



# HOW BIRD FLU BECAME ENDEMIC: HISTORY AND ANTHROPOLOGY OF A GLOBAL MOBILIZATION

**Departmental Seminar with Frédéric Keck,  
Senior Researcher at the Laboratory of Social Anthropology  
(CNRS-Collège de France-EHESS)**



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PLACE: Moesgaard, TBA

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## **Abstract**

Anthropological research has investigated how avian influenza (also known as « bird flu ») has been managed as a potentially pandemic disease since the emergence of the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus in China in 1997 and its spread in Europe and Africa in 2005. Since 2018, the H5N1-related viruses have become “endemic among poultry among a number of countries” (says Thijs Kuiken, one of Europe’s main experts on avian influenza), and wild birds, considered as reservoirs and sane carriers of H5N1, have become more vulnerable to the mutations of the virus, with numerous outbreaks and fatalities in Northern Europe and across the American coasts. Measures of biosecurity and techniques of preparedness have been applied to outbreaks of avian influenza so as to mitigate its spread from birds to humans. Among these are the lockdown of farms to protect poultry from contact with wild birds, the use of unvaccinated poultry as sentinels to monitor the mutations of viruses within farms and the simulation of influenza outbreaks to train poultry workers by worst-case scenarios. Based on archival research and fieldwork investigation, I will examine how these measures of biosecurity and techniques of preparedness are reorganized when avian influenza is framed as endemic rather than pandemic. I will ask how notions of animal reservoirs and cross-species transmission are inflected when the H5N1 viruses are perceived as mutating not only through a teleological line from wild birds to poultry to humans, following a global public health perspective, but in multi-directional lines across species perceived as equally vulnerable, following a “one health” perspective.

## **Bio**

Frédéric Keck is a Senior Researcher at the Laboratory of Social Anthropology (CNRS-Collège de France-EHESS). After studying philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris and Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley, he has investigated the history of social anthropology and contemporary biopolitical questions raised by avian influenza. He was the director of the research department of Le musée du quai Branly in Paris between 2014 and 2018.



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