



Public Lecture Series Spring 2016

Transnational Perspectives and Future Prospects of Migration and Mobility

—
Friday, 26 February 2016

**Contemporary History from a Transnational Perspective:
The Case of Switzerland**

Prof. Jakob Tanner

Department of History, University of Zurich

10:00 – 11:45 h, University of Neuchatel, Espace Louis-Agassiz 1, Room RE.42
Organized together with the Institute of History, University of Neuchatel

Abstract

In this lecture, the renowned historian Jakob Tanner presents the main arguments of his new, and widely praised book on the transnational history of Switzerland in the 20th century. The lecture discusses, how during the “long twentieth century”, Switzerland as a small, neutral state with an open economy of global scope, has produced a significant tension between national sovereignty and economic (inter-)dependence. Compared to the great powers of Europe, the Swiss Confederation was often imagined as a peaceful, blessed country, exempted from the wars and catastrophes of the 20th century, enjoying prosperity and a substantial quality of life. Yet, historical analysis easily shows that instead of being a one-dimensional and intrinsic “success-story”, Switzerland was deeply enmeshed in the trends and catastrophes of the European 20th century.

In this context, the Swiss nation itself cultivated a collective feeling of being endangered by outer enemies. This fortified state of mind became more and more fictional during the Cold War, but was

again and again deployed to fend off external and internal political pressures, for example concerning criticism against Swiss tax haven and the banking secrecy. In the long run, Switzerland was able to realize a competitive advantage through a contradictory combination of a “Sonderfall”- (“Special Case”-) ideology with flexible integration into global markets.

It is shown, how the Swiss “national business model” – whether appreciated or despised – produced structural and ideological synergies and contradictions between historical myths (i.e. “Arcadia of free and pious peasants”), landscapes (i.e. yearning for the alps), the political system (i.e. social piece in a republican democracy) as well as a coordinated capitalism.

The lecture challenges the conventional historiography in Switzerland by proposing a new historical interpretation of Switzerland’s path and transnational history throughout the 20th century. Doing so, it opens up the opportunity for re-considering migration: not as an anomaly to the ethnicized nation but as a constituting part of the transnational history of Switzerland and Europe.

Curriculum Vitae

Jakob Tanner, born in 1950, is Professor emeritus at the Department of History and the Research Institute for Social and Economic History at the University of Zurich. A main focus of his research lays in the history of Switzerland in a European and global context. He also published on the history of science and popular forms of knowledge. 1996–2001: Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland-Second World War 2001/02, Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Study at Berlin. 2004: Research stay at the EHESS and the “Maison des Sciences de l’Homme” in Paris. 2004–2009: Permanent Fellow of the Collegium Helveticum (ETH Zurich/University of Zurich). Founding member of the Centre for the History of Knowledge (ETH Zurich/University of Zurich). 2011: Senior Fellow at the FRIAS in Freiburg i.B. 2015: honorary doctor of the University of Lucerne. Co-Editor of “Gesnerus. Swiss Journal of the History of Medicine and Sciences” and “Historische Anthropologie”.

Selected Publications

- Geschichte der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert, München (Beck) 2015.
- (with Brigitta Bernet, eds.): Ausser Betrieb. Metamorphosen der Arbeit in der Schweiz, Zürich (Limmat Verlag) 2015.
- Historische Anthropologie zur Einführung, Hamburg (Junius Verlag) 2004. [chinesische Übersetzung: Peking University Press 2008].
- (Co-Author of the Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland-Second World War): Switzerland, National-Socialism and the Second World War, Zurich (pendo) 2002.
- (with Harold James, eds): Enterprise in the Period of Fascism in Europe, Aldershot (Ashgate) 2002.
- Fabrikmahlzeit. Ernährungswissenschaft. Industriearbeit und Volksernährung in der Schweiz, 1890–1950, Zürich (Chronos-Verlag) 1999.
- The Meal in the Factory. Food-Related Facilities in the Industrial Production in Switzerland (1880–1950), in: Schärer Martin, Fenton Alexander (Eds.): Food and Material Culture, East Linton (Scotland) 1998, pp 187–202.
- (with Philipp Sarasin, eds.): Physiologie und industrielle Gesellschaft. Studien zur Verwissenschaftlichung des Körpers im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Frankfurt am Main (suhrkamp-taschenbuch wissenschaft 1343) 1998.
- (with Manfred Hettling, Mario König, Martin Schaffner and Andreas Suter): Eine kleine Geschichte der Schweiz, Frankfurt am Main (edition suhrkamp 2079) 1998.
- Bundeshaushalt, Währung und Kriegswirtschaft. Eine finanzsoziologische Analyse der Schweiz zwischen 1938–1953, Zürich (Limmat Verlag) 1986.