

# "New Mobilities, Old Displacements: Protracted Refugee Situations in Theory and (Canadian) Practice"

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# Overview for today

- 1. The 'new mobilities paradigm' (is it new?) and sedentarist metaphysics (what do they mean for migrants, refugees?)
- 2. The conundrum of protracted refugee situations: a silent emergency
- 3. Resettling refugees to or adjudicating asylum claims in Canada: the good, the bad, and the abandoned

# 1. Liisa Malkki: 'sedentarist metaphysics' (1992)

- Refugees are organized through a technology of “care and control” for “peoples out of place” (1992, 34)
- “history tends to get leached out of the figure of the refugee, as imagined by their administrators” (1996, 385)



# The geopolitics of mobility (Hyndman, 1997)

- International borders are more porous to international aid for refugees than to refugee bodies themselves;
- Displaced subjects are encouraged to remain in 'regions of origin'
- “The mobility of international humanitarian aid is juxtaposed here with the relative immobility of involuntary migrants, generating two distinct but related geographies”

# John Urry (2000)

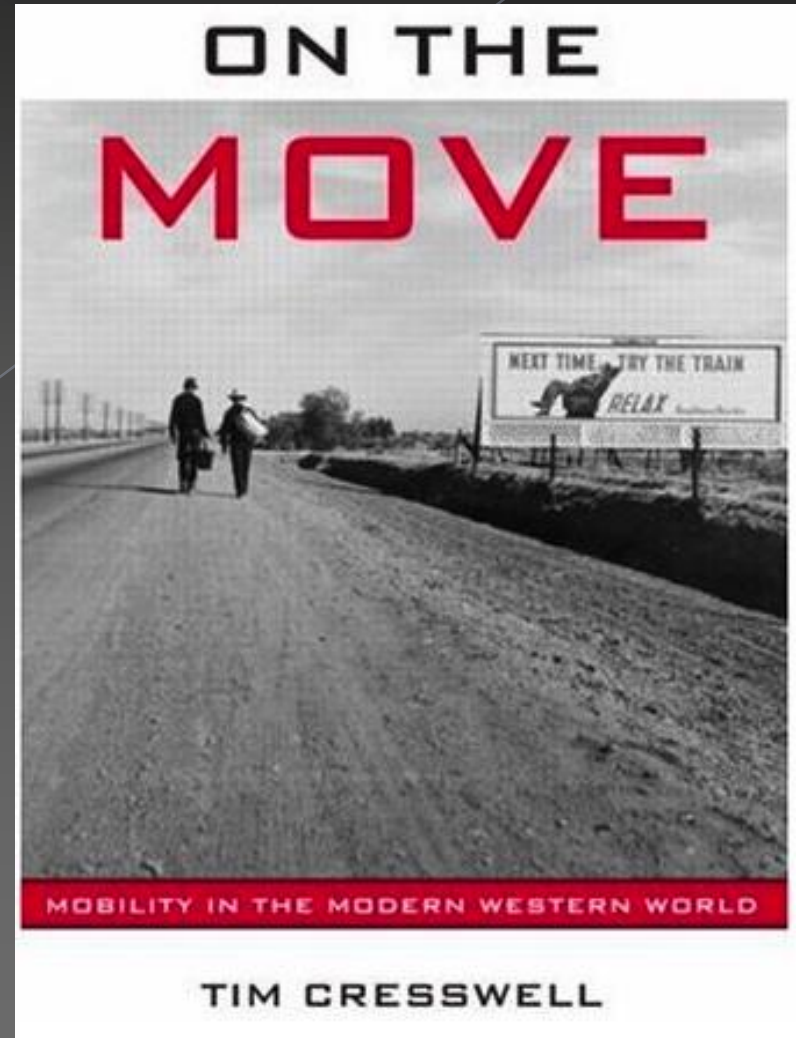
- Urry argues that society is a mistaken object of inquiry in Sociology;
- Mobility, with its relational, unfixed focus, should be the proper subject of the discipline;
- He contends that contingent ordering, rather than static social structures and fixed social ordering are more analytically powerful and rupture our sedentarist assumptions.



# Movement is to mobility...

(Cresswell, 2006)

- ...what location is to place.
- “Mobility involves displacement – the act of moving between locations” (p. 2)
- A -----> B





- ④ “The metaphysics of sedentarism is a way of thinking and acting that sees mobility as suspicious, as threatening, and as a problem. The mobility of others is captured, ordered, and emplaced in order to make it legible in a modern society” (Cresswell, 2006: 55).

# Sheller and Urry (2006)

- “The emergent mobilities paradigm problematizes two sets of extant theory. First, it undermines *sedentarist* theories.... Sedentarism treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placelessness” (208)....”
- “Second, our critique of ‘static’ social also departs from those that postnational *detrterritorialisation* process the end of states as containers for (p. 210). science
- A “sociology beyond societies”





# Sheller and Urry (2006)

- Places are presumed to be relatively fixed, given, and separate from those visiting. The new mobility paradigm argues against this ontology of distinct 'places' and 'people.' Rather, there is a complex relationality of places and persons connected through performances.... (ibid.: 214).

# Matt Sparke on metaphysics



# Metaphysics of Presence & PRS

- When geographers and whomever else set out to describe a particular geography, and even more so, when they invoke geography and space metaphorically, there is a metaphysics of presence at work – what might be called a metaphysics of geopresence – that fixates on the “geo” of a particular spatial pattern or a particular poetics of location while simultaneously downplaying the geographic diversity of the constitutive processes that produced it (Sparke, 2005: xxix).

- “Mobility has become the ironic foundation for anti-essentialism, antifoundationalism and antirepresentation. While place, territory and landscape all implied at least a degree of permanence and flexibility, mobility seems to offer the potential of a radical break from a sedentarist metaphysics” (Cresswell, 2006: 46)

# A simple argument

- ◉ Refugees who stay still and far away from our shores are constructed as 'real' and legitimate, deserving of our humanitarian compassion.
- ◉ Those who approach our borders, and especially our shores, are suspicious, even if they are coming from the same source of displacement.

## 2. Who, what and where are PRS?

- A protracted refugee situation (PRS) refers to a refugee population in existence for 5+ years, with no prospect of a solution (UNHCR, 2005);
  - PRS flattens diverse expressions of displacement, but it also renders refugees *legible* to states as subjects;
- In 2008, USCRI reported 8.5m refugees in limbo for 10 years or more at end of 2007;
- In 2004, 33 protracted situations hosted 64% of all refugees globally (UNHCR, 2006).
  - The average waiting time has increased from 9 years in 1993 to 17 years in 2003.

# Protracted Refugee Research

## Findings from 2007 fieldwork (Giles and Hyndman)

- For many, the Dadaab camps are a **more** secure place for refugees than Nairobi, a reversal from 12 years before;
- Yet many refugees find the minimalist material provisions insufficient.





# A Silent Emergency?

- As Halima Ali, who had lived for many years in the Dadaab camps but is now in Nairobi, puts it,

“the food ration given by UNHCR are not enough for the refugees, they only provide ‘don’t die’ survival.” – cited in Hyndman and Giles (2011)

# The Conundrum: Safety Without Protection



- Refugees in long-term limbo await a ‘durable solution’ to their ‘permanent temporariness’ (Bailey et al, 2002);
- They are protected from *refoulement*, forced return to their country of origin,
- But at a very high cost: they are not allowed to leave the camps, work, move, or establish a residence. **They are temporary.**
- In effect, they trade livelihoods & basic rights for *non-refoulement*.

# A silent emergency: human rights suspended

- Legally, the suspension of refugees' human rights over time becomes increasingly problematic: “While some rights and restrictions may be justifiable during the initial emergency phase of a mass influx, protection should, in the spirit of the Convention, improve over time rather than stagnate or deteriorate” (Durieux and McAdam, 2004: 4)
  - In legal theory, human rights accrue over time; in practice, a minimal regime of safety, not protection exists.

# 'Real Refugees stay still'

- As policymakers, current Canadian politicians see those who stay still and wait to be selected as *more* legitimate refugees:
- “Resources better spent on UN-approved refugees: 'Fake' applications here are hurting those waiting abroad, the Immigration minister says” (Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney cited in Payton, Sept. 9, 2009)
- Bill C-11, soon to be law in Canada, underscores these values: 2,500 new spaces for resettled refugees, but a tiered political space for asylum.

# Salient Sedentarism

- Minister Kenney wants refugees from camps, whose eligibility is assessed and guaranteed by the UNHCR, to come to Canada, rather than have asylum seekers arrive in the country and make a claim.
- He prioritizes one group of migrant subjects over another:
  - 1. refugee claimants (asylum seekers) who have a right to make a claim under international law, and
  - 2. discretionary government-assisted refugees who are selected from abroad.

*How can the refugee be made deportable again?* -- Hannah Arendt

- In today's geopolitical world, the more realistic question is 'how can migrants be prevented from making refugee claims on our [Canadian] soil?'
- Evidence of the 'externalization of asylum', the collective tactics of states to manage potential asylum seekers offshore, abounds in Canada, the US, Europe, and Australia.





MASTER CPL. ANGELA ABBEY, CANADIAN FORCE

Hundreds of refugees crowd the deck of the MV Sun Sea as it arrives in Esquimalt, B.C., on Friday.

# Through hell and high water



# The Province

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Maple Ridge has been told to get its prisons  
ready for a boatload of migrants bound for B.C.

## JAILS AWAIT REFUGEES

**NEWS A4**



The Harinpanich 19, now renamed the MV Sun Sea, is on its way to B.C. with as many 500 migrants on board — many suspected to be Tamil Tigers. — POSTMEDIA NETWORK FILES

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SATURDAY, AUGUST 14, 2010

## Tough love for 490 Sri Lankans



...the M.V. Sea Star at Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt Friday. Authorities intercepted the ship when it entered Canadian waters after a months-long voyage from Sri Lanka.

...why we



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER



MIGRANT SHIP'S IMMINENT ARRIVAL

## A BEACON OF HOPE FOR MIGRANTS A WAKE-UP CALL FOR CANADA



As one ship of Tamils nears B.C. waters, and several others are believed to be on the way, Ottawa is struggling to alter this country's easy-access reputation: 'There is increasing concern that we are becoming the target of international smugglers'

A harrowing sea journey with crying passengers, giant storms

'I thought that we were going to die, or that the ship was going to sink'

BY ANTHONY REINHART

Comfort, for now, comes from a bed in his own room, on solid ground instead of the wood floor in the ship's lower hold.

It was there, on three rows of single mattresses spaced a foot apart, that the men passed time, slept when seas were calm, and tried to catch each other when they weren't.

"I thought we were going to die, or that the ship was going to sink," the man said through a Tamil interpreter.

To him and the other 75 Tamil men on the lurching cargo ship, Ocean Lady, that arrived on Canada's West Coast last October, life was alternately terrifying and tedious. Their diet consisted of noodles, rice and cookies, day after day during the 45-day trek.

As another boatload of Tamil refugees closed in on Canada's western shores

Wednesday, the man sat in a Toronto conference room with The Globe and Mail to talk about his own harrowing journey, which isn't over yet.

# “Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada’s Immigration System Act”

- Bill C-49 affirms sedentarist norms; ‘real’ refugees who stay still deserve help; those who arrive uninvited by boat, regardless of the conditions from which they come, are not welcome.

# Without solution

- The new mobilities paradigm generates insight into the sedentarist norms that create 'real' refugees and 'fake' ones;
- Despite staying still, millions of refugees in protracted situations face 'permanent temporariness' in dozens of places;
- Those who cannot stay in their 'regions of origin' risk punitive legislation and treatment.
- To move is to defy sedentarist norms and political orderings of sovereignty.



