The Established and the Outsiders

Norbert Elias
and John L. Scotson
THE ESTABLISHED AND THE OUTSIDERS
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THE ESTABLISHED AND THE OUTSIDERS

A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems

Second edition

NORBERT ELIAS
JOHN L. SCOTSON

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TO

OUR FRIENDS

IN THE

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

WHO HAVE GIVEN US MUCH HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT
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Foreword

*The Established and the Outsiders* was first published in 1965. It grew out of a study of a community near Leicester in the late 1950s and early 1960s by John Scotson, a local schoolteacher interested in juvenile delinquency. But in the hands of Norbert Elias this local study was reworked to illuminate social processes of general significance in human society—including how a group of people can monopolise power chances and use them to exclude and stigmatise members of another very similar group (for example, through the powerful medium of gossip), and how that is experienced in the collective “we-images” of both groups.

Ten years later Elias dictated, in English, a long new introduction for the Dutch translation of the book. This “Theoretical Essay on Established and Outsider Relations” spelled out how the theory could be applied to a whole range of changing patterns of human inequality: to relations between classes, ethnic groups, colonised and colonisers, men and women, parents and children, gays and straights. For many years it was thought that parts of the English text of this important essay had been lost, but they came to light in 1994, and the final version was assembled by myself and Saskia Visser. The essay is published in English for the first time in this volume, exactly as Elias dictated it, with only minor editorial changes. Shortly before his death in 1990, Elias added a brief appendix on Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mocking Bird* for the German edition of the book which is not included here.

*May 1994*  
Stephen Mennell  
University College, Dublin
Preface

*The Established and the Outsiders* is a study of a small community with a relatively old settlement as its core and two more recent settlements which have formed around it. The enquiry started like so many others because local people drew our attention to the fact that one of the neighbourhoods had a consistently higher delinquency rate than the others. Locally that particular neighbourhood was regarded as a delinquency area of low standing. As we began to probe into the actual evidence and to look for explanations, our interest shifted from the delinquency differentials to the differences in the character of the neighbourhoods and to their relationships with each other. In the course of a fairly intensive exploration of the microcosm of Winston Parva with its three distinct neighbourhoods, one got to know the place and some of its individual members sufficiently well. The fascination which its problems had for us steadily increased—all the more so as we became gradually aware that some of them had a paradigmatic character: they threw light on problems which one often encountered on a much larger scale in society at large.

As it turned out, the shift of the research interest from the delinquency problem to the wider problem of the relationship between different neighbourhoods within a community prevented what might have been a waste of effort. In the third year of the research the delinquency differentials between the two larger neighbourhoods (which had supported the local idea that one of them was a delinquency area) practically disappeared. What did not disappear was the image which the older neighbourhoods had of the newer neighbourhood with the formerly higher delinquency rate. The older neighbourhoods persisted in stigmatising the latter as a neighbourhood where delinquency was rampant. The question why opinions about these facts persisted, even though the facts themselves changed, was one of the questions which impressed itself upon us in the course of the enquiry although we had not set out to explore it. Another question was why the facts themselves
changed—why the delinquency differential between the two neighbourhhoods more or less disappeared.

Thus the study as presented here was not planned as such from the outset. We often followed clues and took up new problems which appeared as we went along and, in one or two cases, what we discovered on the way changed the main direction of the enquiry.

An investigation conducted by not more than two people who were responsible only to themselves, and who were unhampered by set stipulations often entailed by the receipt of a research grant, could be conducted in a relatively elastic manner without the need to stick to a prescribed problem or to a set schedule. The opportunity to follow clues as they offered themselves and to change the main course of the enquiry if they appeared promising proved on the whole advantageous. It helped to counteract the rigidities of any set idea we had as to what was and was not significant in the study of a community. It enabled us to scan the horizon for inconspicuous phenomena that might have unexpected significance. And this seemingly diffuse experimentation led in the end to a fairly compact and comprehensive picture of aspects of a community which one can regard as central—above all of the power and status relationships and of the tensions bound up with them. We tried to discover the reasons why some groups in Winston Parva had greater power than others, and what we found went some way towards explaining these differences. On a wider plane the enquiry shed light on the merits and limitations of intensive micro-sociological studies. While proceeding with it, we ourselves were surprised to see how often configurations and regularities we dug up in the micro-cosm of Winston Parva suggested hypotheses which might be of use as a guide even for macro-sociological enquiries. Altogether the enquiry indicated that the small-scale problems of the development of a community and the large-scale problems of the development of a country are inseparable. There is not much point in studying community developments as if they take place in a sociological vacuum.

By and large the intention was to keep a balance between simple factual presentation and theoretical considerations. We are by no means certain whether we succeeded. But we tried not to allow our theoretical interests to overwhelm our interests in the social life of the people of Winston Parva itself.
An enquiry such as this would have been impossible without the friendly help and co-operation of others. We are indebted to the people of Winston Parva who helped to make interviewing a pleasant as well as an enlightening task. Intrusion into their homes brought no resentment. Many of them took a cheerful and encouraging interest in the research. We were greatly helped by the officials and members of voluntary organisations in Winston Parva. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the County Probation Service and to the Senior Probation Officer. Above all we are indebted to Dr. Bryan Wilson, Reader in Sociology at Oxford. In the final stages he has looked through the whole manuscript. It owes a great deal to his wise help and counsel, and to his power of persuasion which was often needed in convincing us of improvements he suggested.

February 1964

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