

Adrian Jitschin: *Das Leben des jungen Norbert Elias*. Weinheim: Beitz Juventa, 2021, 634 pp.

In 2021, a new work dedicated to the young years of Norbert Elias appeared on the book market, authored by Adrian Jitschin, head of the Frankfurt branch of the FernUniversität in Hagen, and a member of the committee of the Norbert Elias Foundation, based in Amsterdam. Jitschin, a trained historian, explained his professional interest in this subject through the fascination with Elias' work impressed on him during his studies, but also by his own family "roots" in Silesia, thanks to which he succeeded (almost by detective work) in revealing certain new facts about Elias, correcting certain hitherto held assumptions. One of the sources of this research was the correspondence stored in the German Literary Archive in Marbach am Neckar.

Experts who deal with Elias' work agree that it is necessary to see and understand it not only in its uniqueness and originality, but also in contemporary contexts, without which it is hard to adequately assess the author's intellectual performance. Literature on this topic appeared especially in the seventies and eighties. Hermann Korte (1988) at that time worked on the pre-exile period of Elias' life and the beginnings of exile, and Stephen Mennell (1989) examined the post-war period. Elias himself commented on his life several times (e.g. *Adorno-Rede* from 1977), and there are the memories of his contemporaries (including the collection *Human Figurations*, 1977). There are furthermore several film documentaries and radio recordings. Important literary sources include Elias' biographical interview with Dutch sociologists (1984) and his *Notizen zum Lebenslauf* (1984). In 2019, a text by Dennis Smith dealing with the comparative study of the lives of Norbert Elias and André Breton was published. All this is now complemented by the more than 600-page work of Adrian Jitschin, which deals with the period of Elias' life limited to the years 1897–1940. The content of this period is divided into four major chapters: "Adolescence" (1897–1919), "Studies" (1919–1924), "Teaching" (1925–1933) and "Escape" (1933–1940).

Norbert Elias was born on June 22, 1897, in Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland). Hermann, Elias' father, was a textile merchant and manufacturer, and his mother's maiden name was Sophie Gallewski. The family was Jewish and they spoke German. At that time, among the largest Jewish communities in Germany lived in Breslau. Like other children from Jewish families, Elias attended the Prussian humanist Johannes High School. During his childhood and adolescence, he encountered the influences of both Jewish and German culture; in his high school studies he became attracted to philosophy. In the year 1915, however, he left for the front. The experience he gained at a very young age in the trenches of the First World War was undoubtedly of great importance for his further development. In addition to violence and death, it was above all an experience of the relative helplessness of the individual against the social machinery, which the war strongly impressed on him.

After the war, Elias began studying medicine and philosophy at the University of Breslau. He devoted himself to medicine at his father's request but did not complete these studies. He spent the summer semester of the year 1919 at the University of Heidelberg, and a year later undertook a study visit in Freiburg. In Heidelberg, Elias had the opportunity to hear the philosopher Heinrich Rickert, got to know Karl Jaspers, and came into contact with the sociology of Max Weber. In Freiburg he attended a colloquium of Edmund Husserl and had the opportunity to meet Martin Heidegger. In contact with these important streams of German thought at the time, Elias' approach to the humanities was gradually formed.

While studying in Breslau, Elias was a member of the Jewish Tourist Association, publisher of the journal *Blau-Weiß*, which in 1921 released an article entitled *Vom Sehen in der Natur* (*From Seeing Nature*), providing the first evidence of his divergence from Kantian philosophy, leading him eventually into conflict with his then teacher Richard Höningwald. In his doctoral thesis (in 1924) *Idee und Individuum: Ein Beitrag zur Philosophie der Geschichte* (*Idea and individual: A contribution to the philosophy of history*), Elias formulated the view that what Kant took for

granted as prior to experience was in fact something humans must learn with the help of speech for it to be lodged in the consciousness.

After completing his doctoral exam, Elias started working at a small hardware factory, where he was active in the export department. However, when the opportunity arose, he exchanged this position for a university career and went to Heidelberg to engage in sociology, with the aim of obtaining the rank of senior lecturer (via habilitation). The Department of Sociology was under Alfred Weber, who cultivated the discipline in line with the tradition established by his older brother Max (who died in 1920). Another important figure working there at this time was Karl Mannheim, who, however, got into heated professional disputes with Alfred Weber. Elias, by contrast, became friendly with Mannheim – despite some differences in opinion – so that when the Hungarian exile was appointed professor in Frankfurt am Main in 1930, Elias followed him as his assistant.

Frankfurt had a specific intellectual climate associated with university life, discussion groups and cafés. All of this was coming under an increasing degree of political influence at that time. The Institute for Social Research, led by Max Horkheimer, was beginning to develop its critical theory; however, relations between Mannheim and Horkheimer were somewhat strained. Elias meanwhile worked on his habilitation work, which he completed three years after arriving in Frankfurt and gave the title *Der höfische Mensch: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des Hofes, der höfischen Gesellschaft und des absoluten Königtums* (*The courtly man: The contribution to the sociology of the court, courtly society and absolute monarchy*). In this he focused on the study of the absolutist court society of France in the 17th and 18th centuries, thereby first touching on the problems that would a few years later form the core of his most important book. However, Elias lacked the habilitation lecture necessary for his appointment to associate professor, and this was never to occur. Adolf Hitler's accession to Reich Chancellor and his assumption of power changed the situation at the university fundamentally. Jews and all critically oriented scientists were expelled from the

university. Mannheim emigrated to England. Elias left Frankfurt a few weeks after him. After several trips, he tried conducting business in Paris, but without success. He was able however to obtain a small scholarship in London, which allowed him to continue his research work. He later found a job and England became his home for the next several decades.

On arriving in London, Elias spent most of his time in the study hall of the British Library, then part of the British Museum. There he wrote up his life's work. *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, which was later published in English under the name *The Civilizing Process*. This two-volume work was published in German by the Swiss publishing house Haus zum Falken in 1939, at the beginning of the 2nd World War.

The Civilizing Process is subtitled *Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. The concept of psychogenesis expresses the long-term development of human personality structures and ways of behaviour; sociogenesis refers to the development of social structures of inequality, power, and order. Elias showed that both development processes are mutually dependent. The result of this synthetic view was two interrelated theories: the theory of civilization, relating to changes concerning personality and behaviour (the content first and foremost of Part 1) and the theory of state formation (Part 2).

In examining the process of civilization in Western societies, Elias had used hitherto relatively unusual study material: medieval writings on decency, good manners, and good behaviour, epic literature, and period pictorial scenes. He dealt with dining, bodily acts, behaviour in the bedroom, the relationship between man and woman, and the life of knights. As a result, he was able to show that in the early Middle Ages behaviour was less regulated and more determined by spontaneous affections and instincts. This behaviour changed little during the Middle Ages; only at the end of the Middle Ages came refinement. This new quality could be seen during the period of the Renaissance, a process which accelerated and culminated in the etiquette of court society in the 17th century.

Elias illustrated the interdependence of psychogenesis and sociogenesis, for example,

with the issue of aggression. Historical sources depict knights who spent their lives plundering, destroying, looting, killing, mutilating and torturing innocent people. This was one of the accepted standards of the society of warriors. The stronger affections in behaviour, and spontaneous, affection-driven aggression, corresponded to a society with a low level of order and integration, in which threats, raids, robbery and murders occurred daily. In a pacified society, by contrast, the individual has enough certainty to renounce violence itself. Social regulation is exercised in the form of a state monopoly on the performance of violence. This creates, on the individual level, a presumption for mental regulation, for the control of affections and the blocking of aggressive impulses.

Much of the second volume of the work *The Civilizing Process* deals extensively with developments that, after a long series of competitive elimination struggles, resulted in the emergence of powerful centralized states in Western Europe. The consolidation and monopolization of the hitherto highly volatile power of the rulers became possible through centralized military force – an army financed through taxes. The exaction of taxes, on the other hand, presupposed militaristic power and, at the same time, also a stable, functioning economy. Only when the domination of a certain territory, a monopoly of land, was stabilized by the monopoly of power and the monopoly of taxes, was it possible to talk about the state in the modern sense of the word. In the interest of dispositional power over these monopolies, the monarch was forced to establish an administrative apparatus. This originated and developed in the court.

The control of affection, coupled with a code of conduct, there reached its peak, and formerly free warriors were transformed into cultivated courtiers. At the court, as if in a modelling workshop, new standards of behaviour, feelings and thinking were created. The process of civilization initially affected a narrow upper class but spread further to the whole society.

Adrian Jitschin concludes his 600-page book by giving an account of the life story of Norbert Elias at the time when he completed and published his masterpiece, *The Civilizing Process*. Let

us add that Elias had to wait until the mid-1970s for the appreciation and fame associated with it.

On the whole, Jitschin has managed to use a huge number of sources and often completely new knowledge and information in the pages of his book. His work is characterized by precision and scrupulousness, but does not lack attractiveness and appeal, thanks to which it can be read almost like a biographical novel. In its chapters, the author brings out vividly not only the character of Elias himself, but the vanished world of the bourgeois life, academic circles and intellectual environment of the first half of the twentieth century with its striving and controversies, clashes and defeats. In short, Jitschin has presented himself in a truly exemplary way as a man of science in his first great work; we can only anticipate how he can similarly enrich us in his future books.

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Nicolas Maslowski – Kinga Torbicka (eds.).
Contested Legacies of 1989. Geopolitics, Memories and Societies in Central and Eastern Europe.
Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022, 228 pp.

The book under review is from the series *Studies in Sociology: Symbols, Theory and Society*. It is already Volume 12 and the editors of this book are Professor Nicolas Maslowski and Kinga Torbicka. The studies presented in the book are of a high standard, and although the subject matter is wide ranging, the individual articles are carefully selected to cover the whole subject.

The aim of the volume is to analyse the contemporary changes and challenges associated with the events since 1989. Like the previous volumes in this series, this book focuses on Central and Eastern Europe and the dilemmas of modern history and modernity that have affected the region for thirty years.

In particular, the book focuses on the socio-cultural, institutional and strategic transformations that the revolutionary transition has