



Public Lecture Series Spring 2015 **Paradigmatic Perspectives on Migration and Mobility**

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Thursday, 19 February 2015
Circulating Capital, Moving People, and Mobile Words
Prof. Dr. Hans-Rudolf Wicker
Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern

18:15 – 19:45 h, University of Neuchatel, Rue Abraham Louis Breguet 1, Lecture Hall 301

Abstract

In today's academic debates and activities theoretical analysis is often accompanied by the announcement of new "turns". This also holds true for the research on migration, mobility and flexibility in social sciences and humanities. The lecture critically reflects the case of the "mobility turn", a paradigm advanced by social scientists aiming to enhance their understanding of the world on the move. The argument pursues the objective of shedding light on the genealogy of the concept of mobility. It highlights the epistemological pitfalls of claiming paradigmatic shifts in a context of rapid social transformation and academic competition.

The lecture traces the manifold uses of the concept of mobility among protagonists of Evolutionism and Marxism by sociologists of the Chicago School as well as in postmodern critique. It shows that the concept of mobility, since its first accurate definition by Karl Marx, has been important in conceptualizing and producing modernity, for example as an international capitalist system of production and distribution. As concepts and practices of mobility slowly spread as a virtue from capitalist modernity to the field of human action, they also became more prominent in the academic world of social sciences and humanities.

Against this genealogical background, it is argued, that an affirmative understanding of the “mobility turn” runs the risk of ignoring the historical conditions of its emergence. Moreover, it might sacrifice the social theoretical ground for understanding the structural conditions, which regulate mobility as powerful concept, process and practice today.

Hence, the lecture highlights the epistemological and theoretical challenges in academic migration research – as in any other scientific field – that allegedly new paradigms are entangled in the historical and academic conditions of their emergence.

Curriculum Vitae

Hans-Rudolf Wicker was professor of social anthropology at the University of Bern from 1988 until 2012. He was one of the founding directors of the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies in 1995. He has been involved in establishing the Central European Forum for Migration Research (CEFMR) in Warsaw and the Red Cross Center for Victims of War and Torture in Bern. In addition, he was a member of the commission of experts of NFP 39 (Migration and Intercultural Relations, 1996 – 2002). He has conducted field-work on St. Lawrence Island (Alaska), in rural Paraguay, and in Switzerland and writes on issues of anthropological theory, medical anthropology, migration, and citizenship.

List of Publications

Hans-Rudolf Wicker is author of numerous articles and books, including the edited and co-edited volumes *L'alterité dans la société: Migration, ethnicité, État* (1996), *Rethinking Nationalism and Ethnicity: The Struggle for Meaning and Order in Europe* (1997), *Migration und die Schweiz* (2003) and *Paradoxien im Bürgerrecht* (2004). Besides he is author of *Migration, Differenz, Recht und Schmerz: Sozialanthropologische Essays zu einer sich verflüchtigenden Moderne, 1990 – 2010* (2012).