

What does it take to think of a “mobility-centered” social policy?

Intersecting mobilities and social protection on the way towards a new research agenda

Abstract for a presentation at “The Migration Seminar”, MIM, University of Malmö, Sweden, February 2nd 2017

Eberhard Raithelhuber, University of Salzburg, Austria; eberhard.raithelhuber@sbq.ac.at

Social security and statehood nowadays are frequently conflated, precisely because emerging, “Western” nation states used a strategy to nationalize and territorialize social security. The problematic aspect of this conflation is that it tends to be naturalized – just as the nation state itself is imagined as the natural, exclusive home of a (sovereign and culturally bound) people forming a “flat” community of comradeship within a self-contained territory. Amongst other, this development led to an almost exclusive and naturalized understanding of social rights as something originating from, existing in and being activated by the nation-state.

The predominant state-security nexus makes it difficult to deliberate in a progressive way on social security. The reason for this that in such a view, there is no room for those people the same state has categorized as “non-citizens”. Instead, such people become “problems,” even “threats,” that, along with the nation-state itself, mainstream analysts and mainstream service providers cannot, will not – and should not – incorporate. However, even for de jure citizens and even today, such rights and entitlements are guaranteed if, and only if, we are normatively “good citizens” and stay within the borders and moral boundaries of “our” nation-state (Anderson 2013).

To think and act beyond these limits in a world of increasing (im)mobilities and (in)security, we have to free ourselves from the state-centric perspective and notion of these concepts. The fact that social policy as we know it is nation state-centric and thus has strong exclusionary mechanisms built into it, is not addressed, never mind challenged, by mainstream scholarship on social security. Even critical contributions on the migration-security nexus are characterized by an underlying assumption that everyone somehow should “have” citizenship. Some scholars are trying to establish a mobility-centered approach, but most of them are still trying to “include” these people in the national community. In this way, even progressive discussions are still centered on “access”, but they do not criticize the nation-state framework as such.

A mobilities perspective that incorporates No-Border studies in regard to the movement of people can address a number of rigidities which have to date obscured the dominant agendas in both political practice and scholarship on social security/ social protection. Moreover, it liberates us from the alluring and partially misleading category of “migrants”. A No-Border perspective insists that people should not be categorized through inherently exclusionary state forms of identification such as “migrant” or “citizen” (Baines & Sharma 2002). Against this background, we can ask whether there are ways to think of a “mobility-centered” social policy. Hence, and this might be the most challenging task, we need to move forward beyond a mere critique of existing social policy. What is needed is a new research agenda that affects many existing fields.

The presentation at Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare, Malmö University, draws upon joint work between Nandita Sharma (University of Hawai’i, US), Wolfgang Schröer (University of Hildesheim, GER) and Eberhard Raithelhuber (University of Salzburg, AUT), which will be published soon. Recently, this work in progress has been discussed with a number of colleagues during the international workshop “Intersecting Mobilities and Social Protection: Looking Out for a New Approach how to Do Research” in September 2016 in Salzburg.

Bio sketch

Dr. Eberhard Raithelhuber is a social scientist with a special emphasis on social work/social pedagogy and education. He has published on transitions in the life course, agency in social theory, social support and social intervention, youth and young adults, regional development and networks, social policy, citizenship and democracy, and transnationalism and migration. In October 2014 he took up a tenure track position as Assistant Professor at the Department of Educational Science, University of Salzburg, Austria. More: <https://www.uni-salzburg.at/index.php?id=66237>