To flee is to produce the real, to create life, to find a weapon. (Gilles Deleuze)

The topic of refugees and immigration has always been deeply political, as it invariably raises important questions about the changing nature of boundaries, self/other relations, and ethical and political practice. In recent years Western governments have opted to frame these questions through the prism of security. Their restrictive laws and policies have created an elaborate array of bureaucratic and physical impediments to cross-border travel; a vast armoury of technologies of control and exclusion attempt to enforce these barriers. The trend toward securitising migration has only intensified in the wake of the violent attacks on New York and Washington.1 In this nervous state of affairs Didier Bigo argues that a ‘governmentality of unease’ has transformed global anxieties about

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migration into a mode of ruling. He warns of the emergence not of a global ‘pan-opticon’ (where everyone is watched), but of a ‘ban-opticon’ (where profiling technologies determine who is to be placed under surveillance, questioning, detention or removal and who is to be free of such interventions). Asylum seekers, refugees, non-status residents, undocumented workers, so-called ‘ overstayers’ and ‘illegals’—together, they have come to constitute a kind of ‘abject class’ of global migrants. Whatever their designation, these migrants are increasingly cast as the objects of securitised fears and anxieties, possessing either an unsavoury agency (ie they are identity-frauds, queue jumpers, people who undermine consent in the polity) or a dangerous agency (ie they are criminals, terrorists, agents of insecurity).

While global migrations are rendering internal and external borders less distinct and secure, it is clear that state capacities to enable inclusions and enforce exclusions have not diminished, only taken on new forms. This point is often lost in all the hype about the hybrid identities generated through border transgressions. Western states have, in fact, demonstrated a remarkable flexibility in responding to the dynamism of contemporary migration flows. For example, Sandro Mezzadra sees in ‘safe third country’ agreements not simply a bilateral pact, but a broader transnational system of exclusion. These agreements act in ways that reverse the flows of established transnational migratory paths, turning them into transnational corridors of expulsion. In the case of the European Union, Mazzadra explains that this involves exporting border control technologies to frontier countries eager to gain entry into the EU.

Having been identified as a ‘safe third country’, Poland must accept all refugees and migrants expelled from Germany who entered through its territory. But Poland has in turn concluded a series of similar agreements, for example with the Ukraine. As a result, there are now plans to construct detention centres in the Ukraine on the German model, which already exist in Poland. The point is that this path of expulsion—Germany, Poland, Ukraine—follows in reverse the path established by the migrants themselves.

Since it is the migrants themselves, mostly from Asia and Africa, who have chosen the Ukraine as their preferred point of entry into the frontier zone of the EU, Mezzadra gives them credit for possessing enough agency to relegate ‘the exclusionary measures to the status of a mere response’. Nonetheless, in their desire to manage and control the migration process, these border control policies are creating an abject diaspora—a deportspora.

There is a growing interest in critically analysing how restrictive immigration measures are being contested and countered by global and local political movements of refugees, migrants and their allies. This article seeks to contribute to this literature by approaching the topic through a cosmopolitan frame of analysis. Such a framework is advantageous for developing a strategy for contesting the security fixations of the sovereign state as well as for providing a possible antidote to the anxious subjectivities fostered by recent securitisations. To consider how the political campaigns by abject migrants are potential sites of a critical cosmopolitanism involves identifying and assessing such acts of citizenship for how they contest and reshape the traditional terms of political
community, identity and practice. To contribute to an understanding of this complex politics, this article focuses on the contested governance of ‘protection’ in Canadian immigration and deportation practices.

Whenever a state ponders whether or not to grant asylum to an individual, it is making an intervention in the politics of protection. This is a significant political issue because the capacity to decide upon matters of inclusion and exclusion is a key element of sovereign power. Since Hobbes, the modern state has asserted a monopoly over matters of security, claiming to protect citizens from both each other (through laws and police) and from the external aggression of other states (through the military, border policing, etc). This monopoly, we know, is a crucial source of legitimacy for sovereign power. In the case of asylum seekers, the decision over who will, and who will not, be provided with protection is not just a humanitarian determination, but a moment when the sovereign state (re)founds its claim to monopolise the political. Anti-deportation activism, therefore, can be read in terms of contemporary disputes over who has the authority to protect, and under what terms and conditions. Such activism can reveal new problematisations as well as new ways of thinking and acting politically. Who is to be protected? Who will do the protecting? Who represents those in need of protection? Can the endangered speak for themselves? What are the possibilities and constraints that (dis)allow political activism by non- or quasi-citizens? For their agency to be recognised as legitimate and heard as political, does it require mediation from other citizen groups? Most importantly, what implications does the activism of abject migrants have for regimes of the political which operate on the assumption that such acts of agency are, in fact, impossible? The struggle over these questions can be revealing in terms of emerging forms of political subjectivity and practice that contest the state’s claim to monopolise the subject(s) of protection on its territory. To problematise or contest this claim, therefore, becomes a critical moment of cosmopolitan dissent.

The argument begins by way of an introduction to the concept of abjection and its relevance to understanding the theory and practice of a critical cosmopolitanism. Next, Bonnie Honig’s recent intervention into cosmopolitan theory is considered. Honig argues that the ambiguous narratives regarding the figure of the foreigner can serve as a critical resource for moving beyond state-centric accounts of political agency. Her thinking, therefore, is relevant to understanding the significance of the critical citizenship practices of abject migrants. Drawing on the political theory of Jacques Rancière, Honig argues that in these political campaigns is an emerging and democratic taking subjectivity that can be potentially aligned with a democratic cosmopolitan politics.

Who are these taking-subjects, these abject cosmopolitans? The final sections of this article consider the activism of a group of Algerian non-status refugees living in Montreal, Quebec who have self-organised as the Comité d’Action des Sans-Statut Algériens (CASS). These Algerians had their applications for refugee status refused by the Canadian state; however, they could not be returned to Algeria because of a moratorium on removals to that country in effect since March 1997. Held in immigration limbo, these Algerians continue to live in Canada, mostly in Montreal, but without the formal legal status that would allow them to have secure access to work, education, social services, etc (hence
the designation ‘non-status’). After the Canadian government removed its moratorium in April 2002, the CASS mounted a vigorous and highly visible campaign to put a stop to the deportations and to regularise their immigration status in Canada. In doing so, the CASS employed tactics to amplify their political voice and lay claim to political space. Does this make them viable candidates for democratic cosmopolitanism?

Abject cosmopolitanism

The idea of cosmopolitanism is making something of a comeback in contemporary political theory and practice. No longer a ‘dead idea’ to be relegated to the footnotes of critical enquiry, cosmopolitanism is the subject of a growing number of academic studies of impressive quality. The reasons for this resurgence are complicated, to be sure. However, it is clear that the globalisation of late modernity has created an historical context for rethinking the possibilities of cultural engagement, social affiliations, legal authority and political action beyond the state. But just as globalisation represents a diverse, uneven and unequal set of dynamics and processes, the various histories and practices associated with cosmopolitanism are also quite large, and marked by their own controversies. This is an age of protean cosmopolitanisms, and the concept needs to be thoroughly pluralised, historicised and differentiated.

To think of cosmopolitanism in the plural is to upset much of the received knowledge we possess on the subject. Cosmopolitanism, after all, is famously universalistic in its aspirations. It is well known for disregarding the particularistic logic of nationalism, with its imagined spatial communities and territorialised identities. Cosmopolitanism follows its own categorical imperative, taking all humanity, irrespective of place, along for the ride. For all its association with universality, however, the sheer diversity of perspectives and practices of contemporary cosmopolitanism testify to the deep plurality of modes of cosmopolitan conduct. James Clifford, for one, doubts whether ‘a coherent cluster of experiences’ could ever fall under the banner of cosmopolitanism. He prefers, instead, to talk of ‘discrepant’ cosmopolitanisms: pluralised, he says, ‘to account for a range of uneven affiliations’. But if Clifford’s discrepant cosmopolitanisms ‘begin and end with historical interconnection and often violent attachment’, the cosmopolitan actions I am interested in analysing and theorising concern those who have been de-connected, subjected to often violent detachment. As the editors of a recent volume on cosmopolitanism point out, ‘Cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism’s upward mobility, and bereft of these comforts and customs of national belonging’. Therefore, while these editors call for a ‘situated universalism’ to ground cosmopolitan practice, we must ask the question of what is the ‘situated’ context of these ‘victims of modernity’? For abject migrants, the cast-offs of world order, their situatedness is displacement. Therefore, if cosmopolitanism ‘catches something of our need to ground our sense of mutuality in conditions of mutability’, we should also add mobility to these conditions. In this article I speak of ‘abject cosmopolitanism’ to describe the emerging political practices and enduring political problematics associated with refugee and immigrant groups.
resisting their targeted exclusion.

When the word ‘abject’ is used to describe a dimension of world affairs, it is usually employed to highlight some of the gravest ills of the contemporary age. The global problem of ‘abject poverty’ is a good example. But what does it mean to speak of an abject cosmopolitanism? The conjoining of these two terms invites serious conceptual confusion, as their use and meaning could not, it would seem, be further apart. While the Oxford English Dictionary defines cosmopolitanism as ‘belonging to all parts of the world’, etymologies of abjection point to its Latin root *abjectus*, meaning ‘throw away’ or ‘cast-off’. The abject is someone who is cast-out, discarded and rejected. In contrast to the vaunted status of cosmopolitanism, the abject are held in low regard as outcasts. While the cosmopolitan is at home everywhere, the abject have been jettisoned, forced out into a life of displacement. When considered together, therefore, the ‘abject’ and the ‘cosmopolitan’ appear as stark contrasts, relating to one another only in highly oppositional terms: high/low, hope/despair, beautiful/ugly, belonging/exclusion, everywhere/nowhere.

Abjection, therefore, describes a degraded, wretched and displaced condition. Cosmopolitanism, we are told, is quite a different thing, calling for an inclusive, sophisticated and worldly demeanour. But abject cosmopolitanism? Is the state of cosmopolitan theory and practice today such that it deserves the same adjective used to describe global patterns of inequality and poverty? Is the problem of universalism too great to be successfully navigated without (re)creating imperialist prejudices under the guise of, say, a common Europe, a global civil society, or the family of humanity? Are today’s cosmopolitans none other than the subjects of Empire?11 Perhaps. However, there are many who would surely oppose characterising cosmopolitanism in this abject manner, calling it a disservice to the noble and highly regarded tradition of thinking and acting beyond the state. But what if cosmopolitanism’s high value nonetheless relied on a relationship with an abject non-value for its condition of possibility? Butler argues that ‘the exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings’.12 Do cosmopolitan subjects constitute themselves similarly? Kristeva calls abjection ‘a precondition of narcissism’.13 Does the elevated status of cosmopolitanism—its narcissism, as it were—also rely on the construction of an abject other?

The discordance of abject cosmopolitanism, therefore, exceeds the implied pejorative connotation over the state of cosmopolitan theory today. The ‘abject’ is not just an adjective qualifying the noun ‘cosmopolitanism’. Instead, the abject-subject has an important constitutive role in self/other encounters and relationships—including those of the cosmopolitan variety. The ‘moral cartography’ of abjection is, however, riddled with some familiar us/them power relations.14 All too often it is an ‘us’—Westerners, Europeans, humanitarians, etc—who are the cosmopolitans, the champions of justice, human rights, and world order; leaving ‘them’—the Third Worlders, the global poor, the ‘wretched of the earth’—as the abject, the societies and subjects in crisis, the failed states in need of intervention. Consequently, answering the questions about alternative meanings for abject cosmopolitanism requires some critical self-reflection on what Linda McDowell calls the ‘categorization of the classifiers’. She warns,
in particular, against ‘those Western theorizers who see themselves as cosmopolitans but define others, the classified, as creoles’—or, in this case, abject human beings. The tendency to see the relationship between cosmopolitanism and abjection as one of mutual exclusion needs to be problematised. Indeed, relationships of exclusion should always be regarded with some suspicion, especially when they involve sharp binary distinctions. These dualisms tend not to be balanced or symmetrical, but are rather deeply hierarchical and disjointed, riddled with unequal power relations. According to Engin Isin, one of the key assumptions of any discourse utilising a ‘logic of exclusion’ is that the characteristics associated with the ‘excluded’ predate their expulsion.

The logic of exclusion presupposes that the excluding and the excluded are conceived as irreconcilable; that the excluded is perceived in purely negative terms, having no property of its own, but merely expressing the absence of the properties of the other; that these properties are essential; that the properties of the excluded are experienced as strange, hidden, frightful, or menacing; that the properties of the excluding are a mere negation of the properties of the other; and that exclusion itself (or confinement or annihilation) is actuated socially.

As the embodiment of exclusion, the abject are prime candidates for ‘hidden, frightful, or menacing’ subjectivities to define their condition. Understood politically, they stand in contrast to the purity of citizenship, ie the authoritative, articulate, visible and political subjectivity. Instead, the abject suffer from a form of purity that demands them to be speechless victims, invisible and apolitical. In a twisted reversal, the impurity of abjection becomes the purity of the abject. Thus there is an easy association with the ‘cast-offs’, the ‘rejected’, with a form of bodily wretchedness, muted political agency, criminality and moral disrepute.

It is important to highlight the arbitrariness of these designations, and the violence that goes into the enforcement of prevailing accounts of political speech, agency, visibility, and reputable behaviour. After all, the lowly status of the ‘abject’ is by no means their ‘natural’ condition. ‘Abjection’, as Nikolas Rose declares, ‘is an act of force’. The historical practices of casting-off, of demoting an/other’s status to a lower mode of existence, are as varied as they are complicated. However, to see abjection as a practice of force underscores how ‘being abject’ is, in fact, always a matter of ‘becoming abject’. As Rose states:

Abjection is a matter of the energies, the practices, the works of division that act upon persons and collectivities such that some ways of being, some forms of existence are cast into a zone of shame, disgrace or debasement, rendered beyond the limits of the liveable, denied the warrant of tolerability, accorded purely a negative value.

Does this process of abjection not describe the experience of large numbers of today’s global ‘cast-offs’—the refugee, the asylum seeker, the ‘illegal’ worker? Is their ‘zone of shame, disgrace or debasement’ not the interminable ‘waiting areas’, the detention facilities, deportation flights, and lives forced underground? What are the possibilities for political agency in such abject ‘zones’ today? When confronted by such questions, we should not be entirely pessimistic in our
response. Judith Butler, for one, argues that abjection can serve as ‘a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility’.20 How are the ‘cast-off’ today taking up the cosmopolitan call and, with their practices, recasting the possibilities for local/global political life? Here, abject cosmopolitanism describes not a problematic cosmopolitanism for the abject, but rather a problematising cosmopolitanism of the abject.

Democratic cosmopolitanism: taking on the political

In Canada the topic of abject migration brings forth a remarkably messy mix of xenophiliac and xenophobic statements and practices. For example, after a January 2003 census report indicated that the number of immigrants choosing to settle in Canada had risen steadily throughout the 1990s, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Denis Coderre, boasted that Canada is ‘a place where immigrants will find hope, hospitality and opportunity’. The Minister indicated his immense pleasure that so many immigrants deem Canada ‘choiceworthy’ and, thus, seek membership through citizenship: ‘So many immigrants choose to become Canadians because they recognize the Canadian values of respect, freedom, peace and belonging’.21 Only a few days later, however, an incident at Vancouver International Airport revealed another, more troubling, side to Canada’s relationship with foreigners. When an Iranian woman whose refugee claim had been rejected by Canadian officials was about to be deported, she made headlines by making a dramatic escape—‘running for her life’, as her supporters put it.22 The woman and her family had been living and working in Canada for four years, had never been on welfare, had strong ties to the local community, etc. By all accounts they were a ‘model’ immigrant family, the kind praised by Minister Coderre only a few days earlier. However, instead of praising her determination to stay in a country where ‘respect, freedom, peace and belonging’ supposedly reign, the Minister rose in Parliament to reassure the populace that the Iranian woman and her family had been apprehended and deported. He also chose the moment to publicly boast about the number of deportations his ministry successfully carries out per year (about 8400).

How should we understand this confused state of affairs that surrounds the foreigner? An important new book by Bonnie Honig, Democracy and the Foreigner, responds to this thorny political problem. Honig argues that the stories told about a recurring figure in Western political culture—that of the ‘foreign-founder’—are important because they reveal the pivotal role that foreigners play in founding political communities. An important part of this argument is that the moment of founding is not only locatable somewhere in a nation’s past. Honig persuasively argues that the distinctiveness of every national culture has to be periodically refurbished; populations have to be reassured, and their affectations for the nation reaffirmed. Every political community must, in short, re-found itself. Honig explores this process of renewal by considering narratives about foreigners (wanted and unwanted, legal and illegal, celebrated and scorned) and the various ways they are received by political communities. What emerges from her analysis is an appreciation of what might be called a ‘doubleness’ to foreignness: it can operate as both a support and a threat to the political
community in question. From this perspective, the seemingly contradictory comments made by the Canadian Immigration Minister take on renewed import; they are part of the ongoing process of utilising the ‘foreigner’ for the purpose of national (re)founding.

While there is nothing inherent in foreignness to make it correspond to nationalisation or de-nationalisation projects, Honig makes it clear that she favours the latter, albeit in the qualified form of ‘democratic cosmopolitanism’. This critical cosmopolitanism is not an argument in favour of a specified form of transnational governance; it does not have global citizenship or world government as its telos. Honig’s cosmopolitanism similarly avoids the entrapments of international law, recognising that this arena, while significant, is no substitute for the difficult and complex politics that democratic cosmopolitanism calls for. Rather, democratic cosmopolitanism seeks to ‘widen the resources and energies of an emerging international civil society to contest or support state actions in matters of transnational and local interest such as environmental, economic, military, cultural, and immigration policies’. As a form of activism, democratic cosmopolitanism seeks to ‘denationalise the state’ by ‘scrambling’ the oppositions of ‘instrumental’ versus ‘affective’ citizenship. In doing so, it renders visible ‘already existing sites of sub- and international activisms and memberships that are affective, but not nationalist, rooted but not simply in culture, deep but not particularist, transnational but not simply disloyal’. This is a democratic form of cosmopolitanism, moreover, because of its commitment to promote at the local, national or international levels ‘popular empowerment, effective representation, and the generation of actions in concert across lines of difference’. Honig has a vigorous understanding of democratic practice in mind, calling for cosmopolitans to ‘risk their cosmopolitan (and nationalist) principles by engaging others in their particularities, while at the same time defending, (re)discovering and (re)articulating located universalisms such as human rights and the equal dignity of persons’. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, democratic cosmopolitanism is about transforming the meaning and practice of citizenship from ‘a juridical status distributed (or not) by states’ to ‘a practice in which denizens, migrants, residents, and their allies hold states accountable for their definitions and distributions of goods, powers, rights, freedoms, privileges, and justice’.

There is much to admire in Honig’s cosmo-political thinking. Honig is an exemplary contemporary thinker about the abject zones and subjects, the limit-spaces and conditions of the political. In the figure of the foreign-founder, she critically examines subjectivities that are simultaneously ‘inside’ (because of their residency) and ‘outside’ (because of their lack of status) the political community. In doing so, Honig’s argument has some fairly radical implications for who counts as a political subject and what counts as political agency. Her discussion of the ‘myth of immigrant America’ is a revealing example in this regard. This myth posits that the continuation of America’s democratic political culture is dependent upon the vitality and enthusiasm of incoming immigrant populations. Here, the foreigner serves as an important ‘supplement to the nation, an agent of national reenchantment that might rescue the regime from corruption and return it to its first principles’. Such moments of (re)founding by
immigrants can readily be seen, for example, in naturalisation ceremonies that have immigrants swear their allegiance to America. These performances—significantly, the newcomers’ first sanctioned act of citizenship—are meant to provide ongoing evidence that the nation remains ‘choiceworthy’, still capable of enchanting newcomers to desire and seek out membership. The consenting immigrant is, therefore, crucial for holding up—for re-founding—the principles of American liberal democracy.

Through some astute analysis and creative thinking, Honig reveals that a deep uncertainty marks the figure of the ‘good’ immigrant. In the first place, the arguments used to promote the ‘good’ immigrant can quickly be turned around, thereby creating the very conditions for anti-immigrant sentiments and conflicts. For example, the same valued energies that immigrants bring to refurbish and re-energize the nation can just as quickly be deemed suspicious and turned against them:

‘Their’ admirable hard work and boundless acquisition puts ‘us’ out of jobs. ‘Their’ good, reinvigorative communities also look like fragmentary ethnic enclaves. ‘Their’ traditional family values threaten to overturn our still new and fragile gains in gender equality. ‘Their’ voluntarist embrace of America, effective only to the extent that they come from elsewhere, works to reaffirm but also endangers ‘our’ way of life.25

The xenophiliac myth of immigrant America, therefore, has a nationalist xenophobia as its (re)founding partner. A similar dynamic is at work in arguments that emphasise the ‘good’ immigrant’s consenting nature. To praise the achievements of the consenting foreigner creates the conditions for demonising the efforts of the non-consenting foreigner (e.g. the ‘illegal’ alien). The ‘bad’ immigrant always shadows the ‘good’ immigrant. One consents; the other undermines consent. Consequently ‘the iconic good immigrant—the supercitizen—who upholds American liberal democracy is not accidentally or coincidentally partnered with the iconic bad immigrant who threatens to tear it down’.26

The undecidability of foreignness presents dangers as well as opportunities. Honig negotiates both through a productive reading of Derrida’s recent work on the politics of friendship, and then by connecting this analysis to Rancière’s call to ‘take on’ the political through a radical accounting of human agency. In Politics of Friendship, Derrida invokes Aristotle’s distinction between three kinds of friendship: use, pleasure and virtue. While, for Aristotle, political relations were the hallmark of ‘use’ friendships, Derrida argues that politics arises from the mistakes that are made between the different kinds of friendship.27 Honig seizes upon this insight to show that the foreigner can be read as a ‘would-be friend’, only that sometimes mistakes are made as to what kind of friendship is being embarked upon. The disappointments that arise because of these misunderstandings, Honig argues, are often ‘expressed by way of the charge that the other is a taker who is just using us rather than a giver who really wants to be one of us’. In Honig’s hands, however, this much-maligned figure of the ‘taking’ foreigner takes on renewed import. Taking is not something to be ashamed about. To the contrary, the ‘practice of taking rights and privileges rather than waiting for them to be granted by a sovereign power is’, Honig argues, ‘a quintessentially
democratic practice’. This positive assessment of the foreigner as a ‘democratic taker’ paves the way for Honig to consider how foreignness works on behalf of a democratic cosmopolitan project.  

The idea of a taking-subjectivity is one that Honig borrows from the French political theorist, Jacques Rancière. Politics, for Rancière, is an activity that ‘turns on equality as its principle’. Equality, however, ‘is not a given that politics then presses into service, an essence embodied in the law or a goal politics sets itself the task of attaining’. Rather, equality is an ‘assumption that needs to be discerned within the practices of implementing it’. The practices that enact political equality, however, are not necessarily coextensive with the legal status of citizenship. Acts of citizenship are as likely to be enacted by abject subjects as by citizen subjects. For Rancière, the point is that politics is ‘a specific kind of connection’ that ‘comes about solely through interruption’. This involves those moments when abject subjects (in Rancière’s terms, those who have ‘no part’ in the social order) articulate a grievance as an equal speaking being. For Rancière, this is a radical political moment. It qualifies as a quintessential political moment, what Isin identifies as the ‘moment when the naturalness of the dominant virtues is called into question and their arbitrariness revealed’. Such moments enable the excluded—the abject—to constitute themselves as political agents under new terms, taking different positions in the social space than those in which they were previously positioned.  

Honig’s taking foreigner is in the peculiar position of being an unwanted stranger to the polity and may, therefore, be classified as ill qualified to possess a legitimate political voice. The first target of taking-subjects is, therefore, always speech: political speech. Our received traditions of politics tell us that political speech is an attribute belonging to the realm of citizenship. Denied this legal status—and along with it, the onto-political status of a speaking being—these foreigners (historically represented by alien suffrage movements in their various forms) have to interrupt the dominant political (speaking) order not just to be heard, but to be recognised as a speaking being as such. Not surprisingly, then, Honig applauds Rancière’s accounting of ‘political activity’, something which he describes as a form of activity that ‘shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard as discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise.’

The limits of democratic cosmopolitanism

Honig admits that her focus on the myth of immigrant America has its limitations. In the first place, it focuses quite narrowly on a particular class of immigrant—ie the one who consents out of his/her own free will to immigrate to the USA. This account, of course, obscures how almost all states are founded on an unpleasant array of non-consenting practices. Honig recognises that American liberal democracy is founded:

not only on immigration but also on conquest (Native Americans) and slavery (the forced importation of African slave labour) and, in the postfounding era, on
expansion (Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, etc), annexation (French settlements in Illinois, St. Louis, and New Orleans as well as a significant Spanish-speaking population in the southwest as a result of a war with Mexico), and more slavery.32 It would be unreasonable to expect anyone to address all these moments of (re)founding, no matter how significant they are. But Honig’s noted omissions are nonetheless notable. Her focus seems to be on a contested politics of co-optation and national integration involving foreigners who come to America—willingly or forced, legally or clandestinely, admirably it doesn’t matter to Honig. She problematises this integration; unsettles it; finds emerging subjectivities and politics there. But for all her emphasis on the foreigner, Honig doesn’t consider the external dimension to (re)founding moments. Expulsions, deportations, defections, population transfers, forced transportations and coerced migrations are an important dimension of the constitutive relationship between political communities and foreigners. Yet Honig’s focus is uni-directional. She looks at the local/global struggles of foreigners residing within a state. She does not consider the difficult struggles of those on their way out.

Unfortunately, this is a significant omission on Honig’s part because it fore-closes some important theoretical and practical considerations. In particular, by excluding from consideration the abject-foreigner (the deportee, the failed asylum applicant, the overstayer, etc) Honig side-steps the crucial issue of sovereign power. Honig’s unwillingness to confront the question of sovereignty is a puzzle, especially given that her concluding statement about democratic cosmopolitanism is an expression of hope that it may ‘stop us from rescripting [the paradoxes of foreignness] into political problematics that usually end up pitting “us” against “them”’.33 Given such concerns, it is surprising that Honig does not consider the particular form of us/them relationship of political communities constituted as specifically sovereign states. This is an important omission because with sovereignty, as Schmitt and others have observed, the self/foreigner relationship tends to be resolved as a self/enemy confrontation. In this context it seems obvious that to be a foreigner, not least in the USA today, is to be an easy target of the sovereign’s exceptional powers, especially in matters of inclusion and exclusion.34 In fact, in this globalised world, ‘deportation class’ has become one of the fastest and cheapest ways to fly.

For all the ambiguity that Honig attributes to self/foreigner relationships, the lines between these identities become very sharp indeed once the question of sovereignty is provoked. The violence that is the concomitant partner to sovereignty’s self/other resolution makes sovereignty an especially interesting, dangerous and politically pressing object of critical analysis. What is Honig’s assessment of this violence? How would her ‘democratic cosmopolitanism’ resolve the problem of (re)founding in ways different (and presumably less violent) than that of the sovereignty dynamic? Honig never confronts the issue of sovereignty and, therefore, has no explicit answer to these questions.

In this respect Honig’s discussion of the changing possibilities for political agency and subjectivity would have been better served if she had also taken into account the spatial dimension of (re)founding practices. Isin emphasises how spatial practices are key factors in the constitution of citizenship. He argues that
‘space is a condition of being political’ and points to the various buildings (parliament, guildhall), configurations (forum, plaza), and arrangements (assembly) that are spatial expressions of citizenship. In a similar fashion we need to discern the spatial practices of abjection and their relationship to political practice. What buildings, configurations and arrangements are the spatial expressions of the foreigner without legal status? At the limit, there are the airport ‘waiting area’, the immigration detention facilities, the deportation flight. These are the mezzanine spaces of sovereignty—that is, those spaces which are in-between the inside and the outside of the state. A common question arises from sites as diverse as the sanctuaries of the sans papiers in France, to the rioting refugees in the detention camps of Australia, to the non-status Algerians organising against deportations in Montreal—what are the implications that arise from the political becoming of the abject? If these foreigners demonstrate a taking-subjectivity, then their abject cosmopolitanism constitutes a very difficult moment for the state. Through an impossible activism—‘impossible’ because the non-status do not possess the ‘authentic’ identity (ie citizenship) that would allow them to be political, to be an activist—they make visible the violent paradoxes of sovereignty. Consequently, the risks taken by the taking abject foreigner—ie taking the risk to become a speaking agent—is risky for the sovereign account of the political as well. Not surprisingly, representatives of the sovereign order display a striking anxiety whenever the abject foreigner takes on the status of a political activist engaged in acts of self-determination (eg stopping his/her deportation).

Taking status: Montreal’s Comité d’Action des Sans-Statuts

An emerging global politic is critically engaging with the politics of protection in the form of anti-deportation campaigns and immigrant regularisation movements. To be sure, while governments are taking formidable measures to tighten borders and limit the right of asylum, social movements around the world are mounting political campaigns that are set on re-taking these rights. The radical cosmopolitanism of chants such as ‘no one is illegal’, ‘no borders, no nations, no deportations’, and ‘neither here, nor elsewhere’ are being heard from the barrens of Australia, to the cosmopolitan streets of Montreal, to the activist ‘border camps’ on the outskirts of Fortress Europe. Often called ‘no border’ movements, Nandita Sharma describes them as having ‘developed an integrated politics calling for an end to displacement worldwide, the free movement of people and committed support for indigenous struggles for traditional land and self-determination’. No border campaigns appear in various forms and take on a diverse set of tactics to suit their particular contexts and circumstances. Wherever they exist, they have not been stingy in doling out surprising and innovative forms of political action. In Australia, the policy of placing undocumented refugees and migrants under mandatory detention has been met by diverse anti-detriment and anti-deportation campaigns. The militancy of some of the detained asylum seekers has inspired some audacious tactics, including the creation of sanctuary zones and mass convergences on the detention centres of Woomera and Baxter. In Europe, there is an extremely well developed ‘no borders’ movement,
and one which has seen some notable successes. For example, detention centres such as the ‘Via Corelli’ in Milan and Campsfield House in England have been successfully shut down. A well developed tactic of targeting private companies that profit from the detention and deportation industries, such as Codex (catering) and Lufthansa (airlines), has similarly proven to be effective both in raising public awareness and, in some cases, in stopping deportations. Finally, not satisfied with a nationally or regionally based campaign, activists have gone global by taking on the International Organization for Migration over its role in the international management of migration.38

A number of questions animate the debates within these campaigns. Should advocates relate to non-status immigrants as clients or as allies? Should they speak on behalf of the non-status, or in conversation with them? Do radical actions help or hinder the cause of refugees and migrants with precarious legal status? More to the point, what place is there for abject migrants in the politics of their own liberation? Are refugees and migrants from the Global South simply victims of neoliberal globalisations, or can they be protagonists in shaping the process of contemporary local and global transformations? These are difficult questions but ones that campaigns for refugee and migrant rights everywhere must ultimately confront. There are, of course, no simple answers to these questions, as considerations of place and context matter. In France, for example, much of the energy in immigrant rights campaigns has come from the undocumented themselves, as demonstrated by the massive intervention the sans papiers movement has made in public life. In Germany, the ‘Caravan’ movement has made some concerted efforts to create enduring links between activist and migrant groups. During the 1998 elections, for example, ‘caravans’ of refugees, migrants and their allies travelled to 44 German cities, organising meetings and fora to allow non-citizens to express themselves politically. When the city of Cologne hosted the EU and G7 Summits in June 1999, the ‘Caravan Hunger Strike’ was organised with the slogan ‘we are here because you destroy our countries’. A massive Refugee Congress held in Jena in April 2000 is widely regarded as an important moment of solidarity politics. In Italy, a series of massive rallies planned by self-organised migrants ensured that the question of migration would take a central place when the European Social Forum met in Florence in November 2002. Refugees and migrants proved to be effective players at this level of ‘global civil society’, organising a highly successful Migrants European Assembly.39

The situation facing refugee and migrant rights activists in Canada, as elsewhere, is immensely complicated by recent internal and external securitisations of migration and refugee issues. Key developments in this regard include the adoption of a ‘Smart Border’ (smart, so-called) initiative between Canada and the USA, which includes measures such as information sharing, visa policy coordination, the pre-screening of refugee claimants by security officials, and enhanced powers to interdict, detain and deport undocumented arrivals and failed asylum-seekers.40 Perhaps the most significant component of this initiative is the Safe Third Country Agreement, which was signed by Canada and the USA on 5 December 2002. This agreement stipulates that, with certain exceptions, asylum seekers who seek Canada’s protection at the US–Canada border will be
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denied the right to make a claim in Canada. Instead, they will be sent back to pursue a claim in the USA. On both sides of the borders, refugee advocates and human rights NGOs criticise this agreement on the grounds that it increases the risks for asylum seekers and provides less protection for refugees. The Canadian Council of Refugees (CCR) has repeatedly pointed to evidence indicating that the USA is not a particularly ‘safe’ country for asylum seekers. For example, asylum seekers returned to the USA will be subjected to that country’s system of detaining refugee claimants, often among general prison populations, and expediting their removal and deportation.41 To be sure, even the Canadian government seems to recognise this: it issued a travel advisory in autumn 2002 warning foreign-born residents about the risks of travelling to the USA.

In addition to the statements of concern and the political lobbying done by NGOs such as the CCR and Amnesty International, there have also been some more radical social responses. In October 2002 a coalition of faith groups responded to the state’s restrictions on protection with a call to revive a sanctuary movement in Canada and create an underground railroad, despite the considerable risks and severe penalties.42 Similarly, anti-racist and anti-globalisation activists in major Canadian cities are increasingly involved in local and global campaigns to defend refugee and migrant rights. Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver each host an activist group named ‘No One Is Illegal’. In Vancouver, the Iranian and Chinese communities have begun campaigns for the regularisation of non-status immigrants within their communities. In addition, the ‘Open the Borders!’ network in that city has begun a transnational conversation among grassroots organisations on how to organise a ‘no border’ politics.43 In Toronto, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) has developed a successful track record of direct action casework to stop deportations. In Montreal, campaigns to stop the deportations of non-status Algerian, Palestinian and Pakistani refugees and migrants have drawn international attention. In February 2003 anti-racist activists in that city hosted a ‘Consulta’ to co-ordinate various local campaigns at a national level. Similarly, the STATUS Coalition has recently launched a pan-Canadian campaign for the regularisation of all non-status immigrants in Canada.44

The campaign to stop the deportations of the non-status Algerians living in Montreal is worth examining in some detail. The activism of Montreal’s CASS is interesting as a case for considering the limits and possibilities associated with Honig’s conception of democratic cosmopolitanism. The CASS is composed of people who are most directly affected by the exclusionary practices of the Canadian state. As with the sans-papiers in France, the non-status refugees have themselves taken the lead in the campaign to stop their deportations and regularise their status in Canada and Quebec. The majority of the non-status Algerians arrived in Canada as refugees seeking asylum. All were fleeing the violence and conflict that has pitted armed Islamist groups and a corrupt military regime against one another since elections were suspended and a state of emergency was instated in 1992. The conflict in Algeria has taken a disastrous toll on the population: over 150 000 dead, 12 000 disappeared, a million displaced, and a civilian population harassed by regular kidnappings, summary executions and violent repression.45 Of the Algerians who managed to arrive in
Canada, some were granted refugee status; many were not. While the individualistic bias of the Canadian refugee determination process separates ‘genuine’ and ‘non-genuine’ refugees, the Canadian government nonetheless deemed the situation in Algeria to be so dangerous that on 3 March 1997 a moratorium was instated prohibiting all deportations to that country. Many of the failed asylum seekers—now so-called ‘non-status’ persons—noted the irony of this situation: ‘It’s ironic that you can be refused as refugees but you can’t be sent back to your own country because you’ll be persecuted’.46

In February 2002 Amnesty International released a report stating that there had been no substantial change in the political or human rights situation in Algeria since 1999:

Human rights violations in Algeria have become institutionalised. In 2002 alone more than 80 civilians were unlawfully killed by security forces and dozens more tortured or held for varying periods of time in secret detention. Some 200 people continue to die every month as a result of the continuing decade-long armed conflict. The level of killing has remained largely unchanged since early 1999. Many of the dead are civilians, including women and children, killed in targeted and indiscriminate attacks by armed groups.47

Recognising the continuing danger to human life in Algeria, the Department of Foreign Affairs issued a travel advisory stating that ‘Canadians should defer all tourist travel to Algeria’. However, only one day later, on 5 April 2002, the Minister of Immigration lifted the moratorium on deportations to Algeria. Some 1069 Algerians whose refugee claims had been denied would be sent back to a country deemed too dangerous for Canadian tourists.

The reaction of the non-status Algerian community in Montreal has been to fight the government’s policy reversal. The CASS, along with allied groups such as No One Is Illegal (NOII), has mounted a vigorous campaign to raise public awareness about their situation, and to organise an effective political and legal response. Their demands to the Canadian and Quebec governments are for 1) an immediate end to all deportations; 2) a return to the moratorium on removals to Algeria; and 3) the regularisation of non-status Algerian residents in Canada.48 A wide array of actions and strategies have been employed to push this agenda into the public realm, many of which are more in line with the radical tactics of anti-globalisation protestors than with the conventional legal avenues taken by human rights NGOs. In addition to the legal avenues, the actions organized by the CASS have included regular assemblies to mobilise directly affected Algerians; weekly information pickets outside the offices of Immigration Canada; unannounced delegation visits, large and small, to these offices; regular public demonstrations and marches, at times with over a thousand participants; leafleting against deportations at airports, drawing attention to the private carriers who profit from carrying out state deportations; and creating a solidarity network with a diverse group of supporters and allies in Montreal, across Canada, and internationally.49

On one level, these actions have added weight to the demand to stop the deportations and to regularise the status of members of the non-status Algerian community. On another level, the significance of these measures exceeds their tactical utility and raises some fundamental questions about the changing
possibilities for political subjectivity and agency. Do the non-status activists possess a taking-subjectivity, as understood by Honig? To be in a better position to answer this question, let us briefly examine two particular tactics employed by members of the CASS: 1) delegation visits to Immigration offices and 2) sanctuary. These tactics have been proven to be important for how they disrupt the administration, the routines, and, above all, the ‘normality’ of deportations. They are also significant, however, as form of taking-politics: delegation visits allow the non-status, those who have ‘no part’, to assert their political voice; the creation of sanctuary zones similarly allows for a re-casting of political space. Understood together, these tactical measures are crucial to the possibilities of an abject cosmopolitan political agency.

Taking speech

The CASS organised a number of delegation visits to immigration offices beginning in Summer 2002. There is a number of advantages to these kinds of visits. An occupation by non-status people disrupts the normality of office affairs; they bring their own personal ‘states of emergency’ directly to the state apparatus. Direct action tactics work best when they organise around existing weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the system. Canadian immigration offices in particular do not tolerate disruption well as they operate in the context of a massive backlog of casework. Since these offices can’t afford to be upset, a well co-ordinated disruption can create considerable pressure for officials to submit to the request of a meeting with management and/or political officials. These meetings usually include forcing officials to read the individual case files and hear the testimonies of the refugee claimants. This is the other key advantage of delegation visits: they allow for face-to-face encounters with state officials invested with enormous powers of discretion. As one member of CASS complained, ‘We are treated as file numbers, not as human beings’. Once the compelling individual stories behind these numbers are shared, it is not unusual for immigration staff to be moved to tears. But will they be moved enough to changed their minds about a deportation order? The dynamics of delegation visits are revealing in this respect, as they demonstrate the ongoing struggle of the non-status in being recognised and heard as political actors. In an account of an unannounced visit to the offices of Immigration Canada made by members of the CASS’s Women’s Committee and their children, Nacera Kellou describes the intense unwillingness of the government officials to speak to the non-status Algerians. She also describes the panic these officials showed when they realised that other non-status refugees and immigrants in the waiting room of the immigration offices could see and hear the CASS demonstration.

They were hard headed. They were telling us, ‘Give us your letter and we will get back to you’. They didn’t want to speak to us all at once. They were saying, ‘This is not the way things are done in Canada. We don’t do it this way’ … The Immigration officials—they wanted us to provide the good respectful image: that we’d come in, and we’d go upstairs, and we’d sit down, and we’d wait, and we’d talk to them like things are normal. But things aren’t normal! This was panic, and we acted in such a
way. We occupied all the rooms to show that this was a serious situation. They didn’t want the other people [other non-status refugees] in the waiting room to see us because this would dirty up their image. This would take away from their image of their administrative life, of things being done normally. This would ruin that. So that’s how we approached it.  

Clearly, Kellou’s account demonstrates that immigration officials were interlocutors in ‘a determined kind of speech situation’, one in which they simultaneously understood and did not understand what the other (the non-status Algerian) was saying. From the outset the prior expectation of docility and patience on the part of refugees (ie they should wait to be called upon) was shattered. The officials were instead faced with a loud, assertive group of non-status people, who were unwilling to be separated as (speaking) ‘leaders’ and (silent) ‘followers’. The audacity of such tactics threatens to subvert the entire framework of ‘authoritative citizen’ versus ‘passive refugee’. In this context the significance of immigration officials moving asylum seekers and other non-status people out of the ministry’s waiting room is revealed: the dominant order of speaking beings cannot tolerate the sight or sounds of non-citizens acting as political agents. Consequently, this activism must be hidden out of sight of other non-status people, lest they follow the example of the CASS.

Taking space

By October 2002 the Canadian government had deported 32 Algerians. At the same time, the Stop the Deportations campaign found a rallying point in the case of the Bourouisa family: Mourad, Yakout, and their two-year-old Canadian-born son, Ahmed. This ‘good’ immigrant family captivated the media. The Bourouisa family spoke excellent French, had never been on welfare and had worked throughout their lengthy stay in Canada. To all appearances they were the ‘model’ immigrant family employed by nation-states to (re)found their distinctiveness, their ‘choiceworthiness’. And yet the family was facing a type of Catch-22 situation that is so typical of the non-status experience. Shortly after Mourad received his Canadian work permit in September 2002—non-status refugees and immigrants have to make the $150 application every year—the Bourouisa family received a deportation order. Their hopes were raised, however, when they received word that the Quebec government had scheduled an immigration interview for them in New York City. But this appointment was set for two weeks after their scheduled deportation. To add to this absurd situation, the Bourouisa family could not attend their immigration interview because the Canadian government was in possession of their passports and, as Algerian nationals, it was unlikely that the US government would issue them travel visas. Faced with a deportation date for 20 October 2002, the family chose to accept the Union United Church’s offer of protection instead and began an 11-day period of sanctuary there.

The taking of sanctuary has a long history and is rooted in the idea of a ‘sacred space’ of protection, free from governmental power. In North America, a well developed sanctuary movement emerged in the 1980s to provide asylum and protection to Central American refugees. Informed by a theology which held to
a radical expansion of the definition of ‘sin’ to include social and economic injustices—and not just individual transgressions—these faith activists understood the Gospel as one of earthly salvation, as a kind of higher politics. This appeal to a non-territorial and universalistic ‘higher politics’ constitutes an important challenge to an order that already claims to have resolved the relationship between universality—particularity through the principle of territorial state sovereignty.\(^5\) Indeed, the whole idea of sanctuary as a kind of ‘sacred space’—or, if one secularises the concept, a ‘liberated zone’—presents a challenge to the principle of state sovereignty. In the context of deportations, Walters suggests that the taking of sanctuary guarantees that deportation will no longer be a routine administrative process. Rather, it ensures that the deportation act is revealed as a site where sovereignty is performed: ‘either the state negotiating with the subjects of deportation (and thereby recognizing them as subjects), or the state as armed bodies of men smashing down church doors, seizing, arresting, pacifying, terrifying, removing bodies in full display of the public’.\(^6\) In autumn 2002, after several years of dealing with the sans papiers strategy of sanctuary, authorities in France chose the latter option, forcibly evicting over 70 Iraqi and Kurdish asylum seekers from a Catholic church in November 2002.\(^7\) In Canada the political pressure created by the existence of a sanctuary space in Montreal was still relatively novel. The visible and audible presence of non-citizen political subjects was, therefore, successful in forcing the Canadian and Quebec governments to make some important concessions, at least in the short term.

**Sovereign (re)takings**

On 30 October 2002 the federal and Quebec immigration ministers responded to what they called ‘an extraordinary situation’—ie the appearance of a sanctuary space in Montreal, but more generally the political activism of non-citizens—and announced the *Joint Procedures for the processing of the applications of certain Algerian nationals*. ‘For humanitarian reasons, you no longer have to leave Canada’, said the federal Minister, conveniently choosing to ignore the political pressure created by the non-status activists and their allies. The major government concession was to allow non-status Algerians to make in-land applications for permanent residence in Canada. Since the length of the application procedure was three months, in the short term this amounted to a victory: a 90-day reprieve on deportations would apply to all non-status Algerians who made the application.

While taking this as an important achievement, the cass nonetheless recognised the limitations and, indeed, the traps in this concession. In the first place, the *Joint Procedures* re-affirmed the sovereign’s capacity to decide upon the exception by excluding a number of categories of non-status people of Algerian origin: eg those who live outside Quebec; those with a criminal record, however minor; those who have already received deportation orders or been deported; and those who cannot afford to pay the expensive application fees ($550 per adult, $150 per child). For the 174 non-status Algerians who went underground or left Canada—and who soon had warrants issued for their arrest—the *Joint Procedures* were obviously an inadequate response. Indeed, the *Joint Procedures*
actually serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy in this respect. By forcing certain segments of the non-status Algerian population to go underground, it recreates the ‘problem’ of illegal migration, false documentation, human smuggling, etc and thereby reaffirms (to politicians and security professionals at least) the importance of securitising this sector.

Sovereign power reasserted itself through the Joint Procedures in a number of ways. Most significantly, however, it did so by treating the non-status Algerians as potential immigrants, and not as refugees. In doing so, the Joint Procedures does more than just ignore the dangers of returning to Algeria. It also rejects the way in which the CASS had been formulating its politics as one of self-identified refugees. While the CASS forced the government to recognise them as speaking political agents, they failed at being recognised as political agents speaking as refugees. With the Joint Procedures the non-status Algerian is an applicant for permanent residency: an ‘immigrant’. A CASS member describes the importance of framing their struggle as a politics of protection, not immigration: ‘We don’t agree with this, because immigration is granted to people based on their job skills, their language skills. Should not speaking French or English mean you have less of a right not to be returned to a situation where you could be tortured and killed?’ For the sovereign state, however, the category of the refugee remained as it must: speechless and agentless.

The Joint Procedures provide an important lesson for abject cosmopolitans—that is, that radical takings can nonetheless be captured by the logic and practices of state sovereignty. This is what I call ‘sovereignty’s retakings’. Indeed, the Joint Procedures represents a dimension of sovereign power that allows itself to appear in places of absence. That abject agents sometimes make an appearance—to take space, to take voice—is, Honig says, a sign of a radical democratic politics at work. However, these radical takings can themselves become implicated in some of the traditional constitutive dualisms of modern politics (included/excluded, vocal/silent, visible/invisible). This is worrying as sovereign power thrives on the ambiguity and the transgression of dualistic distinctions. As Žižek has suggested in his critique of Rancière, to characterise politics in terms of the sudden intrusion of the ‘part of no part’ as a visible, articulate and equal member of the dominant political order misses how this order itself relies on such subversions for its own condition of being. The dominant order, Žižek says, ‘is never simply a positive order: to function at all, it has to cheat, to misname, and so on—in short, to engage in politics, to do what its subversive opponents are supposed to do’. In other words, the visible and articulate defenders of order at times utilise strategies that obscure and misrepresent. They too have a ‘diversity of tactics’ at their disposal. What makes sovereign power so vexing is its capacity to find presence in absence. Consequently, any radical politics needs to beware of the subversive elements of sovereign power—its non-democratic re-takings.

International (re)foundings

When the Immigration Minister refers to Canadian border policy as ‘not based on building walls but on controlling doors’ we know that the border is no longer only about the ramparts, fortifications, and barricades that separate an inside
from an outside. It also involves the employment of complicated technologies that are designed to absorb, control and manage flows and movements as much as repel them. Consequently, like all borders, the Canadian one is ‘polysemic’ in the sense that it does not have the same meaning for everyone and the experience of the border varies quite dramatically according to race, gender, class and national origin. According to Barry Hindess, one of the constitutive effects of citizenship is to divide and allocate the global human population into smaller sub-populations of territorial states. It is a normal and acceptable—not to mention quite legal—practice for states to discriminate on the basis of non-citizenship. National (re)founding, therefore, do not exist as an abstraction, separate from the overall system of nation-states. Consequently, while Honig emphasises how foreignness plays an important role in national (re)founding, by ignoring sovereignty’s re-takings she misses the important role the deportation of foreigners plays in international (re)foundings. To engage with deportation is not only to engage with practices that are constitutive of citizenship, but also with practices that are constitutive of a state-centric world order.

The Canadian government’s position with respect to Algeria is an excellent example of how the external dimension of sovereignty gets reproduced through deportations. The lifting of the moratorium qualifies as a (re)founding moment for the international system of states in two respects. First, it reconfirms as uncontroversial the idea that every designated national (e.g. Algerian) can be allocated to a designated territory (e.g. Algeria). From an international perspective, as Walters explains, ‘deportation represents the compulsory allocation of subjects of their proper sovereigns’. The Immigration Minister confirms this when he says, ‘The people we deport, there will be no problem for them’, adding that the suspension of elections and the declaration of a state of emergency in 1992 saved Algeria from turning into another Afghanistan. The Immigration Minister’s easy effacement of the extremely anti-democratic and violent practices of Algerian statecraft would seem to be a contradictory stance for a representative of a democratic polity committed to the idea of universal human rights, as Canada is. But according to some of the prevailing conceptions of cosmopolitanism, deportation in and of itself does not negate the viability of a world order where, say, constitutional states and universal human rights reign. For example, Hindess notes how Kant’s famous vision of cosmopolitanism recognised that a cosmopolitan world order would probably be forced upon states, as both an effect and a reasonable solution to the problem of interstate conflict and competition. Hindess reminds us of this dimension of cosmopolitanism in order to suggest that:

the often brutal and inhumane practices of contemporary democratic states show, not that the Kantian vision itself is misleading, but how far we still have to go before that vision can be realized. On this view, lack of elementary hospitality towards migrants would be seen as a feature of the modern world that will be overcome as poor, weak, or undemocratic states become wealthier, stronger and more democratic—that is, as their own citizens have less reason to flee and other states have more reason to treat these citizens with respect.

Following this logic, an important condition for Algeria becoming recognised as
a full partner in the international community of states is that deportations of non-status Algerians must take place. We can read such rationales in Coderre’s assessment of Algeria: ‘There is a future for Algeria. There is an improvement in human rights. There is an improvement with the reforms they want to bring forward’.68 This, surely, is an abject cosmopolitanism of the worst sort.

The return to deporting Algerian nationals back to Algeria counts as a moment of international (re)founding in a second sense. Canadian border policies reference, among other things, a neoliberal economic world order and so count towards the (re)founding of the international political economy. Since 1992, most Western media attention on Algeria has focused on the violence and the human rights abuses resulting from the civil war. However, during that time the country has also adopted a more globalised neoliberal state structure in the course of implementing IMF structural adjustment policies. Algeria is now Canada’s primary economic partner in Africa and the Middle East, with an annual commercial trade valued at $2 billion. The privatisation of public services in Algeria has resulted in a Canadian company, SNC-Lavallin, being awarded a $141-million water contract in April 2002.69 In January 2003, the company received another water contract in Algeria, this one valued at $96 million. These developments have not been lost on the non-status Algerians in Canada: ‘We are sacrificed for money’, says one.70 The timing of the lifting of the moratorium coincided within days with the Canadian Prime Minister’s trade mission to Algeria, suggesting that, when countries successfully enter the international economic order, the deportation of nationals from that country will be part of recognising and normalising relations. In short, an important condition for Algeria becoming recognised as a full partner in the international community of states—or, more to the point in this case, in the international economic order—is that deportations of non-status Algerians take place.

**Conclusion: cosmopolitanisms now**

Cosmopolitanism encourages us to look up, towards a future, beyond the horizon of possible existence.71 But horizons recede as quickly as they are approached, and many refugees and abject migrants have run out of time and patience. Abject cosmopolitanism does not aim for a higher ground so much as burrow into the apparatuses and technologies of exclusion in order to disrupt the administrative routines, the day-to-day perceptions and constructions of normality. The abject put the question of the speaking subject front and centre, under the limelight of critical scrutiny, and as an object of radical re-taking. They provoke fundamental questions about politics: Who speaks? Who counts? Who belongs? Who can express themselves politically? In short, who can be political? When speechless victims begin to speak about the politics of protection, this has the effect of putting the political into question. This is what makes ‘no one is illegal’ such a radical proclamation. Our received traditions of the political require that some human beings be illegal. To say that no human is illegal is to call into question the entire architecture of sovereignty, all its borders, locks and doors, internal hierarchies, etc.

The purpose of this article has been to assess anti-deportation campaigns for
how they intervene in the politics of protection. While noting the limitations of such actions, the way the non-status activists of the CASS took political speech through delegation visits and (re)politicised public space through sanctuary makes them excellent candidates for the status of democratic cosmopolitans. Recalling Honig’s criteria, the CASS have ‘widened the resources and energies’ of activism within Montreal and beyond. They have struggled to be democratic. Their politics favours the ‘de-nationalisation of the state’, both in the sense of organising to stop their own deportations, but also in the sense of regularising the status of all non-status persons in Canada. In their public campaign to stop their deportations the CASS has broken through the nervous subjectivities of citizens anxious about supposed correlations between abject migration and insecure polities. The CASS convinced large parts of the population of the city of Montreal, the province of Quebec and the rest of Canada (and elsewhere) that they were not threats, and that they were refugees in need of protection, despite what immigration officials said. Further, the public acts of citizenship of these abject non-citizens came to represent a troubling anomaly to the sovereign order, one that ultimately forced a response from the Canadian and Quebec governments.

The activism of non-status immigrants and refugees is recreating citizenship in ways that demand recognition and support, not criminalisation and securitisation. In this regard, the CASS is among a growing population of the displaced that is reinvigorating democratic politics today. But the challenge to do both simultaneously—to be a refugee, to be political—is considerable. The CASS found that, while they received recognition by the Canadian and Quebec governments, they were unsuccessful in defining the conditions of this recognition. The radical takings of foreigners are always at risk of being deflected and absorbed by the non-democratic re-takings of sovereign power for the purposes of national and international (re)foundings.

Notes

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5 Ibid.
10 Ibid, p 4, emphasis added.
12 J Butler, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’, New York: Routledge, 1993, p 3. The ‘abject’, Butler continues, are ‘those “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the “unlivable” is required to circumscribe the defining limit of the subject’s domain’.
19 Ibid.
20 Butler, Bodies that Matter, p 3.
24 Ibid, p 74.
25 Ibid, p 76.
26 Ibid, p 97. This focus on consent/non-consent becomes more problematic once we note the ambiguous position the state takes on this issue. As Honig notes on p 97: ‘Illegal migration is not only combated by the state; it is also simultaneously enabled, covertly courted, often managed, and certainly tolerated by it. Established citizens profit from the subsidies that cheap migrant labor provides to their child-care costs and food prices’. I discuss Honig’s ambivalence regarding the state below.
30 Isin, Being Political, pp 275, 276.
32 Honig, Democracy and the Foreigner, p 75.
33 Ibid, p 122.

Isin, Being Political, p 45.


Kein Mensch ist illegal (eds), Without Papers in Europe: Making Migration Illegal, Berlin: Kein Mensch ist Illegal, 2000; and Mazzadra & Neilson, ‘Né qui, né altrove’.


See www.opentheborders.org.


Significantly, this last demand was changed in autumn 2002 to the much more radical call for the regularisation of all non-status residents in Canada.


For example, at the end of 2002 the Immigration and Refugee Board had a record 52 761 cases in the pipeline, despite a significant drop in the number of refugee claims. A Thompson, ‘Refugee board backlog climbs despite large drop in claims’, Toronto Star, 27 January 2003.


One particular concern within the cASS was the opportunities for women to become actively involved. In September 2000 the Women’s Committee of the cASS was organised to address this concern. To date, it has organised some of the most successful demonstrations and delegation visits. Madjiguène Cissé, a prominent activist within the sans papiers movement in France, speaks of the challenges of sexism within non-status movements in a way that has a powerful resonance with the situation in Montreal. J Friedman & C Tarr, ‘The sans-papiers: an interview with Madjiguène Cissé’, in Friedman & Tarr (eds), Women, Immigration and Identities in France, Oxford: Berg, 2000, pp 29–38.


Rancière, Disagreement, p x.


Walters, ‘Deportation’, p 257, emphasis in the original.


POLITICS OF PROTECTION IN THE ANTI-DEPORTATION MOVEMENT

61 S Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, New York: Verso, 1999, p 235 (emphasis in the original). Isin offers an important caveat to Žižek’s assessment, indicating that Žižek himself might be contributing to the depoliticisation of becoming political: ‘While Žižek is right to recognize that becoming political is that moment of questioning the part that a being occupies in social space and is not simply an interruption by those beings who have no part, he depoliticizes those acts of becoming political by restricting the political to those “revolutionary” actions that seek universal restructuring. This restriction of the properly political to acts of a “revolutionary” character is itself a political strategy.’ Isin, *Being Political*, p 277.


68 Thompson, ‘Algeria safe’.

69 S Montgomery, ‘Tears linked to water deal? Deportation seems to make no sense. Big water contract was announced about the time Canada decided Algerians should leave’, *Montreal Gazette*, 19 October 2002, p A7.

70 Quoted in Papadopoulos, ‘When you can’t go home’.

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