

LET THE TAMIL REFUGEES STAY!

Myth 1: They are illegals who are jumping the queue.

There is no 'queue' for refugee claimants. Refugees are forced from their homes in emergency situations due to human rights abuses committed during wars, military occupations, or persecution against a minority group. We cannot expect refugees to wait for Canada to select them from overseas. We must understand that they undertake long and dangerous journeys to protect their lives and the lives of their families. According to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, to which Canada is a party, there are no penalties on refugees who arrive without pre-authorization and irregularly.

Myth 2: They are terrorists.

There is no evidence to substantiate this. Rohan Gunaratna, the government's primary source, has already been discredited by lawyers as well as an Immigration and Refugee Board adjudicator for being unbelievable. Last October, when the 76 Tamil asylum-seekers came on Ocean Lady they were similarly labeled as terrorists and security threats. However by Jan 2010, they were all released from detention when Canadian Border Services Agency admitted they had no evidence of a terrorist connection.

Furthermore, officials are just relying on stereotypes of Tamils as all being associated with the Tamil Tigers to create unnecessary racist hysteria and mistrust of asylum-seekers. National security laws in the post-911 climate have directly targeted and marginalized immigrants, refugees, and racialized people. These laws and policies are less about protecting society than creating a culture of fear. Many of these policies - such as Security Certificates - have been struck down in the Courts after years of human rights and anti racist campaigning. The rhetoric of the War on Terror serves as a convenient distraction from the reality that people's daily lives are increasingly unsafe and insecure due to global neoliberal economics and war-mongering that leads to mass displacement, poverty, and human rights atrocities.

Myth 3: The situation is getting better in Sri Lanka.

According to a 2010 Amnesty International report, in the past 12 months the Sri Lankan government has continued to jail critics and clamped down on dissent. Some 80,000 Tamils remain in refugee camps, while 400,000 displaced Tamils survive in communities where homes and infrastructure were destroyed. The government continues to extend a state of emergency, restricting many basic human rights, and thousands of arbitrary detentions are justified under the guise of detainees being suspected Tamil Tigers. This past month, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appointed a panel to investigate war crimes and genocidal acts committed by the Sri Lankan government against Tamils.

Myth 4: They are a burden on tax payers.

The biggest resource expenditure has been the government's choice to spend thousands of dollars in an unnecessary security operation, including resources spent on incarcerating women and children. Only a tiny fraction has been spent on the health and well-being of the migrants, whose lives are worth more than dollars. Furthermore, scapegoating migrants for being a financial burden lets the government off the hook. All residents continue to receive inadequate access to necessary social services because of misplaced government priorities - choosing to bail out banks and sink billions into the police and military - not because of the lack of resources to provide a social safety net for all in need.



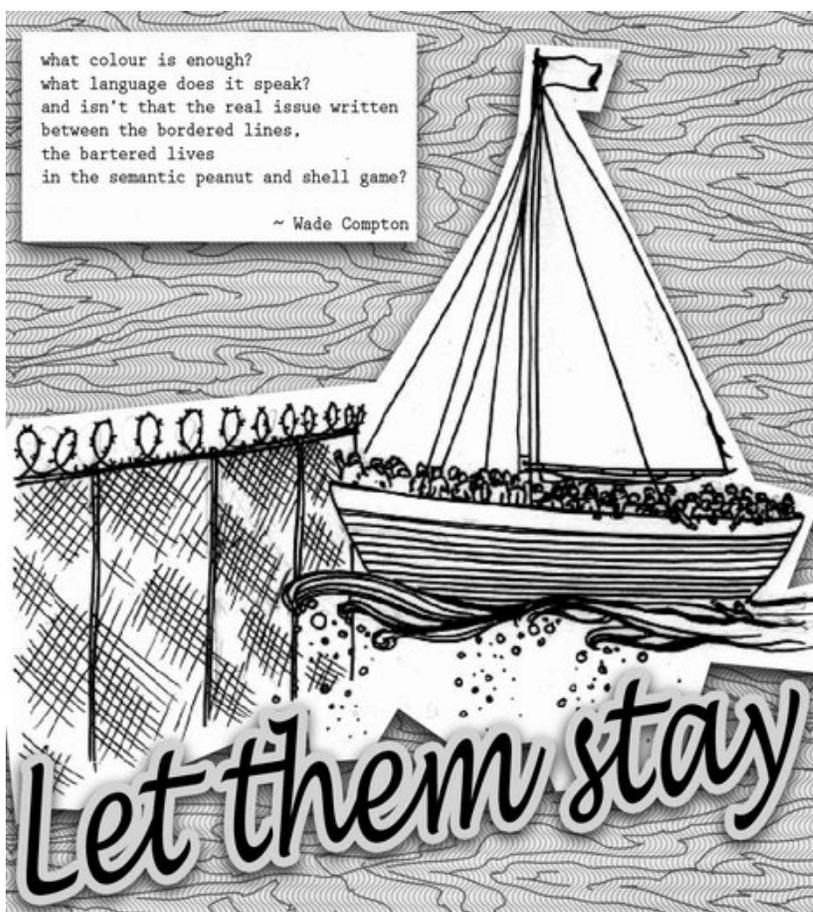
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Myth 5: Canada has a generous refugee system; we cannot keep accepting people.

Despite border panics, only a small minority of asylum seekers make claims in the Western world. There are about 20 million refugees worldwide and most migrate into neighboring countries of Africa, Middle East, and South Asia. Canada accepts fewer than 20,000 refugees per year, which is less than 0.1% of the world's displaced population.

Furthermore, Canada's system is not generous. Deportations from Canada have skyrocketed 50% over the last decade, with 13,000 deportations in the past year. With the Conservatives, the number of approved asylum claims has dropped by 56%. Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney's recent refugee reforms create two tiers of refugees, establishing a hierarchy based on nationality. There are countless structural flaws in the system, designed to make it near impossible to claim asylum. Immigration and Refugee Board members are political appointees; certain avenues such as the Pre Removal Risk Assessment have acceptance rates of 3-5% while others such as the Humanitarian and Compassionate claim do not have to be processed prior to deportation. In addition, the refugee system has been termed a "lottery system" because acceptance rates can vary from 0-80% depending on the judge. The Safe Third Country Agreement between the US and Canada creates a "Fortress Canada" by disallowing up to 40% of asylum seekers.



Myth 6: It is not our problem.

The Canadian government has recently been forced to apologize for racist and exclusionary historical measures including the Chinese Exclusion Act and Komagatamaru incident.

These apologies and the rhetoric of multiculturalism is hollow when current policies and practices perpetuate racism and exclusion. The recent backlash that repeats the tired-old refrain about 'illegals' and 'criminals' has meant that right-wing neo-nazis such as Paul Fromm and the Aryan Guard have resurfaced publicly and are being given a platform to spew their hate about sending the boat back. Is this really the side that we are on?

Immigration and refugee issues are not simply about Canadian benevolence or charity. We need to rethink what function and whose interests the state border actually serves. The current trends of global migration reveal the ways in which patterns of Western domination and corporate globalization have enriched some countries by creating economic and political insecurity that forces people indigenous to their lands to migrate. The Canadian government

continues to maintain economic and diplomatic ties with the government of Sri Lanka, instead of supporting those who have survived the brutality of that government, which makes us complicit in their displacement. Also, we must always remember that Canada is a settler country, built on the theft of Indigenous lands and the forced assimilation of Indigenous communities. On what basis is a colonial government denying colonized people their right to livelihood? Finally, we must challenge the idea that some are more worthy than others to a life of dignity; instead we should reaffirm the universal value that people have the freedom to move in order to seek safety and to flourish.