



**Adrian Jitschin** is head of the Frankfurt Office of the German distance-learning university (FernUniversität in Hagen). He holds an MA degree in Sociology and a doctoral degree in Social History.

Adrian describes his career and interests as follows:

From 2000 on I studied Sociology and Social History at the University of Marburg. My specialisations were in the fields of Sociological Theory, Methodology and the History of the East India Trade.

In 2006 I graduated with a thesis on matrimonial behaviour. I investigated the reasons for individual decision to get married and what kind of social expectation was connected to this biographical step. This was foremost an empirical study, based on the theories of Durkheim and Elias.

As a student, I worked as a tutor at the Department of Sociology and for two years I worked at the Department of Social and Economic History on a research project on Globalisation, which was supported by the VolkswagenStiftung.

From 2007 until 2011 I worked on my doctoral thesis on Life Assurance in India. India, once a British colony, developed its own insurance companies in the 1870s. The Indian companies challenged the British companies, and by the 1920s and 1930 they were pushing these non-domestic companies out of the market. Life insurance became popular in India. It replaced traditional forms of social protection. This can be seen as a process of globalisation as well as a process of modernisation. Sociologically, life insurance stood on the brink between the classical form of protection by the extended family and the possibility of founding a nuclear family in a modern form of the division of labour.

After Indian independence, the national movement saw life insurance as an opportunity to raise the standard of living in the country. In a patriotic attempt all life insurance was nationalised. The results of this nationalisation proved to be unsatisfactory. Despite the Life Insurance Company of India being for some time the biggest insurance company in the world (by number of assured people), it failed to adopt important technical innovations. Also, its branch distribution across the countryside and its customer care were unsatisfactory. So in the late 1980s the Government of India decided to revoke this nationalisation. The development of three decades of nationalised life insurance is a typical example how good intentions lead to bad results. A functioning sector of the economy was destroyed by trying to functionalise it for political purposes. In the end neither it fulfilled its goal of raising the living standard of India substantially nor worked fully as an industry.

From 2007 until 2013 I worked as a Research Assistant at the Department of Social and

Economic History. My work included teaching, developing MA programs, student counselling and administrative tasks. As an academic teacher I supervised BA and MA theses and gave courses on a variety of topics in the field of Social and Economic History. Among them were courses on the history of the family, the genesis of professional sports, the development of the social structure of India in the twentieth century, theories in Cultural Studies and the German post-war economy.

I still feel a special commitment to the history of the East India Trade. The East India Company and the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie were two of the most world-transforming figurations in mankind. Economic Historians tend to reduce them on their economic impact. In fact, the impact at their climax was enormous. About one third of the economy of Britain and the Netherlands was more or less dependent on the East India trade. The companies made possible industrialisation, established new forms of funding – like the stock exchange – and created thousands of jobs. On the other hand the companies created suffering. Colonialism, drug and slave trade are only the most visible parts of this impact. Besides of all this economic impact the East India Companies changed the direction in which humankind was evolving. And that is what is fascinating to me in particular. Speaking about culture, there was a Muslim belt in 1600 from Morocco to Bengal. Western and Asian Civilisations were separated. And then unexpectedly Europeans just began travelling around the Muslim countries by sea. They brought their commodities to China, Indonesia and Japan. And in exchange they transported goods of the entire world back to Europe. Suddenly Dutch peasants bought porcelain. English workers drank tea. Many of our present habits were created by this trade. And we as humankind have rather accepted the idea that varied interests and conflicts can be regulated by trade and the laws of capitalism. For me, this change in the way we live together is an eminently important research area.

Among my students were inspiring young thinkers, from whom I learned myself. I feel gratitude to people like Martin Michael Bloos, Daniel Boy, Dennis Cassens, Gamze Kardag, Sophie Kühnlenz, Nicolas Leibold, Marcel Neckenich, Eva-Maria Nietsch, Johanna Pöppelwiehe and Julian Tangermann, who showed the potential to be great scholars.

In 2013 the FernUniversität in Hagen offered me the post of leading its local office in Frankfurt. The FernUniversität is the biggest German university in terms of number of students. It offers a wide range of BA and MA programs, which can be followed worldwide. It is a partner of the British Open University. My team and I are responsible for approximately 8,000 students in our region. They read all kinds of subjects from Economics and Law to Informatics, and of course History and Sociology. Our duty as a local office is to support and supervise them. We maintain contact with local educational providers, organise examinations, seminars, tutorials and student counselling, and operate as a local office for all kind of responsibilities relating to the FernUniversität.

My personal fascination for Norbert Elias has its roots back in the very first days of my university years. I made presentations and term papers on his theory. All this flared up again when I explored my own family history in 2008 and 2009. My grandparents left Silesia in 1945. And I explored this part of the world, which has now become a part of Poland. Remembering Norbert Elias himself came from Silesia, I tried to learn more about his roots. But there was not much information. The names of his parents were known and there were "some aunts". So I tried to find out more about his biography. I asked the Record Office for his birth certificate and was surprised to learn, that nearly all information was different from what has been published: his given name was not plain Norbert, but Norbert Leo. His mother's maiden name was not Sophie Galewski, but Sofie Gallewski. And he was not born at the Nikolaistadtgraben, but at the Museumsplatz. So I began investigating further. I learned soon that his mother was killed not in Auschwitz but Treblinka, found the name of the company his father owned and traced the names of aunts and cousins. I coiled a rope of new information and any new information led to other new information. Finally in 2012 I submitted a short paper to the Elias Foundation

about his family background.

This paper was received sceptically. I had not had any contact with the Foundation before. And out of the blue I was writing totally new things about his relatives, even giving a family tree with a dozen previously unknown names. As I had proof for all my theses, they accepted my arguments and published them in 2013 (see *Figurations* 39). Since then I have received great intellectual support from the Elias Foundation. Simultaneously I had established contact with relatives of Elias, who were surprised to learn about his fame. They had contact with him nearly until his death. But this was the time before the internet. And they were absolutely unaware that he was one of the most important Sociologists of the twentieth century. So again I learned more about him and this hitherto hidden side of his biography.

I am currently continuing my biographical work. I am preparing an intellectual biography of Norbert Elias. I have explored his childhood, his military experience and his student years and with whom he was in contact. At all stages in life he gained inspiration for his thinking. And in the end he assembled all the stimulating impulses into a new theory, the theory of civilising processes. Yet although he was the mastermind behind this theory, he was – like all of us – standing on the shoulders of giants. I am identifying the giants.