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INVITED ARTICLE



Unsettling feminist geopolitics: forging feminist political geographies of violence and displacement

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ABSTRACT

Feminist geopolitics has analyzed violence across scales and critiqued the dominant epistemology of political geography for almost two decades. What theoretical and political purchase does it have today, given the potpourri of perspectives and reimaginings of the idea? Current research on violence, human displacement and the security of people out of place is used to explore answers to this question, finding that *feminist political geography* – a bigger tent than just feminist geopolitics – is indispensable to geographical thinking. Recent non-human feminist geopolitics of ‘earthliness’ offer an original theoretical departure from what has come before, though truncate political possibilities by refusing to engage the individuated subjects of ‘conventional’ feminist geopolitics. Feminist geopolitics and its consonant concepts remain relevant to addressing the fast violence of war, displacement, detention and the attendant *waiting*, or slow violence, that these power relations imply. Feminist geopolitics can and has been enriched by critical work on subaltern geopolitics and post-secular geographies and is shown to be vital to understanding human displacement for those living in the postcolonies of the global South. A case study of private refugee sponsorship to Canada is critically analyzed as one pathway out of protracted displacement. While resettlement is valorized by states and their civil societies as a laudable ‘solution’ offering permanent protection, a feminist geopolitical analysis exposes the Canadian Government’s racialized preferences and prejudice against Sub-Saharan African asylum seekers, masked as geography. The research presented exposes some of the Orientalist assumptions that frame and figure private refugee sponsorship. Taking this Orientalist critique and these additional literatures into the fold of feminist geopolitics, ‘feminist political geography’ offers a larger umbrella under which to collaborate, innovate, and intervene in political struggles that interrupt salient geopolitics and state discourse across world regions and inhibit violence wherever possible.

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Introduction

How can feminist thinking in geography, including feminist geopolitics, address the precarious yet longstanding conditions of protracted human displacement across scales? This question provides the research focus of this paper, but is sufficiently broad to allow one to query the place of feminist geographies in relation to other critical geographies of violence and human displacement. Is it possible that the concept of *feminist geopolitics* has outlived its usefulness, as a once-original approach that analytically conceptualized violence and displacement in embodied ways? Feminist approaches to political geography have burgeoned over the past two decades; today, one can speak of *feminist* political geography. Analyses of feminist geopolitics have ranged from arguments that the body is the finest scale of political space (Mayer 2004) to the claim that the body is the fictitious subject of liberal democratic orders and that other materialist approaches offer more insightful ways to think geographically (Dixon 2015).

I first encountered the words 'feminist geopolitics' in a chapter by Kofman (Kofman, 1996). Kofman's use of the term provoked a feminist call to respond to the important but flawed scholarship of critical geopolitics (Dalby 1994; O Tuathail 1996; Sharp 1996a; Sparke 1996), an invention of the early 1990s if not before. Critical geopolitics offered a welcome series of poststructuralist interventions, sometimes with a gender dimension, that exposed the power relations of salient geopolitical discourse just as the Cold War had ended.

While feminist geography and political geography had not officially met, Kofman and other feminist geographers probed the gender dimensions of political geography (Kofman and Peake, 1990; Staeheli, 1994; Sharp, 1996a) more than two decades ago. In the ensuing decades, many geographers including myself have elaborated, debated, re-imagined, and returned to feminist geopolitics, perhaps in the absence of a claimed space or disciplinary 'camp' to call our own. This paper aims to create more space for and provoke a wider range of feminist interventions related to embodied geopolitical phenomena, materialism, violence, displacement (of all kinds), and scale to consolidate a thoroughly feminist and anti-racist political geography that does not succumb to Orientalist rescue narratives or produce regimes of care and security that subjectify refugees.

While this paper does not, and cannot, review all of the relevant scholarship and insights that have been generated over the past two decades, I acknowledge that others have done much of this work (Gokariksel and Secor 2015; Pain and Staeheli 2014; Massaro and Williams 2013; Dixon and Marston 2013; Fluri 2011). These bodies of knowledge continues to grow, along with new contributions by feminist geographers that enhance our understanding

of violence and/or displacement through critical work on the settler state and the overlooked spaces of indigenous homes where families are torn apart and residential schools where they were put and punished for speaking in their own language (de Leeuw 2016, 2017). Vital work by Jo Sharp (2011) and feminist allies on subaltern geopolitics has unsettled geopolitics and excavated postcolonial archives and texts not on the imperial record of international relations. Citing Butler's (2009: 3) 'differential allocation of precarity', Sharp (2011, 272) notes that 'it is still the agents in the west who are involved in the recognition, it is the others who are to be recognised.' Feminist geopolitics stands to learn from subaltern geopolitics, a project that heeds the colonial and imperial histories as well as the geographical locations of states and their societies. In her analysis of subaltern geopolitics Sharp (2019: 2) highlights the conceptual tension between 'subaltern' and 'geopolitics:' subaltern is based on 'a presence of lower ranking order', while geopolitics is 'a dominant form of knowledge that has attempted to order and regulate space.' The contradiction, or internal tension, within this pairing is nonetheless productive for the spatial enactment of subaltern imagination, Sharp notes, just as 'feminist geopolitics' may sound oxymoronic. She illustrates how political leadership in the postcolonial state of Tanzania, for example, undertook nation-building without nationalism or raising ethnic tensions through educational policies. Importing Swahili as 'a nontribal, non-European language through which to narrate and perform the new nation' was an effective move that avoided the epistemological violence of an imperial tongue or the tyranny of one nation's language over others, a problem that has created ongoing conflict in countries across the world. Subaltern studies has long revealed hierarchies of intersecting but unequal power relations, whereby questions of gender and other oppressions are subordinate to those of national liberation (Chatterjee, 1989; Butalia 2000).

Taken together, these various strands of feminist and subaltern geopolitics and critical understandings of power constitute a robust 'feminist political geography,' whether as a subfield of political geography or an entity in its own right. Below I map out four parts to the paper.

Feminist geopolitics, displacement, and detention

How have feminist geopolitics animated and analyzed human displacement at various scales and sites (Conlon and Heimstra 2017; Maillet, Mountz and Williams 2016; Heimstra 2019)? Geographers have illustrated how the asylum seeker-migrant-refugee who decides to flee is at once an expression of transnational and international power relations and protagonist of her journey and diasporic formation (Ramadan 2012; Hyndman and Mountz 2008). She self-authorizes and negotiates her own protection but not under conditions

of her own making (Kyriakides et al. 2018a; Marx 1852). Feminist geopolitics has other variations, and applies to myriad domains, such as emotional geopolitics (Pain 2009) the feminist geopolitics of religion and post-secularism (Gokariksel and Secor, 2015); intimate geopolitics (Smith 2012), alter-geopolitics (Koopman 2011), and intimacy-geopolitics (Pain and Staeheli 2014). Language, however, can always limit imagination and political possibilities (Long 2011). How can feminist geopolitics avoid factionalizing a politics of its own and escape the conventions and imperial history that 'geopolitics' invoke? The subtle exclusions that existing terms and categories unwittingly make are difficult to avoid; should we invent new language?

Critical feminist scholarship in geography, such as Pratt (2012), explores the violence that states inflict on foreign care workers on temporary contracts and their families. Caregivers are allowed a pathway to citizenship in return for a minimum of two years of paid work living with their employers in Canada, but generally wait upwards of eight years to be reunited with their families after meeting the requirements. Such separations, codified as normal in policy, can be construed as a kind of state violence that warrants the attention of both political geographers and feminists (Pratt 2012), and yet it may fall outside the purview of 'feminist geopolitics'. In a different context, Conlon and Heimstra (2017) illustrate the intimate violence of detention for migrants-asylum seekers-refugees, another form of enforced separation for families through incarceration in their excellent edited collection, *Intimate Economies of Immigrant Detention*. These intimate forms of detention, separation and violence might not be immediately construed as 'geopolitical', hence the call in this paper for a bigger tent with fewer exclusions.

The paper proceeds in four parts. First, a critical analysis of feminist geopolitics in geography is provided to lay the groundwork for a larger project of *feminist political geography*. Specifically, I engage Deborah Dixon's (2015) book, *Feminist Geopolitics*, which is the most sustained treatment of the concept to date. It is a highly original and inventive contribution, but it exists in a universe largely unconnected to any of the scholarship in feminist geopolitics that precedes it. Theoretically adroit and historically wide-ranging, Dixon's book is a tacit argument that feminist geopolitics as we know it should be dispensed with in order to explore a wider range of theoretical framings and feminist materialisms. Nonetheless, I contend that her analysis is politically anemic in relation to understanding quotidian violence, war and displacement. While I do not embrace democratic liberalism uncritically, we are ensconced nonetheless in Westphalian states that rehearse and refuse arguments of law, humanitarianism, and human rights. These salient framings define the political struggles of our time, though they must also be challenged.

Second, I introduce the conundrum of protracted human displacement and bring to bear selected aspects of feminist geopolitics and critical political geographies on it, illustrating the vital contributions these aspects have made to understanding how refugees find themselves in extended exile more often than not. Given the primacy of violence to war, displacement and related political geographies, I dismantle the salient discourse of managing displacement in three ways, using a feminist lens: a) I elaborate a critique of the language of 'solutions' to expose the state-centric approach of the international refugee regime, and to the wars and human rights abuses that spawn displacement (Hyndman and Giles 2017); b) I contend that the externalization of asylum and extended waiting that refugees experience while displaced is a form of 'slow violence', or slow harm (Nixon 2011; de Leeuw 2016, 2017; Hodzic 2016); and c) I build on an existing argument that resettlement is a *strategy*, not an end point of displacement, and *rescale* resettlement as the purview of the person who begins life in a new place, not as a state outcome or goal (Hyndman and Giles 2017).

Third, I link this discussion of resettlement, a concrete pathway to safety for some, to my recent research on refugee settlement sponsored by private sponsors in the Canadian context. I present a case study and analysis that signals the rise of new forms of governance in relation to private (largely citizen-driven) refugee resettlement. The 'private' nature of this gendered volunteerism on the part of civil society is largely invisible, and yet some 300,000 people have come to Canada through the Private Refugee Sponsorship Program (PRSP) over the past four decades (Macklin et al. 2018). Until recently Canada was the only resettlement country that made possible these civil society sponsorships, with at least five private citizens or residents signing a contract to pay and provide everyday support for refugee newcomers upon arrival for one year. While admirable and life-changing in one sense, the governance and policies of the program have also proven geopolitically selective, arguably neoliberal, and undoubtedly Orientalist, with a racialized underbelly. So little research has been published about private sponsorship that this small contribution aims to add to that literature from a feminist political geography perspective.

Finally, I circle back to the initial questions posed above and make the case for a 'feminist political geography' that is responsive to postcolonial critique and goes beyond 'feminist geopolitics' with all its variations. Feminist political geography eschews any singular terminology or theoretical framing, engages in subaltern analyses of violence and other power relations, traverses and unsettles lines between public and private spheres, and engages individuated and unindividuated subjects, to borrow Dixon's (2015) terminology. Making the tent bigger but more importantly better through explicit commitments to postcolonial critique, subaltern geopolitics, and a refusal of

Orientalist rescue narratives will create more space for projects that take violence, exclusion, inequality, the materiality of the bodies, and their various subjectivities seriously.

Feminist geopolitics, then and now

As noted in the introduction, feminist geopolitics has been around for more than two decades; its names, applications, meanings, and borrowings have ranged widely. Some salient features of feminist geopolitics include its embodied epistemologies, its alternative 'units of analysis' (i.e. beyond states as the sole protagonists acting on a world stage), and the scales at which power, violence, subjectivities and politics are analyzed. Almost two decades ago, Sallie Marston (2000) wrote about the social construction of scale, and the ways in which geographers too often effaced the scale at which social reproduction takes place, that of the household, stirring a debate and exchange that would last at least another decade. Since that time, geographers – many of them feminist – have filled the short supply of scholarship at this scale (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Hyndman 2001; Valentine 2002; Smith 2012).

Feminist geopolitics has sought to render visible that which has been conveniently partitioned off as private space, where invisible acts of violence are visited upon unsuspecting people. As Massaro and Williams (2013: 567) ask in their introduction, '[h]ow might US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan be related to domestic abuse, securing the US-Mexico border, or drug enforcement in the US inner city?' Paternalistic discourses of vulnerability and rescue permeate and reproduce themselves in all of these scenarios, they contend. Moreover, people's lives are characterized at both intimate and global scales (Pratt and Rosner 2006; Mountz and Hyndman 2006). In 1996, a UN United Nations tribunal indicted eight Bosnian Serb military and police officers in connection with rapes of Muslim women in the Bosnian war. Rape was finally classified as a war crime, a weapon of war, a public act, and not the aberrant behaviour of frustrated individual 'bad boy' soldiers, often relegated to private acts (Simons 1996). The domestic space of home remains gendered (Domosh and Seager 2001), and has increasingly become the target of violence in war. Any public/private divide to map the proper place of war misses the point: the battlefield is everywhere, and gendered civilian bodies are the sites of violence (Mayer 2004; Giles and Hyndman 2004).

While Williams and Massaro (2013) and Massaro and Williams (2013) speak of feminist geopolitics as a distinct analytical, epistemological, and methodological approach in geography that exposes power relations and the production of inequality and exploitation, Deborah Dixon's (2015) book, *Feminist Geopolitics*, represents a distinct departure from this project, moving into

more-than-human geographies and a pioneering approach to feminist materialism (Dittmer 2018). Moving from ideas of feminist geopolitics as embodied in individuated subjects, especially in contexts of violence, militarized nationalism and war (Mayer 2004; Hyndman 2004; Sharp 1996b), Dixon (2015) wholly departs from such subjects and their implicitly *realist* and anthropomorphic frames. Feminist geographers can, she tacitly argues, be much more theoretically savvy if they eschew the dominant state-centric and human subjectivities. I admire her theoretically innovative approach to feminist geopolitics (Hyndman 2018), and have argued that her intervention is a fascinating and important one. Like Jason Dittmer (2017), who uses the notion of *assemblage* combined with the 'body politic' to highlight the entanglement of human and nonhuman forms in foreign policy, Dixon refuses statist subjectivities and players. Upon further reflection, I have concerns, however, about the *politics* part of feminist geopolitics: what of the materiality and violence of borders and displacement in relation to people and the punitive and carceral power that states employ to manage and prevent risk (Aradau and van Munster 2007) and implement enforcement regimes (Mountz 2011, forthcoming)?

I explore the political stakes of grounding Dixon's unindividuated subjectivity – the 'material states' which are far more abstract than countries and the people that populate them - as compared with the perhaps strategic essentialism of retaining the salient realist frames of debate. While not a defender of geopolitical realism, my work and thinking are encumbered with the vestiges of liberalism, rights and subjects that give meaning to our shared political worlds. Jason Dittmer (2018, 85) writes that

Feminist Geopolitics is a powerful manifesto for how thinking in feminist materialism can inform existing research in feminist geopolitics, which has typically taken a more subject-centered notion of the body as its object.... Yet Dixon goes further by exploring the world of the semi-living, from stem cells to BioArt.

Dixon's *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States* is a rich, provocative, and original excavation of 'the geopolitical.' As I have written elsewhere, "[s]omewhere between Gillian Rose's (1993) *Feminism and Geography*, Gerard Toal's/O Tuathail's (1996) *Critical Geopolitics*, and Whatmore's (2002) *Hybrid Geographies*, Dixon has produced an important and wonderfully original exegesis on feminist thought, its materialisms, and the unindividuated ways in which these are translated into what I prefer to call 'the geopolitical', given Dixon's wholesale and feminist rethinking of realist geopolitics" (Hyndman 2018, 77).

However, I am deeply ambivalent about giving up the scale and epistemology of the body, its situated knowledges, and its various subject formations. Despite their encumbrances, I am also reluctant to forfeit the the poststructuralist, Marxist and subaltern takes on feminist geopolitics unless

more incisive analytical and emotionally accountable geographies to negotiate power relations in more direct ways are unearthed.

Sara Smith's (2018, 47) reading of Dixon resonates with my own: I too want to see the decolonizing impulses of critical geography, including feminist postcolonial geographies, animated. Smith's important work (2012, 2016) on intimate geopolitics examines marriage as a transgressive act across religious borders and probes the postcolonial critiques of representation embedded in her research. In responding to Dixon, Smith also notes that feminist geopolitics blurs conventional borders between civilian and military and renders 'civilian people as embodied political subjects; it forges a space for the telling of their stories, not just those of their states' (see also Butalia 2000).

In Kai Bosworth's (2018, 82) assessment, Dixon's analysis raises questions about its limitations 'for understanding and combating the structural geopolitical, economic and ideological (which is to say *material conditions*) that are productive of the fantasies of White supremacy.' Bosworth's (2018) political impulse is to ruminate on 'how these messy moments of materiality are rendered complicit with the ideologies and operations of racial capitalism' (83). The political economy of competing nationalisms, and the racism and racialization they produce, cannot be ignored in world where globalization is qualified at every turn by parochial, powerful and exclusionary secessionist movements.

Dixon's book is nonetheless important to scholars of feminist and critical geopolitics who want to refuse geopolitical realisms, retain a poststructuralist approach and forge material approaches to geopolitics that eschew individuated subjects. The 'material' is taken on fully, as earthliness replaces talk of states, subjects, and the polities they form or are excluded from. 'Material states' is effective word play too, invoking the state-centrism of conventional geopolitics but pushing back against it at the same time. The Westphalian state with all its liberal subjectivities, Enlightenment frames, and Occidental concepts of violence and justice are simply not employed. Dixon so thoroughly upends geopolitical knowledge production as we know it that one has to assess the consequences for feminist geopolitics.

At the outset of her book, Dixon says she is concerned less with defining what feminist geopolitics *is*, than with what it can *do* to help people improve the conditions of their lives. This is the most important claim, I think, Dixon makes. Yet I am not convinced she delivers on this praxis. While the book traces a geopolitics of human matter across disciplines and world regions, I worry that people displaced by violence and dispossessed of home and livelihood are left off this clever mapping. Despite Dixon's claim to the contrary, what feminist geopolitics can 'do' in such moments is wholly missing in my view. I am not persuaded that Dixon's version of feminist geopolitics

can make sense of violence, hate, exclusion and displacement as much as other authors who embrace intimacy-geopolitics, feminist geopolitics, and the like have done to date.

The book is admittedly a refreshing read, tethered less to what other scholars of feminist geopolitics have said in response to these masculinist statecraft practices, and instead reviving lesser known, often feminized narratives once obscured in relation to conventional geopolitical thinking. While Dixon does not reference the feminist impulses behind subaltern geopolitics (Sharp, 2011), her book features feminists and other subversive actors, writing in the 16th century Paris Salons up to today feature prominently and provocatively.

The early and arguable progenitors of feminist geopolitics, Simon Dalby's (1994) analysis of Cynthia Enloe and IR feminist more generally and Matthew Sparke's (1996) take on the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in Canada as a feminist, critical geopolitical space is so far removed from this book that leaving them out creates more space to start anew. In chapter one Dixon (2015) herself says that feminist inquiry is an approach that 'feels for the borders of thought and practice. Such a concern for difference – what it is, how it locates people, ideas and practices, and what it implies about these – problematizes at the very outset the question of what *is* a feminist geopolitics.'

Feminist geopolitics is important, if flawed, analytical *practice*. It can expose historical continuity in disparities, across geopolitical events such as the end of colonization or the disappearance of the Soviet bloc and the rise of globalization (Slater, 2004). Slater cites Edward Said's highly geographical note about the centrality of human struggle:

The central point... is that human history is made by human beings, and [s]ince the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning. The task for the critical scholar is not to separate one struggle from the other, but to connect them...' (Edward Said [2003:332-332] cited in Slater 2004: 3)

How can scholars – feminist, political, geographer or otherwise – connect human struggles that emerge from conditions of violence and related displacement?

Feminist political geographies of protracted displacement

How have temporary refugee camps and status, both of which are to be stop-gap protection measures for people whose lives are in immediate jeopardy, lasted 25 years or more? In Refugee Studies there is a constant tension between refugee subjectivity and more poststructuralist (and sometimes feminist) readings of geopolitics and biopolitics *over/through/about* refugees.

For example, geographer Adam Ramadan (2012, 2013) shows how Foucauldian readings of refugee camps obscure and downplay the dynamic transnational diasporic politics of nationalism and survival in Palestinian camps in Lebanon. Geographers Brun and Fabos (2015) argue that refugees are not 'homeless', but in fact make home and place as they travel through journeys of displacement.

Why are the three 'durable solutions' offered up by the UN refugee agency so ineffectual? Since the end of the Cold War, a geopolitics of containment for displaced persons has become the consensus of states in the West, or global North (Castles, 2008; Hyndman, 1997). In this section I briefly rehearse arguments that aim to dismantle the salient discourse of 'solutions' in refugee protection and to reconceive of 'resettlement' not as a solution but as a strategy that refugees use to change their status and shape their own security situations.

Katy Long (2011, 22) unsettles the language of solutions in relation to long-term displacement. Precarious status, she notes, 'prevents access to local labour markets, prevents the displaced from setting up businesses or accessing education or health services.' Perhaps more importantly, she steps away from the idea that the international refugee regime merely needs reform or updating and explores how the *language* of solutions creates complicity and consent to an international system focused on states:

The very fact of protracted displacement is evidence that existing approaches to 'solving' displacement have failed. Voluntary return, local integration and resettlement – the traditional 'durable solutions' – are not accessible for those trapped in protracted displacement.... One question which must be asked, however, is whether the very language of 'solutions' is in fact creating – rather than confronting – the apparent impasse in protracted displacement crisis (Long, 2011, 8).

More than two-thirds of all refugees under the auspices of UNHCR have been displaced for more than five years; Palestinian refugees fall under a different UN agency and push proportion of people living in conditions of protracted displacement to more than three-quarters of the global number. The international refugee regime has not protected most refugees with these 'solutions' (Hyndman and Giles 2017). The 'waiting' people do while enduring precarious displaced status is the norm and not the exception: most refugees have been exiled for years if not many decades.

Long-term displacement as a guest in host states or living with precarious status without any attendant access to livelihoods or civil rights is a form of waiting, of getting by and making a living as much as possible, but also a period of exclusion for many from cities and labour markets, from local schools and housing options (Hyndman and Giles 2011). As co-authors, Wenona Giles and I identify as 'undisciplined feminist *bricoleurs* who glean

insights from a wide range of thinkers, analysts and approaches' (Hyndman and Giles 2017, 17). Hence, our work draws on poststructuralist thinking, feminist political economy, postcolonial analysis, and other work that queers the international refugee regime and the IR discourse that explains its policies. How do we refuse, reframe, and redirect our analysis? In short, we analyze the salient use of 'security', especially national security and securitization discourses employed by states, and then *refuse* this meaning given the relative absence of refugees' own security. Scaling security to that of the person affected by displacement, we generate an ontological notion of 'feeling safe.' While imperfect, ontological security wholly departs from existing meanings of security normally applied to refugees (Conlon, 2018).

In the context of displacement, I contend that waiting is a kind of 'slow violence' building on the work of Rob Nixon and Sarah de Leeuw – a feminist political geographer. Slow violence is not a catastrophic disaster or event, but rather a much more gradual and invisible process (Nixon 2011), akin to draining the swamp so nothing can live or hide, rather than killing an enemy or perpetrating human rights atrocities. Sarah de Leeuw (2016) has transposed the logic of slow violence into the multitude of violent acts perpetrated against Indigenous persons in Canada. She too is more interested in the less visible, more domestic expressions of violence, specifically the separation of children from their families and their placement in residential schools far from home. This scale of the domestic and family is much less analyzed in critical academic work on Indigenous issues that focuses land title, treaties, and related rights of access than on the finding of 'cultural genocide' vis-à-vis these schools by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015).

For those who are encamped, the work of 'slow violence' is more vivid: people wait. While they navigate livelihoods of their own, they have little access to medical care for chronic conditions or acute emergencies. Children are born in the camps, often stateless, and have paltry options for education; even restricted access to vision care and glasses can preclude learning and perpetuate deficits in social development if not social exclusion. Protracted displacement is an expression of geopolitical containment but also produces slow violence.

Waiting may be a kind of slow violence on one hand, but it is an active not a passive process, on the other (Özcan 2016). Like living on a reserve, residing in a camp or settlement without access to mainstream services nonetheless can erode health, undermine educational opportunities, and truncate livelihoods as the experience of Indigenous communities has so vividly illustrated. Hodzic (2016) complicates the invisible and insidious forms of slow violence with her own analysis of 'slow harm.' Her incisive analysis illustrates the ways in which neoliberal governance regimes predicated on national debt reduction in Ghana gradually reduce the food supply and

blood life of the country's poorest people, living in the Upper East Region. She links the decline in female genital cutting in Northern Ghana to the decline in the health and literal blood of women, connecting global economic scales of debt repayment with national policies of structural adjustment that, in turn, detrimentally affect nutrition for women's bodies and perceived blood supply. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's (2007) concept of slow death, Hodzic contends that 'slow harm' reveals how the invisible violence of indebted neoliberal democracy makes bodies vulnerable.

Citizenship is hard to come by for those facing protracted conditions of displacement. However, formal membership in social, economic and political communities is not always a prerequisite to self-sufficiency, self-authorized security, and autonomy. People living with uncertainty, without legal status or *de facto* acceptance in a country where they can then make their way are constantly weighing options, making decisions, and forging livelihoods (Landau Forthcoming; Amit 2010). Slow violence and harm may not be about just deprivation (of food, mobility, and work), but also about undermining volition, decision-making power and people's ability to manage their own affairs.

Ehrkamp (2016) identifies three salient themes in the highly interdisciplinary Refugee Studies literature: the securitization of migration, including territorial and spatial strategies of migration maneuvering; protracted displacement in camps and cities; and refugee subjectivities. Feminist geopolitics is vital to animating this field, and the links among these three interwoven phenomena, given the salience of states in regulating all three of these dimensions. People living in conditions of long-term displacement *embody* the geopolitics of containment that dominate the global landscape (Hyndman 2000; Castles 2008).

In a similar vein to John Urry (2000) and Mimi Sheller and Urry (2006), Tim Cresswell contends that movement can be framed as the normal, if we allow it, whereas 'staying put' is the aberration and invention of modern Westphalian-centric liberal democracies. Cresswell (2006, 46) argues a more poststructuralist position that connects to Liisa Malkki's (1992, 1995) critiques of state-centric sedentarism and how refugees are aberrations of the state. He contends that

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 sedentary metaphysics (Cresswell 2006, 46).

Giles and I have argued that the salient geopolitical paradigm for refugees in the Cold War period is one of containment and thus mobility as a new metaphysical norm in modern social and geographical life is problematic (Hyndman and Giles 2011). Nonetheless, guaranteeing displaced persons

mobility does offer autonomy, agency and opportunities for people to make their own 'solutions' in a way that no other big idea addressing protracted refugee displacement has (Aleinikoff and Zamore 2018).

Only a tiny proportion of the world's refugees – less than 1% – are selected from camps, settlements and urban areas for resettlement in places like Canada, the US, Australia and Sweden. The permanent status to reside in these states, and the attendant pathways to citizenship, are coveted, rare opportunities. Meanwhile millions will seek asylum on their own steam, arriving at ports of entry to make claims or bypassing them in hopes of finding informal protection. In the eyes of wealthier states, those resettled are the 'good' refugees, the 'managed flow', whereas asylum seekers, often referred to as 'irregular migrants', are considered the less deserving or more suspicious migrants. Ironically, the richer states have concrete legal *obligations* to these inconvenient 'spontaneous' arrivals, those claiming refugee status at a port of entry.

Most of the world's wealthiest countries have signed international legal instruments, specifically the 1951 Convention Relating to Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, which stipulate due process of asylum claims, due diligence in protecting claimants from *refoulement* until their cases are heard, and in some cases constitutional protections, including access to health care, jobs, and education while they await the adjudication of their cases. Precluding access to such entitlements and protection is the salient geopolitical consensus among the world's wealthiest states. Between the embodied geopolitical narratives of protracted displacement and the intransigence of camps and temporary settlements for many refugees, the prevailing geopolitics of refugee containment have trickled down. A feminist politics can refuse, reframe, and redirect analyses to go beyond these IR politics and practices that centre states as the objects of inquiry, but ultimately it seeks to change them.

The poorer states hosting displaced people are internationally funded and cajoled with other perks to feed and maintain refugees on their territories. Thus refugees can 'stay put' in global South 'havens' (Betts and Collier, 2017), a preferred option for powerful states in the global North than having such persons arrive to claim asylum at their borders (Hyndman 1997). In the post-Cold War period, refugees have largely lost their geopolitical and strategic value, with a few exceptions. More than 85% of the world's 25.4 million refugees live in the global South (including Middle Eastern locations), with 3.1 million new asylum seekers worldwide in 2017 (UNHCR 2018). More than three-quarters of these 25.4m people displaced beyond the borders of their home countries are in 'protracted refugee situations' (PRS), having been in exile five years or longer with no end in sight. Most have been displaced for decades. How then, does one analyze the decisions and self-authorized forms of security and protection that refugees seek?

Refugee resettlement, one of the UN's three 'durable solutions', offers a thread of hope and possibility, if only for a small minority. Yet, the concept of resettlement must be 'unsettled' in a postcolonial sense, and redefined as a *strategy* of the migrant-asylum seeker, not merely an endpoint of orderly migration endorsed by states. To this end, Loyd, Ehrkamp, and Secor (2017, 2) disrupt dominant geopolitical imaginaries that situate the violence of war in discrete times and places by challenging the idea 'that refugee resettlement simply moves refugees from unsafe, traumatising spaces to safe, caring spaces.' At the most granular of scales, their feminist-geopolitical intervention exposes 'the refugee' as the subject of humanitarian treatment and the target of a highly securitised migration regime' (3). For Loyd et al. (2018, 1) the geopolitics of trauma emerge "not only in cartographies of war, displacement and resettlement, but also in the minute details and performative demands of the refugee determination and resettlement process."

A feminist geopolitics of private refugee resettlement in Canada

This section begins by rehearsing the argument that 'resettlement' can be reconstituted and rescaled as a *strategy* employed by those called refugees and selected for a new start in another country (Hyndman and Giles 2017), rather than a sedentarist outcome of immigration policy. I then offer an original analysis of a unique and unusual refugee protection enacted by private Canadian citizens and residents, the Private Refugee Sponsorship Program (PRSP), a resettlement scheme.

This brief case study weaves a tale of inspiring civic engagement with an analysis of less benign governance measures, including efforts to privatize some costs and functions of refugee resettlement. What began in 1978 as a public-private partnership between the federal government and groups of five residents to sponsor refugees to Canada has since morphed into a *de facto* program for the reunification of refugees' family members still abroad, and a protection-oriented immigration stream subjected to government agendas to privatize government costs of resettlement and prioritize refugees in some regions more than others, a racialized geopolitics.

Private sponsorship in Canada is an impressive enterprise, which is completely voluntary and has flown under the radar for most of the 40 years it has been in existence (except see Molloy et al. 2017; special issue of *Refugee* 2016). Groups of five Canadian residents agree to fund and assist – in all senses of the word – a refugee family or individual for one year. Upon arrival refugees are granted permanent residence and a pathway to citizenship. Some 300,000 people have come to Canada through this program, which is defined by additionality, or the concept that privately sponsored refugees will always be 'in addition to' those whom the Government of Canada

sponsors. Refugees are selected from all over the world, although source countries for government assistance have always been shaped by Canada's geopolitical positioning globally. Sponsors may 'name' or request sponsorship of a particular person or family, a feature that contributed to this pathway become a way for separated families to reunite (Macklin et al. 2018). Sponsors themselves come from a range of backgrounds, places, and vocations: all must sign a contract to fulfill their commitment of one year. Background police checks are performed and proof that financial support is forthcoming is normally required. Many sponsors are affiliated with faith organizations; others are secular and community-based; even Canadian university students pay for stipends that privately support refugee students to come and stay in Canada for their studies (Hyndman, Payne, and Jimenez 2017).

Canada has a strong record of refugee resettlement since World War II, one driven by Cold War geopolitical alliances. Before WWII (and after), Canada enacted systematic and violent dispossession of its Indigenous Peoples, internment (of Japanese persons living in Canada) and refusals (of Jews arriving by ship in 1939). After WWII, however, people whose lives were endangered by Communist rule were generally welcome: in 1956 more than 100,000 Hungarians came to Canada. A decade later, the Prague Spring gave rise to another wave of Cold War displacement and refugee resettlement, but it was not until the late 1970s that large-scale refugee resettlement would include government-led *private sponsorship*.

As part of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in Southeast Asia, some 74,000 refugees came to Canada in a five-year period from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, starting in 1979. Many of these refugees were assisted through private sponsorship (Girard 2005). The 1976 Immigration Act made private, that is citizen-led, sponsorship possible, and in 1978 the concept of *designated class* (section 6.2) was implemented making it practically possible. This new legal structure added capacity for resettling refugees beyond the 1951 Convention Relating to Refugees. The massive resettlement program out of Southeast Asia was forged through the serendipitous alignment of Soviet-era geopolitics, Canadian public opinion (as shaped by the politicized media coverage of the conflict in Southeast Asia), and government policy (Alboim 2016). These tenacious Cold War politics have long faded, along with the declining popularity of refugees. A more defensive posturing between wealthier, global North and global South divides characterizes the politics of asylum and displacement today. And yet, private refugee sponsorship has endured throughout.

Before delving into my case study, I want to signal the important if still sparse scholarship that 'unsettles' the goodwill behind private sponsorship in refugee resettlement. Loyd et al. (2018) convincingly show how resettled

refugees are the subjects of medicalized regimes of care and security, and yet they also navigate these regimes astutely with networked knowledge of their options, however constrained. People who are refugees can refuse the Orientalist framings of humanitarian assistance, just as they may accept them as a pathway to protection for strategic reasons in a particular time and place (Hyndman and Giles 2017). Kyriakides and colleagues (2018a, 2018b) reveal the insult and bruising moments of resettlement to Canada in the Orientalist 'rescue' narrative that can characterize private sponsorship. The authors argue that privately sponsored refugees are 'persons of self-rescue' who have navigated difficult journeys and often significant hardships before arriving in Canada. They have the 'eligibility to exist,' the 'authority to act,' and retain autonomy over their lives even within a context of resettlement and sponsorship which they have chosen. They may not even identify as 'refugees':

My wife and I travelled a lot as tourists before coming to Canada. When we arrived as refugees at the airport we actually didn't know how to act. The reason was that coming to a specific country as a refugee is different from travelling as a tourist. I think that implicitly we rejected the idea that we came here as refugees. Instead we thought 'we're coming to Canada to build a new life, just like any other immigrant.' We didn't accept the categorization 'refugees' and we didn't know how to act based on this categorization (Ali, a Syrian man in his 30s, interviewed in rural Ontario; cited in Kyriakides et al. 2018a: 65).

This refutation of refugee labels and the reinscription of 'refugeeness' onto people who do not claim it for themselves is also evident in Martha Kwee Kumsa's (2006) work with young women in Toronto who were formerly Oromo refugees; says Dinsiri,

I had a problem accepting that I am a refugee.... Refugees are the ones in Somalia or Kenya or somewhere out there. Like, not me! [people laugh] ... I mean these are displaced people! ... I didn't consider myself to be displaced! (cite in Kumsa 2006: 244)

Likewise, Kumsa herself writes about being constructed as a refugee, despite more than a decade as a Canadian citizen and tenured professor:

I am a refugee! Others look at me and see a refugee. I look at my Self through Others' eyes and become a refugee. The notorious cycle of Self is complete. The fact that I have been a Canadian citizen for over ten years matters little. Persecution and flight, asylum and resettlement, racialization and alienation, all woven into essentialist discourses of nationhood construct me as a refugee (Kumsa 2006: 230).

The settler society can deny a fully realized selfhood and belonging to those who arrive as racialized refugee newcomers.

Despite the fairly widespread support for refugee resettlement and private sponsorship in Canada, the asymmetrical power relations of host/settler

society and guest/refugee remain fraught. Audrey Macklin and colleagues (2018) ask how the unequal relationship of sponsors to refugees can be transformed into a more inclusive group incorporating all as co-residents or co-citizens. Their research probes the motivations of sponsors, and the meanings they attach to the sponsorship work that they do in relation to their own *practice* of citizenship.

The stealth architecture and governance of private sponsorship (2006–2016)

With the election of a minority Conservative Government led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2006, and the appointment soon after of former Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, Jason Kenney, the benign neglect of private sponsorship by government and the autonomy sponsors enjoyed began to change. The analysis presented here briefly highlights two governance measures that were implemented in what once was a veritable governance vacuum: 1) the introduction of a new category of resettled refugee, the Blended Visa-office Referred refugee, or BVOR; and 2) the application of *limits* to private sponsorship, as well as *caps* on certain Canadian visa posts, resulting in the prioritizing of certain nationalities over others, and creating longer waits for people who are the most racialized. The creation of the BVOR category and of caps and limits on certain visa posts in significant places will be my focus here.

Beginning in 2009, the federal government decided to create an association to connect all of the groups that held contractual agreements with it, known as Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), into a national network across English-speaking Canada. Quebec is responsible for its own immigration selection, including refugee programs, so is not part of this association in the same way. Groups of five sponsors that work under the auspices of SAHs are called 'constituent groups' and represent the vast majority of sponsors, though Groups of 5, Community Sponsors, and other formations continue to operate. While analysis of the meaning and function of this national network is beyond the scope of this paper, one can show through the communication network of SAH policies and practices that it soon became a vehicle for governance where none had previously existed. Information could be shared in new ways, but new government limits on the number of private sponsorships and caps affecting particular visa posts were also conveyed through this network, as was news of a new refugee category, the BVOR.

Privately-sponsored refugees (PSRs), in contrast to the BVOR category, can either be chosen from a list of visa-office referrals, normally screened by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or identified by name by their prospective sponsors, an arrangement that often allows to a sponsorship

group to select family members related to the first group sponsored who were left behind. This *de facto* process of family reunification is referred to as the 'echo effect' (Chapman 2014). The Canadian government under PM Harper determined that this informal process of family reunification through private sponsorship was fraudulent (Black 2013).

The Harper Government won a majority mandate and government in the 2011 federal election; in 2013 the BVOR category was introduced (Labman and Pearlman 2018). At the same time the Government also cut the number of government-assisted refugees GARs, and created new spaces in the BVOR category. BVOR sponsors support refugees who are screened for eligibility by the UNHCR and meet its eligibility criteria for 'vulnerability' for one year of settlement. BVORs are jointly funded on an equal basis by government and sponsors (50% each), which means they cost the sponsors half as much money. Because of this third-party referral system to government by UNHCR, BVOR sponsors *cannot* identify by name who they want to support. By applying new limits on the number of refugees who could be privately sponsored, the government hope to divert private sponsors to the BVOR stream and incentivize the BVOR program by paying half the of the financial cost (Hyndman, Payne, and Jimenez 2017). At the same time, an elaborate system of distributing and tracking scarce 'spots' for approved refugee applicants to private sponsors was created, with a specified limit for each Sponsorship Agreement Holder. Should a SAH not use its allocation in a given year, it risks losing those spots in the subsequent year, effectively creating a *disincentive* to SAHs to sponsor BVORs if the PRS 'quota' were not filled.

What is remarkable about the BVOR category is that sponsors largely refused to participate in the government's efforts to divert their energies and resources to it. Taking decision-making power away from sponsors and impeding the ability of sponsors to reunite extended families that did not meet the Canadian Government's definition of (nuclear) family was not a welcome move, even if the cost to sponsors was half as much (Labman 2016). Until the Syrian Initiative to welcome refugees to Canada in late 2015 and 2016, the BVOR category was largely a policy failure with very modest uptake. Under the government led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, elected in October 2015 on a pro-Syrian refugee resettlement platform, almost 4000 BVORs were brought to Canada out of some 40,000 from November 2015 to January 2017. Since that time, however, BVOR numbers have waned, since those who come under this category also ask their sponsors to initiate support and another sponsorship for *their* family members abroad, putting additional pressure on the PSR pathway which facilitates family reunification.

By 'capping' the numbers of refugees who could be selected by Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) from *some* Canadian visa posts but not all, certain host states (and the refugees living there) were prioritized

Table 1. Caps and limits on privately sponsored refugees (removed December 2016).

2016 SAH Global Cap on PSRs (10500)	Numbers of refugees to be shared by 102 SAHs
Non-capped missions	8700
Sub-capped missions	1650
Nairobi	400
Pretoria	250
Cairo	100
Islamabad	100
Rome	250
Tel Aviv	350
Dar es Salaam	200

Note: Data from an e-mail post to the Sponsorship Agreement Holders' (SAH) listserv, obtained through personal correspondence with SAH members.

over others, limiting refugees of some nationalities but not others. Upon more careful scrutiny, I identified a geographic prejudice against certain visa posts (especially those serving Sub-Saharan African refugee applicants). Other visa posts were free of restrictions (see [Table 1](#)). In short, the Harper Government created a system of racialized preferences defined by the geography of and limits at specific visa posts without naming race (Mongia 1999; Balibar and Wallerstein 1993).

The table shows how Nairobi, Pretoria, Cairo, Rome, Tel Aviv, and Dar Es Salaam – all destinations for mostly Sub-Saharan refugees – were tightly capped at less than 15% of the annual total of 10,500 in 2016. This prejudice against Sub-Saharan Africans is troubling and highly geographical. The capping of these visa posts translated into much longer waiting times for the mostly African applicants for private sponsorship at these visa missions. For example, searches I conducted on the Federal Government's website showed a waiting time of 70 months for privately sponsored refugees in Kenya in September 2016 compared with 10 months for a PSR in Jordan (Government of Canada no date).

In December 2016, the Government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau eradicated these differential caps on visa posts. Nonetheless, the Syrian Refugee Initiative, which brought more than 40,000 Syrians to Canada between November 2015 and January 2017, also skewed the demographics of who 'gets in' as privately sponsored refugees. Those waiting for processing in African locations faced even longer wait times, as Syrian refugees were prioritized in order to meet the campaign promises of 25,000 Syrian refugees in three months, pledged in fall 2015. While priority for 25,000 Syrians was based explicitly on an election promise, it too had racialized and geographically exclusionary effects.

Etienne Balibar (2007) coins the term 'differential racism' which purports to function within a framework of racism without races, also known as 'neo-racism'. Such prejudice is based on race but does not name it. Radhika Mongia (1999) emphasizes this concept in her analysis of the Canadian Government's 'continuous journey regulation, another racialized geopolitics of exclusion (see also Slater 2004). The regulation prohibited Indian, mostly

Sikh, passengers on the Komagata Maru from landing on Canadian soil if they did not come to Canada directly (without stopping) from their country of birth or citizenship, an impossible feat at the time. The 'continuous journey' regulation indirectly but intentionally resulted in excluding Indian immigration to Canada.

The theme of waiting reappears again, this time after one is accepted for private sponsorship but is placed in queue. As note, waiting times for privately-sponsored refugees out of Nairobi, Kenya as of September 2016 was 70 months, while the waiting time for a refugee in Jordan was 10 months (Government of Canada no date). Likewise, a refugee applying from Eritrea would wait 50 months, and one from Turkey (not a source country for Canada's initial goal of 25,000 Syrian refugees) was 8 months. These disparate lengths of wait times too can be considered a geopolitical expression of 'slow violence' (Nixon 2011; de Leeuw 2016) that ensued for almost five years before a new federal government put an end to the practice. By November 2018, waiting times for PSRs had improved and evened out across regions notably: 21 months wait out of Kenya and 25 months out of Jordan (Government of Canada no date; no data were available for Eritrea). This brief analysis shows how waiting times were a proxy for geographical discrimination based on region, resulting in exclusionary geographies of racism.

So private refugee sponsorship through resettlement is at once laudable as a voluntary, sustained engagement as civil society, but it also fraught with Orientalist rescue narratives, government accusations of fraud (as yet unproven), and racialized geographies of waiting for displaced persons introduced since 2010. While caps on visa posts are gone, limits on PSRs and the awkward BVOR category remain alive and well. During the summer of 2018 there was so little uptake of the newly increased available spaces for sponsorship that UNHCR in Canada, the Government of Canada, Amnesty International and others took up campaigns to avoid wasting these protection spaces. At the same time, private sponsorship for Rohingyas in Bangladesh, Yemenis in Djibouti, and those who have fled violence in the Northern Triangle of Central America are not even part of the online register of waiting times.

Conclusion expanding the tent: feminist political geography

The example of private refugee sponsorship in Canada shows how resettlement can provide permanent and high quality pathways to full citizenship for refugees, but also how the largely invisible and banal bureaucracy of the state can create and conceal a slow violence of longer waits for those displaced people from more racialized countries, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Waiting is disguised as limits, caps, and processing times – a banal

bureaucracy, but one that can generate a racialized geography of preferences. Tacitly these findings are evidence that we have to pay attention to the resettlement rationalities of the state, even as they facilitate important protection and new opportunities for refugees. Sponsors' motivations, meanings, and work as they volunteer to welcome refugee newcomers, pay their rent and bills, and provide everyday support to them for at least one year remain poorly understood (Macklin et al. 2018).

At a broader scale, interventions, analysis, and action can catalyze feminist, anti-racist, geo-politics that aims to be postcolonial, while eschewing ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of violence – all in an effort to create a bigger tent of 'feminist political geography.' Plenty of room is needed for the feminist materialist project of taking apart the imaginaries of sexual difference that generate a conventional Western framing of a body politics by underlining how this is constructed, as Dixon (2015), but also the imaginaries of migrant-refugee threats or disembodied knowledge production produced from the vantage point of 'nowhere' (Haraway 1991). Making space for the scholars of feminist geopolitics broadly construed, whose politically engaged approaches challenge the contested quotidian power relations that produce violence and historicizes the spatialities that emerge from them, is important. Even more critical is a much fuller engagement with sub-altern geopolitics and postcolonial framings of power, so that feminist political geography can address transnational human displacement without Orientalized Western rescue narratives.

While scholars of feminist geopolitics have argued that the body is the finest and most intimate scale of political space, Deborah Dixon has adroitly theorized otherwise: the individuated body and its presumed subjectivity obscure the power relations that traverse the earth and apply to bodily matter not necessarily framed in tacitly liberal Enlightenment ways. Still, I – and others – cannot relinquish the narratives of violence and exile, the struggles they impute, and the political possibilities that the flawed individuated subject offers. I would like to see more nonhuman or more-than-human geographies too. This bigger tent of feminist, anti-racist postcolonial political geographies makes room for these, as well as the embodied, contradictory, messy, co-constituted illiberal subjects contesting multiple modalities of violence – including waiting.

Geographers need time and space to stretch our thinking around 'material states' in wholly new ways, without the borders that haunt so much work in feminist geopolitics. In the meantime, let us also use the scrappy, political if encumbered version of feminist geopolitics for the realist struggles to curb violence, prevent it where possible, and refuse the 'us'/'them' binary that so divides the world. Feminist political geographers are vital analysts of and intervenors in the slick and tricky ways that states and others exercise 'slow

violence' (Nixon 2011; de Leeuw 2016) through policy and practices that do not name race, caste, nationality or gender but nonetheless exclude, discriminate, and damage the well-being of those displaced and more precariously positioned than others.

While signalling more of a beginning than an end, this conclusion calls for the consolidation of feminist work under the umbrella of political geography. Feminist political geography has long been producing, engaging and changing scholarship in political geography, including geopolitics. Let us name, occupy, and transform this wide, deep and incisive assemblage of theory, ontology, and geographical analysis, and move forward.

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