1991; Schulte and von Tippelskirch 2004; Poster and Mitchell 2007.

³ It is worth noting, in this connection, that Gerth, like Elias, was one of Karl Mannheim's assistants in Frankfurt.

⁴ In classical Greek mythology Charybdis was a creature that took the form of a dangerous whirlpool separated by a narrow channel of sea from the sea monster Scylla. The metaphor of Scylla and Charybdis represents two opposing points of peril that need to be negotiated simultaneously.

⁵ Such an assumption has been made, for example, by Deem 1994: 4 who accounts for Neustadt's lack of present-day sociological prominence in terms of his limited publications profile, which, she explicitly states, would likely not stand up well to the scrutiny of, say, the Research Assessment Exercise.