Possibilities of Urban Belonging

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Abstract: Many migrants who inhabit cities are illegalized, excluded from formal membership in urban communities, and denied full participation in urban life. In this article, I examine the possibilities of all inhabitants to belong to the city. Drawing on Ernst Bloch, David Harvey, Henry Lefebvre, and others, I theorize different “layers” of possibility and review the literature to explore how these layers apply to urban belonging. Furthermore, I investigate how urban protests and activist practices can materially transform the city to be more accommodating to illegalized migrants, while evoking the different layers of possibility. I conclude with a discussion of the practical and theoretical implications of contemplating the possibilities of urban belonging.

Keywords: illegalized migrants, utopian imagination, domicile, right to the city, sanctuary cities, urban protests

Introduction

Cities have always attracted migrants. The European medieval saying “city air makes you free” (Stadtluft macht frei) describes how moving to the city once enabled people to shed feudal bonds and become free citizens. Like in the past, people today move to cities to take refuge, seek freedom, and pursue opportunity. However, many migrants and refugees today are not free citizens. In fact, those who crossed an international border before settling in a city are often denied legal status and thus criminalized. These “illegalized” migrants exemplify marginal populations that are denied equal participation in urban life. In this article, I use the case of illegalized migrants to explore the practical and utopian possibilities of all inhabitants belonging in the city.

Drawing on urban theoretical work, such as David Harvey’s writing on the utopian imagination, Henry Lefebvre’s “right to the city”, and the analytical framework of Ernst Bloch relating to the “possible”, I argue that there are different “layers” of possibilities of urban belonging. According to these layers the belonging of illegalized migrants can either be imagined by mobilizing existing material configurations and political concepts, or one can anticipate a radically different urban reality that is open and unfixed, and thus impossible to grasp from a contemporary vantage point. Furthermore, I suggest that these layers of possibility are not contradictory but complementary, enabling critical scholars and activists to pursue strategic urban politics and radical utopian transformation simultaneously.

My argument builds on a sizable literature on urban citizenship (eg Bauböck 2003; Holston 1999; Smith and McQuarrie 2012) and the right to the city (eg Brenner et al. 2011; Mitchell 2003; Purcell 2002, 2013). It also explores the tension between urban and national scales (Purcell 2002), which arises because the
material situation of migrants in cities is configured by the legal process occurring at the national scale\(^1\) that “makes people illegal” (Dauvergne 2008). This illegalization of migrants occurs not only at the border that separates national territories, but increasingly in cities—at workplaces, bus-stations, in schools, and in situations in which people can be identified as not-belonging to the national community (eg Balibar 1998; Vaughan-Williams 2008). Furthermore, the devolution of welfare and migration-policing responsibilities, grants cities “newfound powers to discriminate on the basis of alienage, or noncitizen status” (Varsanyi 2008:877). While the illegalization of migrants is enacted increasingly at the urban scale, this scale also presents various layers of possibilities for these migrants to belong.

In the following sections, I first provide a theoretical backdrop on urban possibilities, territorial belonging, the need to imagine the city as an open project, and the process of subject formation. Then, I use the concrete examples of the \textit{2006 immigrant rights marches in US cities} and the sanctuary-city movement to examine how these activities have mobilized a layer of possibility of belonging according to which illegalized migrants are imagined to belong to established national and urban polities. Thereafter, I investigate how protests and activist practices are evoking more far-sighted utopian possibilities. I end with a discussion of the practical and theoretical significance of the urban possibilities of belonging.

**Background**

**Urban Possibilities**

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain utopian thinking has been discredited as the fantasy of failed totalitarian regimes and erased from mainstream political debate (Bret et al. 2013; Kritidis 2006; Quarta 1996). Political debate today presents market capitalism organized on the basis of territorial nation-states as the only imaginable possibility. Margaret Thatcher’s infamous proclamation that “there is no alternative” has come to symbolize the apparent foolishness of fundamentally critiquing capitalism and the global political order based on the Westphalian nation-state (eg Bret et al. 2013; Hawel und Kritidis 2006).

From a strictly materialist perspective, existing conditions produce the ideological superstructure that legitimates these conditions and makes alternatives appear impossible. For example, Thatcher’s endorsement reaffirmed the existing economic and political order of capitalism and the Westphalian model. However, the human capacity to envision alternative possibilities must not be disregarded. For example, Hayek’s and Friedman’s vision of a free-market utopia, in which capitalist enterprise is not distorted by political interference, facilitated the construction of neoliberal capitalism as we know it today (Harvey 2005). Armed with this vision, political and economic actors, like Thatcher, were able to further entrench free-market capitalism in political and economic life.

In today’s political climate that denies the possibility of alternatives, it is especially important to explore the possible. As Marcus Hawel and Gregor Kritidis observe: “Only when we conceptually cross exiting boundaries, will we be able to unleash
the forces necessary for the material transgression of these boundaries” (Hawel and Kritidis 2006:8, my translation). Or, in David Harvey’s words: “without a vision of Utopia there is no way to define that port to which we might want to sail” (Harvey 2000:189).

There are different “layers” of the utopian imagination. Utopia serves first and foremost as a negation of existing conditions that require transformation. For example, in 1516 Thomas Moore (1997) coined the term utopia—a combination of the Greek words eutopia (good place) and utopia (no place)—to describe a fictional island where material circumstances, social relations, and political, judicial, and economic systems differ from Moore’s contemporary Europe. Since Moore, visions of utopia have commonly served as a critique of contemporary society (Hölscher 1996; Levitas 1990).

Ernst Bloch (1985:258–288) identifies additional “layers” of possibilities. The “fact-like object-based possible” (sachhaft-objektgemäß Mögliche) could conceivably be implemented under current material configurations. For the sake of readability, I will refer to the “contingently possible” and “contingent possibilities”. These possibilities are “conceivable” because they rely on concepts and ontologies currently in circulation. For example, “contingent” on the continued existence of the structure of the territorial nation-state, it is possible to conceive reorienting a nation-state’s economy away from the principles of the free-market towards socialist or ecological principles. Similarly, Moore’s utopia offers a concrete image of an alternative society mobilizing imaginable ideas, such as religious co-existence, private property (ie lack thereof), a structured workday, and slavery.

At a third layer of the utopian imagination, the possible cannot be described in concrete terms. Rather, alternative possibilities of this layer are based on not-yet existing conditions, concepts and ontologies, and therefore cannot be defined in concrete terms or visualized as a sharp image. These alternative possibilities do not rely on concepts such as the nation-state, market or socialist economy, or migrants. Rather, these possibilities remain unfixed and open (eg Adorno 1966). Bloch (1985) describes these possibilities as “real”. The term “real”, in this context, does not refer to the actual world in which we live but rather a possible world that is not reducible to particular aspects—such as a particular economic system—but encompasses the totality of social and spatial relations.

The differentiation of these layers of the utopian imagination is important because they are associated with different political projects. The contingently possible can be applied in pragmatic ways that seek to modify particular aspects of society and mitigate concrete problems and injustices. Conversely, the real possible is associated with politics that seek to radically transform social and spatial relations.

Utopian possibilities and the figure of the city “have long been intertwined” (Harvey 2000:156; see also Fishman 1982). At the layer of the contingently possible, for example, are the urban utopias of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries envisioned by Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and others, which assumed that certain material circumstances and social relations continue to exits. These urban utopias, however, may be poor examples for progressive change. Harvey observes that they portray the city as spaces of control, surveillance, and
authoritarianism, stifling spontaneity and denying the possibility of an open future (Harvey 2000:159–173). Likewise, Lefebvre alleges that these 19th century urban utopias are cleansed of politics, including class struggle, and thereby deny the political nature of the urban. These depoliticized utopias depict “a city made up not of townspeople, but of free citizens, free from the division of labour, social classes and class struggles, making up a community, freely associated for the management of this community” (Lefebvre 1996:97). What is needed today, following Harvey and Lefebvre, are not visions of a depoliticized city, but rather possibilities of an urban future that is open and inclusive of the city’s inhabitants and their politics. Below, I examine possibilities of urban belonging in the particular context of illegalized migrants.

Territorial Belonging

Lefebvre’s (1996) work on the “right to the city” provides a useful departure point to theorize urban transformation and the belonging of illegalized migrants. Lefebvre links the right to the city to use value rather than exchange value. In this way, the right to the city lies not in property ownership but presence in the city (Allon 2013; Purcell 2002, 2013). People possess this right independently of their status as citizens, temporary residents, or being illegalized migrants. In the words of Mark Purcell (2013:142): “it is the everyday experience of inhabiting the city that entitles one to a right to the city, rather than one’s nation-state citizenship”. In this way, the right to the city implements the “domicile principle” of belonging (Bauder 2014a), which entails that all residents belong to a territorial polity and should be recognized as citizen-subjects. In Western liberal democracies, municipalities and regional polities (states, provinces, cantons, territories, etc) already follow this principle when they accept all national citizens and most legal residents as formal members of their communities. The problem is that nation-states apply the domicile principle in a highly selective manner when they permit the naturalization of some migrants but deny citizenship and status to others. Illegalized migrants without national status are thus also denied formal membership in urban or regional polities. In this sense, the nation state is “hegemonic” (Purcell 2002:104) because it defines who can be enfranchised at regional and urban scales.

Based on his reading of Lefebvre’s right to the city, Purcell (2002:105) suggested that the urban could be centred as the scale of formal belonging, and elevated to supersede regional and national scales, thereby creating an “urban-hegemonic” system of political membership. Thus, the city would offer to vulnerable migrants, especially illegalized migrants, “the opportunity to both develop and express a sense of belonging that is denied to them at the national scale” (Allon 2013:254). One could conceive that formal urban citizenship is granted on the basis of the domicile principle of residence in a city, and that this urban citizenship would automatically entitle one to citizenship at regional and national scales.

This urban citizenship based on the domicile principle is a “contingent” possibility (Bloch 1985:258–288), ie a possibility that is “conceivable” under current territorial configurations of governance. By “conceivable” I mean that we have the conceptual tools—in the forms of territorial polities and formal citizenship—to envision such an alternative. Domicile-based membership in an
Urban polity is already legal practice that applies to national citizens; extending this practice to illegalized migrants is not inconceivable. In addition, the territorial polities to which this citizenship applies already exist in the form of nation-states, sub-national regions, and municipalities (Staeheli et al. 2012).

Urban Imagination as an Open Project

The right to the city, however, involves more than granting citizenship based on the principle of domicile while preserving the basic parameters of the existing political order. Rather, Lefebvre’s right to the city “offers a radical alternative that directly challenges and rethinks the current structure of both capitalism and liberal-democratic citizenship” (Purcell 2002:100). Drawing on Hannah Arendt and David Harvey, Eduardo Mendieta concludes that the right to the city entails not only a legal claim to the right to have rights but also the “right to determine the ways in which we can define and transform ourselves” (Mendieta 2010:445). Thus, all inhabitants of the city—including illegalized migrants—possess the right to shape the urban community’s future and participate in the production of urban space, i.e., the built environment, social relations, and the lived experience (Lefebvre 1991).

Lefebvre imagines the possible city as unfixed and “experimental” (e.g., Lefebvre 1996:151)—neither as a concrete model, like the modernist urban utopias of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nor as a vision that is referenced in contemporary concepts or ontologies. Harvey (2012:140) remarks:

Most of what we know about urban organization comes from conventional theories and studies of urban governance and administration within the context of bureaucratic capitalist governmentality (against which Lefebvre quite rightly endlessly railed), all of which is a far cry from the organization of an anti-capitalist politics.

Harvey and Lefebvre imagine the city as an unfixed, incomplete, and open project that is not constrained by contemporary concepts and ontologies. This image of the city corresponds with what Bloch (1985) calls the “real” possible. Lefebvre uses the term “possible-impossible” to describe the same idea, as Nathaniel Coleman (2013:353) explains: “Bloch’s conception of the Real-Possible is akin to Lefebvre’s Possible-Impossible.” Lefebvre (1996:181) clarifies that his imagination of the city projects “on the horizon a ‘possible-impossible’” that neither denies the material urban circumstances of today nor the past, but rather transcends—or “sublates” (authenben) to use Hegel’s term—them (Busquet 2013). In the possible-impossible imagination of the city, different subjectivities exist than today or in the past. For example, the very concept of “migrant” may no longer be relevant to identify people as non-belonging, and it would no longer make sense to speak of “illegalized” migrants. However, what alternative identities urban inhabitants would embrace cannot yet be determined.

Subject Formation

The impossibility to envision the “real” possible in concrete terms should not hinder us from embarking on the journey towards it. Following a Hegelian-Marxian
tradition, the process of subject formation lies at the core of societal transformation and thus achieving the possible. For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, revolutionary potential rested in the realization of the urban working class (which existed as a material fact, or in itself) that it constitutes a political force (and exists for itself). They saw the formation of a collective working class identity as key towards overcoming capitalism and a class-based society.

Since Marx and Engels, material circumstances have changed. The two antagonistic urban classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which Marx and Engels identified in the mid-nineteenth century no longer exist in the same way. By the 1930s, Adorno observed that “the proletariat has more to lose than its chains” (cited in Hawel 2006:112, my translation); today members of the “middle class” possess social and economic rights, a relatively high standard of living and life-expectancy, smart phones, and educational systems for their children. Although neoliberalism has restored class power and has chipped away on the rights and achievements of this “middle class”, it has not brought back the class structure of the industrial revolution (Harvey 2005). Today’s transformative potential must be theorized as originating from an open and inclusive concept of class. In Harvey’s (2005:202) words:

There is no proletarian field or utopian Marxian fantasy to which we can retire. To point to the necessity and inevitability of class struggle is not to say that the way class is constituted is determined or even determinable in advance.

A few years after publishing this remark, Harvey (2012:130) elaborated on who this concept of class may include:

So we now have a choice: mourn the passing of the possibility of revolution because that proletariat has disappeared or change our conception of the proletariat to include the hordes of unorganized urban producers (or the sorts that mobilized the immigrant rights marches) and explore their distinctive revolutionary capacities and powers.

Today’s transformative urban movements emerge under conditions that “are full of the complexities that arise out of race, gender, and ethnic distinctions that are closely interwoven with class identities” (Harvey 2005:202). Lefebvre agreed that societal transformation may require the “pressure of the working class”; but the working class alone is “not sufficient” (Lefebvre 1996:157).

The capacity for transformation today emerges from a “precariat” (Standing 2011; see also Harvey 2012:xiv) that includes workers denied their fair share of the surplus value they produce as well as people denied rights, entitlements, and access to the resources of their communities. Correspondingly, calls for societal transformation are articulated around notions of both social justice and citizenship. Despite the conceptual distinctiveness of notions of social justice and citizenship, economic exploitation and the denial of rights and entitlements are inter-related. For example, the denial of formal citizenship renders legalized migrants super-exploitable as workers (eg Bauder 2006b; Sharma 2006). In fact, illegalized migrants exemplify the contemporary precariat, which is denied formal citizenship and super-exploited as labour. With a nod to the proletariat of the nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries, Étienne Balibar (2000:42) has called illegalized migrants the “modern proletariat”. Demands for social justice and citizenship should not be separated as distinct political struggles. In Harvey’s (2012:153) words: “Citizen and comrade can march together”.

Acts of solidarity are central to the formation of transformative subject identities. My understanding of solidarity, in this context, has its origin in Hegelian thought (Kapeller and Wolkenstein 2013) and emphasizes that subject identities are formed through material practice. The Marxian tradition applies this understanding of solidarity to promoting the formation of the working class as an acting subject. In this sense, solidarity facilitated the process of a working class that existed in itself to become a political force for itself. At the same time, the identities of the actors—for example the working class or citizens—are produced through material acts themselves (Butler 1990; Isin 2002). By acting in solidarity citizens, workers, and illegalized migrants intervene in the dialectical process of subject formation. These acts of solidarity can, on the one hand, instigate the contingent possibility of including those who are excluded in existing polities, or, on the other hand, evoke the real possible by generating entirely new subject identities.

In the next section, I investigate how recent protests and activist practices in support of illegalized migrants evoke contingent and real possibilities of urban belonging, and how they are fostering the formation of corresponding subject identities.

Urban Activism and Transformation
Cities today function “as an important site of political action and revolt” (Harvey 2012:117–118). Since cities are conversion points of global capital and information flows, urban protests can disrupt capital accumulation and thus put pressure on the ruling elements of society. Furthermore, cities have been the key sites of production, exploitation, and class struggle, and thus the location where class and other identities form and revolutionary movements are born (Merrifield 2002). Cities are also places to which vulnerable migrants tend to gravitate, where alliances between disadvantaged groups are struck, and where claims to rights and belonging are made (eg De Genova 2002; Sassen 2011; Young 2010). In this way, cities are important strategic locations for transformative activist politics.

Engin Isin (2007:212) further suggests that the city differs from assemblages like the nation-state in that the city “exists as both actual and virtual spaces”. As actual space, the city embodies physical infrastructure; as virtual space it encompasses a political and cultural imagination and juridico-legal structure that come into being only when they are enacted. In contrast to the city, the nation-state exists only as a virtual space—ie as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991). In fact, virtual assemblages such as the nation-state are enacted through the city’s actual space (Isin 2007:222). As actual spaces, cities also bring people in physical proximity to each other, which is an important condition for “being political” (Butler 2012; Isin 2002, 2008:35). By facilitating the political, “cities are one of the key sites where new norms and new identities are made” (Sassen 2013:69). In this way, cities are
places where the real possible can be evoked. Before I examine how urban campaigns evoke the real possible, I turn to how they articulate the contently possible.

**Contingent Possibilities**

Harvey observes that “the materialization of anything requires, at least for a time, closure around a particular set of institutional arrangements and a particular spatial form” (2000:188) and that the realization of possible urban futures involves “tangible transformations of the raw materials given to us in our present state” (2000:191). Harvey uses Marx’s famous analogy of bees and architects: the architect, similar to the bee, constructs dwellings based on available resources and materials, space and time limitations, and existing techniques, regulations, knowledges, and practices. Yet, architects also use their imagination to create something new and potentially transformative (Harvey 2000:199–212). I suggest that urban migrant protests, too, draw on existing resources in the form of political configurations and concepts when they enact the contingent possibility to include illegalized migrants in the political community.

The 2006 protests in Los Angeles, Chicago, and other US cities exemplify how activists have drawn on existing political configurations and concepts to advocate illegalized migrants’ belonging. The protests erupted in response to the so-called Sensenbrenner Bill (or Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act—HR4437), which would have made it felonies to be an illegalized migrant or provide humanitarian assistance to illegalized migrants, among other repressive measures against unauthorized migration. Despite the seeming spontaneity of the protests, they were grounded in an expansive urban grassroots network revolving around immigrants-rights that included faith-based communities, student groups, ethnic associations, no-border activists, and ethnic media (Loyd and Burridge 2007; Pantoja et al. 2008).

Harvey cites these protests as a powerful reminder of the “collective potentiality” (2012:118) that rests in urban protest. He also observes that the protests were “basically about claiming rights not about revolution” (2012:120). Rather than evoking the real possible of radical change, the protesters pursued the contingent possibility that illegalized migrants obtain rights associated with existing understandings of citizenship and territorial polity. Most significantly, the protesters demanded citizenship rights and formal belonging to the nation-state.

These protests exemplify how “the state and its sovereignty are enacted through the city” (Isin 2007:222). As the protesters moved through city streets and public squares, they sang the US national anthem, waved American (as well as Mexican, Guatemalan, and other Latin American) national flags, proclaimed themselves to be Americans, and speeches ended with God-Bless-America. In this way, the protesters validated the very concept of the nation and reaffirmed the USA as the legitimate polity to which they demanded to belong (Figure 1). They did not seek the destruction or abolition of the American state (or the nation-state in general), although this state frames their identities as migrants, enacts their disenfranchise-ment, and thus constitutes the very source of their unequal treatment, exploitation,
and oppression (Bauder 2006a). These enactments of America relate to the protesters’ goal to bring about the contingent possibility of illegalized migrants becoming formal members of the existing national polity based on the domicile principle of belonging.

Another example is the sanctuary-city movement.5 This movement has had a considerable impact in numerous US cities, including Chicago and San Francisco, where municipal administrations and civic institutions have committed to creating an environment of hospitality for migrants and refugees, and where city councils adopted resolutions and/or passed legislation banning the use of municipal resources to enforce federal immigration-related laws, prohibiting city employees from collecting and disseminating information on a person’s status, and/or ensuring the delivery of municipal services independent of a person’s or family members’ status or citizenship (eg Darling 2010; Darling and Squire 2013; Mancina 2013; McDonald 2012; Squire and Bagelman 2012).

In 2013, Toronto became Canada’s first sanctuary city.6 Already in 2004, Toronto-based activists had launched the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) campaign, demanding that municipal service providers do not ask clients for their status.

Figure 1: Chicago, 2006 (source: author)
and, if they happen to find out, do not share this information with federal authorities. In this way, barriers to accessing public services could be reduced for illegalized residents (Berinstein et al. 2006). The Toronto District School Board endorsed this policy in 2006, affirming all students’ right to education (Walia 2013:114). On 21 February 2013, Toronto City council adopted a motion further entrenching the city’s “commitment to ensuring access to services without fear to immigrants without full status or without full status documents” (Motion CD 18.5), effectively declaring Toronto a sanctuary city. The campaign to become a sanctuary city was spearheaded by the Solidarity City Network, which included a range of community organizations and advocacy groups like the Law Union of Ontario, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, the Toronto chapter of No One Is Illegal (NOII), and Social Planning Toronto. This network demanded that all residents of the city can live without fear of abuse, detention, or deportation, can safely access services, are recognized as contributing members of society, and are able to participate in urban civic life. With its 2013 vote, Toronto’s City Council—like city councils in other sanctuary cities—supported the Solidarity City Network’s (2013:5) view that “immigration status should not be a factor in access to services and rights”.

Sanctuary cities promote “solidarity based on participation through presence” (Squire 2011:290). This focus on presence in (and use of) urban space applies the domicile principle at the municipal scale, echoing Lefebvre’s understanding of who possesses the right to the city. Similar to the protests of 2006, sanctuary practices do not fundamentally challenge existing political configurations but rather “reproduce state discourses and practices” (Czajka 2013:54). In fact, the affirmation of existing municipal structures of governance is part of the strategic pursuit to enact the contingent possibility of granting illegalized migrants de-facto membership in the municipal polity. Unlike the 2006 protests, sanctuary cities resemble a strategy of scale-switching (Miller 2000; Purcell 2002). They undermine (but do not transform) federal immigration laws and policies by enacting contradictory municipal laws and policies (Ridgley 2008) and creating a “de facto regularization program from the ground up” (Walia 2013:116).

Moreover, sanctuary-city policies enable all urban inhabitants to participate “in the everyday enactment of the city through its routines, practices and rhythms” (Darling and Squire 2013:201) and thus assume an active role in the production of urban space as envisioned by Lefebvre. In this way, sanctuary-city policies could provide a pathway towards the real possibility of forming new subject identities. Correspondingly, Toronto’s community organizers have been quite cognizant that their “campaign may not change federal immigration policy; however, its importance lies in its ability to change the ways in which people interact with one another locally and to develop a shift in ideas around community and belonging” (McDonald 2012:143). The sanctuary city may, indeed, facilitate more fundamental transformation of current practices of social and political inclusion and exclusion based on citizenship and status.

Along these lines, Harvey (2012:151) observes that urban rebellions will have to be:
reconstitute neoliberalism within the interstices of continuing imperial domination. This poses more general questions not only of the state and state institutional arrangements of law, policing, and administration, but of the state system within which all states are embedded.

The overarching goal of many activists in Toronto, Chicago, and other cities is to bring about the real possibility in which categories such as the nation-state, citizen, or migrant are obsolete.

**The Real Possible**

We strongly believe that none of us are free until all of us are free. (NOII 2013a)

Groups like NOII are endorsing the notion of “no border”. The call for abolishing national borders altogether fundamentally challenges the idea of the territorial nation-state and the contemporary capitalistic world order (Anderson et al. 2009). **No border is “not a political proposal—it’s a revolutionary cry”** (Sharma 2013), aiming to fundamentally reconfigure the way people govern themselves. It is impossible to imagine this no-border world in concrete terms. Rather, the no-border possibility requires not-yet existing material conditions and not-yet established ontologies (Bauder 2014b). By leaving open and unfixed of what the no-border world concretely looks like, the no-border notion lies in the realm of what Bloch called the real possible and what Lefebvre referred to as the possible-impossible.

The urban plays an important role in the transformation towards the real possibility of no border. Lefebvre (eg 1996, 2003) has been clear that the possible-impossible derives from everyday urban social and political practice. The urban also provides the “actual space” (Isin 2007) where “bodies congregate” (Butler 2012:117) and where political struggles for new subjectivities are fought (Sassen 2013). In the context of the inclusion of migrants and their claims to the rights to the city, Fiona Allon (2013:256) remarks: “the city is a battleground for the production of new identities and new forms of social political mobilization”. This transformative potential of the urban context can be observed in relation to political activism in support of legalized migrants.

The no-border activism of NOII is an illustrative example. Although NOII was established in response to the illegalization of migrants, this organization explicitly expresses solidarity with other groups and individuals who are suffering from other forms of structural oppression. This solidarity was expressed at the Annual May Day of Action in Toronto (Figure 2), where NOII and Solidarity City were at the forefront of a coalition of social justice groups, labour unions, community organization, poverty advocates, charities, Indigenous groups, and other organizations that marched together against ableism, colonialism, environmental destruction, homophobia, imperialism, patriarchy, racism, and transphobia (NOII 2013b).

The alliance of migrant-supporting and Indigenous organizations is noteworthy from a theoretical perspective and important to the protesters’ critical practice. This
alliance rejected the mainstream media’s and political debate’s construction of the two groups as antagonistic in the way they claim territorial belonging: Canada as a settler society centres immigration as the foundation of its national identity, negating Indigenous claims of territorial belonging based on the principle of ancestry (Bauder 2011; Sharma and Wright 2009). Denying those antagonistic constructions, organizations like NOII have long acted in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, for example, by supporting Indigenous land reclaims, co-hosting events, or translating educational material (Walia 2013:124–138). Building on these efforts, the protests demonstrated unity and thereby refused to re-enact the categories that separate migrants, Indigenous peoples, citizens, and non-citizens. In this way, the protests negate existing constructions of belonging and instead affirm their shared experience of racialization, dispossession, and “border imperialism” (Walia 2013). The associated “liberatory vision for immigrant rights is one that is based less on pathways to citizenship in a settler state, than on questioning the logics of the settler state itself” (Walia 2013:xiii).

Similar acts of solidarity have occurred in other cities, such as in Montreal at the 2013 conference “Building a Solidarity City”. The event sought to assure “access to free and quality services related to health, education, food, housing, shelters and more, for non-status migrants and all residents of Montreal”. While it included diverse workshops, discussions, and panels on “Deportation, Prison, and the Double Punishment of Migrants”, “Immigration Support: A Strategy Session”, “No Borders Movements and Building Solidarity Cities Across North America”, the conference also connected these issues with “Indigenous Sovereignty and Self-Determination” (Cité sans frontières 2013a).

In December 2013, community activists mobilized against the proposed Quebec Charter of Values, which infringed on the rights of religious minority and migrant groups in Quebec. The activists’ statement opened with an expression of solidarity with Indigenous struggles and a call to end all forms of oppression:
From the outset, the proposed Charter and related debate fails to recognize that Quebec and Canada are built on stolen Indigenous land, and constituted through the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples. We assert our solidarity and support with Indigenous struggles for self-determination and cultural integrity.

We are for equality between all genders but we also assert our support for struggles against patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism and all forms of oppression.

This statement was signed by diverse organizations, such as the Centre de lutte contre l’oppression des genres/Centre for Gender Advocacy, the Immigrant Workers Center/Centre des travailleurs et travailleuses immigrantEs (CTI), No One Is Illegal/Personne n’est illégal-Montréal, and Solidarité sans frontières/Solidarity Across Borders (Cité sans frontières 2013b).

These acts of solidarity can be interpreted as efforts to evoke the real possible by constructing a new consciousness among a diverse precariat of urban inhabitants and bring about a not-yet existing subject identity that encompasses those we describe today as illegalized migrants, Indigenous peoples, the racialized and criminalized, the disabled, displaced, deprived, and dispossessed, and that captures various forms of exploitation, subordination, and oppression.

**Achieving Urban Transformation**

The process of inclusion can be facilitated through acts of solidarity between people who are in possession of and those who are denied status and citizenship. For example, Heather Johnson (2012) observed how refugees in Tanzania, unaccompanied youths in Spain, and asylum seekers in Australian detention centres contested their political marginality by transgressing from the conduct and behaviour expected of them. The transformative moment, however, is enacted only with “the establishment of a relationship of solidarity between non-citizens and citizens within the politics of asylum” (Johnson 2012:117). Solidarity between formal citizens and non-citizens is important not because the citizen speaks for and acts on behalf of the non-citizen but because participation by citizens creates a shared political sphere in which both non-citizens and citizens speak and act.

The 2006 protests in Chicago and other US cities involved similar alliances between citizens and non-citizens, for example, between long-established Chicano groups and illegalized migrants. The acts of solidarity between illegalized migrants and formal citizens in the form of protesting together enact all protesters as belonging to the urban polity. When the illegalized migrants share a political sphere with citizens and “emerge on the street, acting like citizens, they make a mimetic claim to citizenship” (Butler 2012:122). The sanctuary city movement, too, has mobilized formal citizens and their representatives on municipal councils to advance an agenda of providing refuge and security to those who are formally excluded from the urban polity (Lippert and Rehaag 2013). This bond between formal citizens and illegalized migrants and their appearance together in the urban political sphere have enabled illegalized migrants to “enact themselves as political subjects in their own right” (Squire and Bagelman 2012:147).
By re-enacting the category of citizenship, the acts of solidarity associated with the 2006 protests and sanctuary city movement grasp the contingent possibility of belonging in existing national and urban polities. However, the category of formal citizenship may not be suitable to capture the subjectivities of “peoples whose actions may not necessarily be framed in this way” (Nyers and Rygiel 2012:10), including the activists who advocate the real possibility of a no-border world. While citizenship has the potential to be inclusive of people, it also excludes and distinguishes between people (Bauder 2006b). Sanctuary cities, for example, continue to be structured by privilege and unequal relations between “guest and host” (Darling and Squire 2013:193–194). However, alternative political configurations and subject identities that transcend the categories of migrant and non-migrant, citizen and non-citizen, Indigenous and settler are not yet available. This open and unfixed future lies in the realm of the real possible.

Transformation towards the real possible proceeds in a dialectical fashion, whereby the formation of new subjectivities shapes political configurations and practices, and vice versa. Acts of solidarity constitute interventions in this dialectic, aiming to overcome—or “sublate”—existing distinctions between illegalized migrants, non-migrants, Indigenous peoples, and other inhabitants of the city and thereby enact the real possibility of no border.

**Discussion**
The pursuits of urban activists and theorists may seem contradictory when they engage different levels of possibilities. Such contradiction, however, should not be interpreted as an inconsistency in their politics or flaw in the logic of their thought. Rather, urban activists are simultaneously pursuing various levels of possibility and see these levels not as mutually exclusive but as complementary. In the words of NOII organizer Harsha Walia (2013:99): “Sustaining a connection between the daily grind of community organizing and broader Left struggles is necessary in order to maintain an expansive political perspective and to stay inspired”. This sentiment is echoed by Syed Khalid Hussan (Walia 2013:283): “We must show that what we bring is both a vision for the future and a way to make things a little better in the present”. The contingently possible and the real possible frame different, yet complimentary, aspects of progressive urban theory and practice. Likewise, urban theorists have long embraced the contradictions between contemporary material conditions and the possible. They should also recognize that the contradictions between the contingently possible and real possible constitute important moments in the dialectic of societal transformation.

At the level of the contingently possible, the practical politics of inclusion often involve a strategy of switching from the national to the urban scale. The sanctuary city movement exemplifies this scale switching: while national policies and laws illegalize many migrants, contravening sanctuary policies and legislation at the urban scale include these migrants based on the principle of domicile, ie their urban presence, rather than national status. The protests of 2006, too, make use of the “actual space” of the city that exists in the form of physical infrastructure and urban institutions.
The examples I chose to illustrate the contingent possibility of urban belonging came from major immigrant-gateway cities—Chicago and Toronto—that can be presumed to be key sites where political claims of belonging are made and new subject identities form (Isin 2007; Sassen 2013). Local responses to illegalized migration, however, tend to vary not only by a city’s size and its proportion of immigrant populations, but are also influenced by local labour market conditions, residents’ level of education, and local and regional politics and histories (Gilbert 2009; Walker and Leitner 2011; Wells 2004). In addition, there are important national differences between Canada and the US in the public immigration debate, federal migration and settlement policies, and the enforcement of these policies. In the US, the multi-layered structure of the federal state, the legal system, and administrative devolution have permitted localized responses to the illegalization of migrants (Wells 2004). In Canada, municipalities may be more constrained in the way they can implement local policies of inclusion due to federal laws, programing and funding guidelines, and surveillance and policing practices (Bhuyan and Smith-Carrier 2012). My point, however, was not to demonstrate that variable urban or national contexts produce particular responses to illegalized migration. Rather, I drew from variable contexts to illustrate differences in the possibilities of urban belonging.

Saskia Sassen (2013:69) suggests that urban policies and practices that challenge national laws—like those associated with sanctuary cities—make “it possible for us to imagine a return to urban law”. However, I would caution against anticipating that these policies and practices lead necessarily to the elevation of the urban scale and an urban-hegemonic superstructure of governance (Purcell 2002). Urban activist campaigns, in fact, frequently re-enact the nation-state. For example, local anti-immigration campaigns often reinforce restrictive federal migration laws and national discourses (Gilbert 2009). Even pro-migration campaigns, such as local campaigns against the deportation of migrants, often reaffirm national discourses of belonging rather than challenging “the idea of deportation as such” (Anderson et al. 2011:559).

In addition, sanctuary extended to migrants and refugees is not only an urban phenomenon, but also exist at other scales and in non-urban contexts (Lippert and Rehaag 2013). Similarly, while the urban may provide an important “strategic site” (Sassen 2013: 69) to mitigate the exclusion of illegalized migrants, the organizations involved in corresponding movements are not contained at this scale. For example, although NOII is active in large cities and supports urban Indigenous struggles related to housing or the disappearance and murder of Indigenous women, it also fights for Indigenous land claims and Indigenous justice in regions that are not typically considered urban (Walia 2013). Even the city itself is not a homogenous territory but consists of particular sites (and “actual spaces”) where sanctuary practices are enacted (Young 2010). The urban must therefore not be essentialized as a natural scale of belonging.

More likely, I think, is that the tension between national and urban scales related to migrant exclusion and belonging will be resolved at the level of the real possible. Some critical urban theorists no longer distinguish between urban and non-urban scales and contexts. Lefebvre, for example, began his influential book The Urban.
Revolution with the hypothesis that “Society has been completely urbanized” (Lefebvre 2003:1). Neil Brenner, too, recently affirmed that “the urban can no longer be viewed as a distinct, relatively bounded site; it has instead become a generalized, planetary condition” (Brenner 2011:21). And Isin (2007:212) suggests that the actual space of the city enacts other assemblages such as nation-states and empires “that are kept together by practices organized around and grounded in the city”. If the urban encompasses all of society and/or frames the enactment of almost all subjectivities, then it may no longer be very useful as an analytical category. In the real possible, the urban category may be equally obsolete as the categories “migrant” or “citizen”.

Achieving the contingently possible as well as the real possible will rely on the formation of new subjectivities. In contemporary cities, the precariat is at the forefront of this process. This precariat is currently defined by the intersection of class struggle and the fight against racialization, gender inequality, sexual discrimination, colonialization, and environmental degradation (Harvey 2012). Acts of solidarity must prevent a wedge—in the form of defining citizenship as a national birth privilege that can be denied to migrants—being driven between citizen and comrade. The urban protests of 2006 and the successful calls for municipal policies and legislation that provide sanctuary have demonstrated that in unity comrade and citizen can advance the right to the city for all. As Indigenous peoples are included in these acts of solidarity, their claims to territorial belonging must also be seriously engaged.

Eventually, radical practice and the formation of new subjectivities will structure real possibilities that radically differ from the material conditions of today. These possibilities not only give “hope” (Bloch 1985; Harvey 2000) but they are also “disconcerting” (Purcell 2002:100) because they are not yet known or knowable. The radical politics of open borders and no border, for example, can become a dream or a nightmare, and produce mass harm as much as mass good (Hiebert 2002). Since the dialectic of societal transformation towards the real possible is always open, it contains the possibility of belonging as well as the possibility of disenfranchisement. Multiple scenarios emerge on the utopian horizon of the urban imagination, which is why the various layers of the possible need to be continuously and critically engaged.

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Endnotes
1 In fact, the very concept of the “migrant” is dependent on a person crossing an international border (Anderson et al. 2009; Sharma 2006).
2 David Harvey (2000:164) also critiques Jane Jacobs’ urban vision as containing “its own authoritarianism hidden within the organic notion of neighborhood and community as a basis for social life”, paving the way for exclusionary gated communities and shopping malls.
3 For Lefebvre (2003:182), these urban utopias represent “abstract” rather than “concrete” space.

4 The concept of solidarity can be theorized from various angles: in its “counter-enlightenment” (Kapeller and Wolkenstein 2013:486–487) incarnation, solidarity is a form of loyalty based on signifiers such as nationality, ethnicity, or religion that suppresses liberty and free will. Conversely, as an enlightenment concept, solidarity is based on reason and the quest for liberty. Different strands of enlightenment philosophies are associated with different conceptions of solidarity. From a Hobbesian position, for example, solidarity is a self-centred utility, while a Humean tradition emphasizes empathy; following the Kantian deontology, solidarity can be seen as a commitment to universal moral principle, while a Hegelian tradition emphasizes the process of subject formation (Kapeller and Wolkenstein 2013). In the context of community organizing, solidarity requires sustained commitment to a “community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around with to unite” (hooks 2000:67); entails listening to other people and understanding their experiences, needs and desires; and ultimately produces a link between theory and emotion that affirms community by “creating bonds of love, trust, respect, compassion, and mutual aid” (Walia 2013:269). In this way, the Hegelian understanding of solidarity as a process of subject formation contains elements of loyalty, self-serving utility, empathy, and moral principle.

5 Sanctuary practices have their origin in religion and faith-based communities, but expanded to secular urban municipalities. While in the past these practices have targeted criminals, war deserters, and other persons in need, today they are most well known in the context accommodating illegalized migrants and refugees (Lippert and Rehaag 2013; Ridgley 2008, 2011).

6 The city of Hamilton, Ontario, followed suit in February 2014 (McCall 2014).

7 The notion of “no border” differs from “open borders”. According to the latter, borders should be permeable for every person but the territorial nation-state and international borders continue to exist (eg ACME 2003; Cole 2000; Hayter 2000). In contrast, the notion of “no border” asserts that international borders themselves constitute a source of oppression and should therefore be abolished (Bauder 2014b; Walia 2013).

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