

(Im)mobility-ies - Untangling the Knot

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Never before have so many people across the planet been on the move'. This kind of general statement frequently pops up in the media as well as in academic texts. As a concept-metaphor, mobility captures the common impression that our life-world is in constant flux, with not only people, but also cultures, objects, capital, businesses, services, diseases, media, images, information and ideas circulating across (and even beyond) the planet. The scholarly literature is replete with metaphorical conceptualizations attempting to describe (perceived) altered spatial and temporal movements. In this talk, I argue that it is important to identify not only various forms of mobility but also the (re)production of socio-culturally shared meanings through diverse discourses as well as practices of movement. Any narrative and experience of mobility is inevitably value-laden. Distinctions are made, which ultimately feed back into the production of the social through culturally inflected notions of what 'mobility' means. The currently dominant mobility discourse in Europe, for instance, equates geographical movement with social fluidity, but only for socio-cultural insiders. The recent influx in Europe of 'outsiders' is interpreted quite differently. In this talk, then, I illustrate the dialectic relation between ideologies of (im)mobility and actual practices of people 'on the move', with examples from various geographic regions and time periods.

Noel B. Salazar is Research Professor in Anthropology at the University of Leuven, Belgium. He is editor of the Worlds in Motion (Berghahn) and Anthropology of Tourism (Lexington) book series, co-editor of Methodologies of Mobility (2017), Keywords of Mobility (2016), Regimes of Mobility (2014) and Tourism Imaginaries (2014), and author of Envisioning Eden (2010) and numerous peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on mobility and travel. Current research interests include typologies of travellers, discourses and imaginaries of Otherness, heritage, cultural brokering and cosmopolitanism. Salazar is vice-president of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, past president of the European Association of Social Anthropologists and founder of ANTHROMOB, the EASA Anthropology and Mobility Network. In 2013, he was elected as member of the Young Academy of Belgium.

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