

The Mobility Paradigm: Securitized Borders, Racialized Boundaries, and the Travel Ban

By Hadi Khoshnevis



The Muslim travel ban, also dubbed the “Muslim ban,” is one example of many historical measures and socio-political processes that have something in common: they aim to control the movement of the constructed Other. The “ghettos” that confined the Jews in Europe, the reservations that have restrained first nations in the Americas, Jim Crow laws that restricted the movement of black bodies, the “bathroom bills” that demonize and confine those with non-heteronormative identities, the wall between Mexico and the U.S., and the travel ban are instances that reveal the interdependency of physical borders and ideological boundaries. These historical instances show how those in power have historically attempted to protect their monopoly over the mobility of the Other and control movement across borders and boundaries.

Through “the mobility paradigm,” the late John Urry and his colleagues argue for a “movement driven” social science. This is a social science that adopts a dynamic historical perspective and studies how and why certain movements become associated with progress, freedom, civilization, and modernity, while the movement of Others are constructed to summon feelings of terror and undesirability. Those deemed under the categorical figure of the Other, constructed and construed as history-less, backward, or frozen in time, must navigate these representational discourses.

Whilst romanticized talks about globalization and “compression of space and time” can fetishize the de-territorialization of movement and processes of identity formation, sociology needs to recognize the politics of difference and politico-social processes by which one group constructs a discourse designed to control the movement of the Other(s). A movement-driven sociology recognizes that the mere act of movement and increase in its frequency does not herald the emergence of a qualitatively accessible world for all. The paradigm of mobility, by inviting a historicity, demonstrates how colonial history—in which the “enlightened” white man embarks on its “moral” civilizational journey—has evolved into neoliberal ideologies of globalization and the universal exploitation of the Other, both at home and in the farthest corners of the world. Mobilities are always situated in a hierarchy that grants some people control over their movement while others’ movement is either revoked, restricted, or forced. While some movements are marked as modern and welcomed, the movement of certain groups, like refugees and immigrants, carries notions of crisis and fear.

One of the implications of limiting the entry of othered bodies and minds into historically white and privileged spaces (like academia) and processes (like knowledge production) is that alternative modes of thinking are banned from entering the “Western” intersubjective world. As a corollary, theorizing and scientific production remains the “moral” responsibility and normative territory of Western bodies and minds. A sociology that prioritizes historical study of mobility across and within borders and boundaries, at individual and collective as well as socio-political and legal levels, can reveal these larger patterns of inequality—it can contribute to the study of social problems from which our larger world is suffering.

Hadi Khoshnevis is a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology, University of South Florida. Hadi’s latest publication, [*Accountability in a State of Liminality: The Experience of Iranian Students at American Airports*](#), is an attempt to show how airports as liminal spaces have determining effect on one’s transition into a new society.