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Irregular migrants, neoliberal geographies and spatial frontiers of 'the political'

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Abstract. In this article I argue that the demands of irregular migrants to belong to political communities constitute key contemporary sites of 'the political'. I also argue that geographies associated with neoliberal globalisation (transnational production circuits, special economic zones and global cities) are implicated in irregular migration flows and in new conceptions of political belonging. In relation to these claims, I reflect upon recent mobilisations in the US context, in which hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants and their supporters asserted the right to belong. I suggest that similar claims to belong are likely to proliferate and that neoliberal geographies may provide some clues as to where and how these contemporary frontiers of the political might proceed. I conclude by suggesting that a multidimensional approach to political belonging provides a sound conceptual starting point for the analytical and normative challenges raised by both the claims of non-status migrants and the sovereign practices of contemporary states.

In her book, *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight For Immigrant Rights*, Jennifer Gordon describes how migrants contributed to the campaign for the Unpaid Wages Prohibition Act, passed by the New York Legislature in July 1997.[1] The Act provided for the enforcement of wage payments to workers regardless of their legal status. It aimed to address the frequent withholding of wages from migrants employed in the city and suburbs of New York and Long Island whose insecure legal status made them vulnerable to exploitation and reluctant to report employers' abuses. The Act was the brainchild of a coalition of immigrant workers, many of whom had irregular status,[2] organised under the banner of a local legal clinic and worker centre. By initiating and lobbying for the Act, migrant workers brought claims upon a political community from which they were excluded, yet they did not argue for a right to

[1] Jennifer Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), chs 5 and 6.

[2] The term 'irregular migrant' refers to non-citizens who have crossed state borders or remain in state territory without the explicit sanction of the host state. It includes recent arrivals as well as longer-term residents who lack officially recognised residence and citizenship status. I avoid the more common terminology of 'undocumented migrant' because, as I discuss later in the article, irregular migrants are often in possession of identity documents which provide a measure of status within certain jurisdictions of the host state. 'Irregular migrant' and 'irregular migration' remain awkward terms, not least because they are thoroughly implicated in the state-centric account of citizenship and political belonging that this article attempts to problematise. However, since forms of citizenship and political belonging beyond state-centric ones are conceptually underdeveloped, we do not yet have the vocabulary to articulate the ambiguous status of many irregular migrants and residents. Thus while I employ the term 'irregular' here, more appropriate alternatives may well emerge as the theory and practice of citizenship progresses in terms of these issues.

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formal citizenship. The very idea of an irregular migrant campaigning (in Spanish) for changes to employment law in the office of a Republican senator[3] dramatically upsets the 'common sense' line between legitimacy and illegitimacy. While claims were posed in a variety of terms, including those appealing to the protection of wage levels for low-paid *citizen* workers, the migrant activists nevertheless acted 'in ways beyond the boundaries of the law's definition of who was entitled to do the work of citizenship.'[4] What can these ambiguous identities and practices tell us about transformations in political belonging? And how might such transformations relate to border dynamics, spatial assemblages and sovereign practices apparent in an age of neoliberal globalisation?

The term political belonging is intended to capture the connections between political community, identity and practice. In the discipline of International Relations (IR) the Westphalian state system has dominated the lens through which political belonging is represented. On this basis, a specific spatial phenomenon (territory) has been conceptually linked to a specific community (the state) and a specific identity (the citizen) as a frame of reference for legitimate political practice. A great deal of practice in today's world continues to be structured by this state/citizen/territory constellation. This is why, for instance, the policing of territorial borders against unwanted non-citizens currently attracts unprecedented levels of rhetorical, financial and technological investment. It is also the reason why statelessness remains 'a condition of infinite danger.'[5] At the same time, however, and as the example above reveals, this framework cannot always account for political claims asserted by particular kinds of non-citizens. Moreover, the territorial imagination underwriting this framework appears increasingly out of step with the variety of transnational flows and fragmentations that animate discourses of globalisation in policy circles, civil society and social movements alike.

This article investigates the political projects encapsulated in different conceptions of belonging and not belonging and the practices involved in legitimising and/or contesting one frame of reference over another. In this respect I am concerned with how notions of political belonging are linked to practices of 'the political'. My usage of this term is drawn from the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and the radicalisation of the democratic project that they proposed over twenty years ago.[6] For Laclau and Mouffe, democratic struggle relates not only to the rights and opportunities afforded to defined groups (citizens, for example) but also to the contestation of boundaries through which those groups themselves are defined. Accordingly, the political is distinguished from politics in the conventional sense by the ontological destabilisation of naturalised identities as boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. In terms central to this article, the political relates to a radical questioning of what it means to belong.

Identifying the political in political belonging prompts a number of broad research questions. What processes and dynamics are producing cleavages where established boundaries of belonging are challenged? Which actors are located on these fault

[3] Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops*, p. 267.
[4] Ibid., p. 272.
[5] Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 32.
[6] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd edn. (London: Verso, [1985] 2001).

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lines? What strategies do they employ and towards what ends? One way into these questions is to focus upon the politics of irregular migration and the political claims of irregular migrants who are positioned literally and figuratively on borders of belonging. Cast in securitised terms, the intensified policing of borders in response to irregular migration creates a flashpoint for anxieties about an outside world encroaching upon a vulnerable inside where the legitimacy of the state as a basis for sovereign communities is at stake. Irregular migration, by its very definition, is a reminder of the centrality of the state to prevailing notions of belonging. When state authorities act to punish and deter irregular migrants they reinforce a territorial account of belonging that confirms the sovereign status of the state and its citizens against unwanted external intrusions.

At the same time, however, government authorities pursuing neoliberal policies, particularly in regard to labour market regulation, are heavily implicated in the generation of migration flows to which restrictive border policing subsequently responds. Neoliberal restructuring over the last four decades has exacerbated both push and pull factors leading to irregular labour migration.[7] Irregular migrants meet the flexibility demands of a neoliberal labour market in the most efficient manner: often impervious to wage and condition regulations, highly mobile, easily expendable and/or deportable according to market fluctuation. Legal and regulatory regimes within states have also contributed to the emergence of transnational production circuits, special economic zones and global cities as new geographical phenomena which not only disrupt received assumptions about territorial space, but also facilitate the integration of irregular labour into local, national and global political-economies in very specific ways. While estimates vary widely and there is no consistent cross-country data, numerous sources confirm that irregular migrants presently constitute significant portions of migrants and labour forces throughout Asia, North America, Europe and the Gulf States.[8] This presence and the neoliberal policy framework to which it is connected presents a legitimacy crisis for states whose *raison d'être* is based in the sovereign protection and privileging of a territorially bounded community of citizens. Hence, in relation to irregular migration, many contemporary states are faced with a fundamental tension between territorial and neoliberal rationalities of governance. While scholars have identified this tension in relation to managing migration policy in general,[9] irregular migration poses particularly acute legitimacy problems since it remains at once economically productive and, at least ostensibly, unauthorised by the state.

[7] Bill Jordan and Franck Düvell, *Irregular Migration: The Dilemmas of Transnational Mobility.* (Cheltenham UK and Northampton USA: Edward Elgar, 2002), pp. 63–4; Madeleine Leonard, *Invisible Work, Invisible Workers: The Informal Economy in Europe and the United States* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 26–56, 76–82.

[8] Human Rights Watch, 'Bearing the Brunt of the Asian Economic Crisis: The Impact on Labor Rights and Migrant Workers in Asia', (1998) Available at ⟨http://www.hrw.org/reports98/asialbr/⟩ (accessed 5 January 2006); International Labour Organization, 'Towards a fair deal for migrant workers in the global economy' (Geneva: Report VI, International Labour Conference, 92nd Session, 2004), pp. 11–12; Philip Martin, 'Bordering on Control: Combating Irregular Migration in North America and Europe' (International Organization for Migration, Migration Research Series, no. 13, 2003), pp. 27–28; Ronald Skeldon, 'Introduction', *Migration and the Labour Market in Asia: Recent Trends and Policies* (Paris: OECD, 2002), p. 10; United Nations Population Division, 'Levels and Trends of International Migration to Selected Countries in Asia' (New York: United Nations, 2003), pp. 16–23, 59–74.

[9] James F. Hollifield, 'The Emerging Migration State', *International Migration Review*, 38:3 (2004), p. 887.

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These tensions were highlighted dramatically in recent demonstrations in cities across the United States. In March, April and May 2006 hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants and their supporters protested against the introduction of restrictive immigration legislation and emphasised the crucial role that their labour plays in the US economy. In this article I reflect upon these particular mobilisations in order to argue that the claims of irregular migrants represent key contemporary sites of the political, challenging long standing assumptions about who belongs and to what they belong. I also argue that particular geographies associated with neoliberal trajectories are implicated in new conceptions of political belonging. I suggest that these geographies may provide some clues as to where contemporary frontiers of the political might be and how we might expect those frontiers to be challenged.

In the first section of the article I introduce this spatial theme. I examine the spatially reconfigured sovereign practices of the neoliberal state and specific geographies emerging in this context, with a focus upon the example of global cities. I consider the implications of these spatio-political dynamics both for flows of irregular migration and political belonging. In the second section I analyse the US mobilisations in detail and relate these to the discussion of global cities, in particular. In a concluding section I outline some analytical and theoretical foci which might shape further research into the links between alternative neoliberal geographies and frontiers of the political in relation to irregular migrants. I also suggest that a multidimensional approach to political belonging provides a sound conceptual starting point for the analytical and normative challenges raised by both the claims of irregular migrants and the sovereign practices of contemporary states.

Neoliberal geographies

A number of studies of globalisation have begun from the starting point that the sovereign state now confronts a range of transnational forces which challenge both its identity as the central unit of global political life and its logistical capacity to operate as an independent sovereign power. Such studies have looked beyond the state to conceptualise contemporary governance in neo-medieval,[10] cosmopolitan,[11] and polycentric[12] terms. Against these moves away from state-centrism, other scholars have emphasised the changing but persistent role of the state in the context of neoliberal globalisation. From such perspectives, the state is not so much in retreat,[13] as reconfiguring its sovereign practices in ways that no longer correspond to

[10] James Anderson, 'The shifting stage of politics: new medieval and postmodern territorialities?' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14 (1996), pp. 133–53; John Gerard Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations', *International Organization*, 47:1 (1993), pp. 139–74.

[11] Daniele Archibugi (ed.), *Debating Cosmopolitics.* (London and New York: Verso, 2003); David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From The Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

[12] Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn. (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 185–223.

[13] Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

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a territorial basis or a citizen/non-citizen binary.[14] For Edward Cohen, states' facilitation of neoliberal globalisation is suggestive of a transition in the geographic context and constituency of sovereignty. Following neoliberal agendas, 'states began to reject the notion that their primary purpose was to provide for the security and protection of their citizens from the forces of economic competition and risk [. . . and] began to substitute a commitment to the promotion of economic globalization itself as a defining purpose of policy choice.' With this newly defined purpose, he argues, 'the constituency of the state is no longer only or simply a population of citizens defined by territorial borders and demanding protection from forces outside of those borders . . . It is increasingly the global economy and its dominant actors and institutions themselves.'[15] This transition contradicts the territorial basis upon which the state's legitimacy as an organising structure, source of authority, and basis for community rests. Hence the neoliberal state negotiates a fundamental tension between neoliberal and territorial rationalities.

A conception of sovereignty reconfigured in this way loosens the conceptual grasp that territorial logic has imposed upon our understandings of the state. This reconfigured perspective thus provides an opening to theorise novel spatial phenomena as integral rather than threatening to the contemporary state. Below I highlight three examples which detail the connections between reconfigured sovereign practices and the emergence of neoliberal geographies. In addition, a link is drawn between these geographies and the increasing prevalence of irregular labour migration.

Transnational production circuits

Legislative and regulatory changes instituted in the course of free trade agreements and in efforts to attract foreign investment have facilitated the cross-border operations of firms and markets.[16] Since the relaxation of tax and other regulations applied to intra-firm trade, component part manufacture and assemblage is increasingly outsourced to sites in different countries according to the most competitive arrangements, involving multiple locations in the production of a single end-product. These transnational production circuits de-link assembly workers from final destination markets and in many cases from direct involvement with the originating company. Workers may be hired by subcontractors several layers removed from general site managers, allowing legitimate industries to exploit informal labour without direct culpability and increasingly blurring the distinction between formal

[14] Edward S Cohen, 'Globalization and the Boundaries of the State: A Framework for Analyzing the Changing Practice of Sovereignty', *Governance*, 14:1 (2001), p. 85; Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 6, 21–22.

[15] Cohen, 'Globalization and the Boundaries of the State', p. 83.

[16] Saskia Sassen, 'Globalization or Denationalization?' *Review of International Political Economy*, 10:1 (2003), p. 8; Saskia Sassen, 'A New Cross-Border Field for Public and Private Actors', in Yale H. Ferguson and R. J. Barry Jones (eds.), *Political Space: Frontiers of Change and Governance in a Globalizing World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 185; Matthew B. Sparke, 'A Neoliberal Nexus: Economy, Security and the Biopolitics of Citizenship on the Border', *Political Geography*, 25:2 (2006), p. 158.

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and informal economies.[17] Workers may also work offsite from home, paid on a per-piece basis.[18] These are more isolated work environments where both existing labour standards (where they exist) and collective labour demands are more difficult to implement and police. The structures of transnational production circuits thus facilitate the recruitment of irregular migrants who have fewer working options available to them and present a ready source of cheap and flexible labour.

Special economic zones (SEZs)

SEZs are designated territories dedicated to manufacture for export. The first of such zones appeared in Taiwan in the mid 1960s and since then have proliferated throughout Asia, as well as in Latin America and in the Middle East. In these zones incoming capital investors are attracted via minimal taxation and regulation, while other laws are specifically crafted to delegate control over labour recruitment, conditions and dismissal to private enterprise. SEZs represent a transfer of governance functions from the state to private authorities and the diversification of agencies involved in the deployment of neoliberal governance.[19] According to Aihwa Ong, the implications of this transfer include 'graduated' expressions of sovereignty with differential treatment of citizens and workers under law depending upon the zone in which they live and work.[20] The benefits of a cheap, willing, compliant workforce are actively promoted by governments as a drawcard for foreign capital.[21] Alongside citizens and regular migrants employed in formal and informal capacities, irregular migrants provide an especially attractive and expendable source of manufacturing, construction and domestic labour in these contexts. While states have actively sought to devolve governance functions within SEZs they retain their capacity for territorial control. In this way, periodic policing of irregular migrants can respond to market fluctuation and domestic political imperatives.[22]

Global cities

A globalised production process has led to the increased concentration of coordinated business services in cities which act as hubs or nodes in a global financial and

[17] Jennifer Hurley, 'Garment Industry Subcontracting Chains and Working Conditions: Research Overview', *Core Labour Standards and the Rights of Women Workers in International Supply Chains: Garment Industry Subcontracting in Nine Countries* (Manchester: Women Working Worldwide, 2004), pp. 10–18; Marta López-Garza, 'A Study of the Informal Economy and Latina/o Immigrants in Greater Los Angeles', in Marta López-Garza and David R. Diaz (eds.), *Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: The Metamorphosis of Southern California* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 144–5.

[18] Ruth Pearson and Rosa Fernandez, 'Mapping Home-Working: Globally and Locally. An Interview with Rosa Fernandez', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6:4 (2004), pp. 673–8.

[19] Sassen, 'A New Cross-Border Field for Public and Private Actors', pp. 175–8.

[20] Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, pp. 215–22.

[21] International Labour Organization, 'Social and Labour Issues in Export Processing Zones' (Geneva: Background Paper for the International Tripartite Meeting of Export Processing Zone-Operating Countries, 1998), pp. 4–14, 18–35.

[22] Amy Gurowitz, 'Migrant Rights and Activism in Malaysia: Opportunities and Constraints', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 59:4 (2000), pp. 866–7; Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr, 'The Irregular Migrant as Homo Sacer: Migration and Detention in Australia, Malaysia and Thailand', *International Migration*, 42:1 (2004), p. 48.

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production network.[23] In many cases, cities have been subject to specific regulatory regimes designed to attract business and finance and mimicking the creation of London and New York as 'offshore' financial markets in 1979 and 1981 respectively.[24] For Saskia Sassen, the growth in business services associated with global capital is too often viewed in isolation from the increased demand for low skilled and poorly paid work that it generates.[25] She shows how the growth of high income urban centres in global cities corresponds with growth in low-wage, part-time and informal jobs, both those directly related to the maintenance of business-service infrastructure, as well as to the consumption demands of service workers with high disposable incomes. In large US cities, for example, she highlights demand for residential building attendants, restaurant and gourmet food workers, garment industry workers, dog-walkers, errand-runners, child-carers and house-cleaners. Others have documented the commonplace employment of irregular migrants in order to meet this demand.[26] Increased numbers of low-paid workers have generated an alternative rung of consumer demand catered to by small, culturally specific, family businesses producing low cost goods and services and running on cheap, informal and/or unpaid labour recruited through well established transnational networks.[27] The links between global cities and irregular migrant labour are indirectly acknowledged through the more recent development in the Asian context of hybrid zones linking cities designed for high-tech business development and financial services with proximity to borders and crossing-points for low skilled migrant labour.[28]

In order to understand the significance of these geographies for political belonging we first need to establish the centrality of space to conceptions of political identity, community and practice and to distinguish this approach from others which separate space from political processes at a conceptual and temporal level. As Engin Isin argues, '[s]pace is . . . never simply a passive background' to political identities and struggles but 'a fundamental strategic property' through which identities are enacted and represented as self-evident realities.[29] In this way, the naturalisation of the territorial nation-state, as a spatial concept, has been integral to the construction of citizenship as a 'common sense' marker of political privilege. Without the spatial qualities inherent in the state, the concept of citizenship would differ from conventional configurations through which it is linked to the territory of the state as a point of reference (rather than to the city or the globe, for instance). Crucially, the citizen should not be considered a by-product of the state. Such an image temporally

[23] Saskia Sassem, *Cities in a World Economy*, 2nd edn. (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Pine Forge Press, 2000), p. 4.

[24] Heikki Patomäki, *Democratising Globalisation: The Leverage of the Tobin Tax* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001), pp. 79–87.

[25] Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, pp. 133–5; Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 48.

[26] Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops*, pp. 10–66.

[27] Norma Stoltz Chinchilla and Nora Hamilton, 'Doing Business: Central American Enterprises in Los Angeles', in López-Garza and Diaz (eds.), *Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy*, pp. 188–214; Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, p. 135.

[28] Tim Bunnell and Neil M. Coe, 'Re-fragmenting the 'Political': Globalization, Governmentality and Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor', *Political Geography*, 24:7 (2005), pp. 831–49; Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, p. 221; Bae-Gyoon Park, 'Spatially Selective Liberalization and Graduated Sovereignty: Politics of Neo-liberalism and ''Special Economic Zones'' in South Korea', *Political Geography*, 24:7 (2005), p. 868.

[29] Engin F. Isin, *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 49..

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separates one identity from the other, as if the state were a pre-constituted entity from which the citizen *subsequently* emerges. Rather, each identity comes into being in and through the articulation of the other. Extending this logic to alternative geographies, it follows that the emergence of new spatial experiences and discourses will be implicated in both the destabilisation of naturalised territorial identities and the construction of new political subjectivities. Hence an analysis of emerging neoliberal geographies provides an important perspective upon corresponding changes to political belonging.

What is new about neoliberal geographies?

At this point, some important qualifications need to be made in order to argue that the examples I have given do indeed represent novel spatial assemblages with implications for political belonging. Firstly, my emphasis on the 'new' is not to imply that the traditional disciplinary (IR) privileging of the territorial state has ever reflected a universal reality in which the state has been the central or exclusive spatiopolitical identity. While the state-system has expanded through colonial and postcolonial eras there are numerous contexts in which territorial imaginations continue to have a fragmented hold over political communities and identities.[30] However, one does not need to subscribe to the historical accuracy of the Westphalian conceptual framework in order to recognise the ongoing significance of the *story* of Westphalia. For it is precisely in terms of that story that particular frameworks of political belonging continue to be justified and enforced. The novelty of neoliberal geographies lies in their capacity to bring an alternative spatial frame of reference into the everyday experience of significant numbers of citizens and non-citizens alike and to engender that experience in and across a variety of contexts with different historical relationships to the territorial imagination. In this way, new geographies may subtly challenge the 'common sense' spatial assumptions that underwrite the power and authority of Westphalian structures of belonging.

Secondly, I do not intend to identify new spatial phenomena in the sense of being entirely without precedent. Designated colonial 'concessions' administered by private companies on behalf of imperial governments and devoted to development for export (the British South Africa Company's operations in Zambia, for example) are surely forerunners of contemporary SEZs.[31] Similarly, the levels of financial traffic so crucial to the characterisation of global cities are regularly compared with those of a nineteenth century stage of capitalist expansion.[32] The newness of contemporary geographies is at least in part related to the specific historical moment in which they

[30] Bunnell and Coe, 'Re-fragmenting the ''Political'' ', pp. 844–5.

[31] James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, 'Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality', *American Ethnologis*t, 29:4 (2002), p. 992; Aihwa Ong, 'The Chinese Axis: Zoning Technologies and Variegated Sovereignty', *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 4:1 (2004), p. 75.

[32] Paul Bairoch and Richard Kozul-Wright, *Globalization Myths: Some Historical Reflections on Integration, Industrialization, and Growth in the World Economy*. Discussion Paper 113 (Geneva: UNCTAD United Nations Commission on Trade and Development, 1996), pp. 25–6; Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question: The International Economy and the Possibility of Governance* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 2–3.

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emerge. Unlike these important precedents they follow in succession from the predominance of a Keynesian model of politico-economic development.[33] *In this context*, neoliberal geographies will have a particular effect of contrast with a highly territorial and citizen-oriented spatial imagination and are thus worthy of analysis in these terms.

Thirdly, it is not necessary for new conceptions of political belonging emerging in the context of neoliberal geographies to completely overturn state-centric conceptions in order to be significant. Just as reconfigured sovereign practices imply a shift in sovereignty rather than its demise, new geographies may be implicated in the transformation of belonging to the state, rather than the erasure of the state itself as a reference for belonging.

It is beyond the scope of this article to fully investigate the links between each of the emerging geographies I have identified, the neoliberal/territorial compromise, and specific flows of irregular migration. For now, I merely want to suggest that each of these alternative spaces will be implicated in struggles to belong that emerge in and through them. As such, they provide some analytical starting points from which to investigate contemporary frontiers of the political. How further investigation of transnational production circuits and SEZs might proceed is discussed in the concluding section while I consider the case of global cities in more detail below.

Global cities are characterised as much by elite urban zones, gated communities and the financial districts which coordinate transnational flows of capital as by increasingly impoverished and neglected districts of the urban poor, often dense with migrant populations.[34] The concentrated and visible presence of migrants within districts of global cities creates opportunities for the public playing out of new questions of belonging. These questions, moreover, defy a simplistic binary of belonging/not belonging based on formal legal status. Riots in Paris in 2005 involving first, second, third and fourth generation migrants are suggestive of such dynamics. The riots reflected migrants' social, political, economic and spatial alienation via urban planning initiatives which concentrated their presence in outer-suburban public housing complexes, or *banlieues,* from the 1960s onwards.[35] Commentators were swift to identify the fundamental issue at stake in the riots as the denial of substantive citizenship rights to migrant populations.[36] The spatial dimension of belonging/not belonging in this context continued to be emphasised as authorities and media identified 'lawless zones' and the urgent need to control behaviour within them.[37] For some commentators, these efforts to instil a sense of order reflect an increasing anxiety attached to immanent 'foreign' spaces in and through which political practices and identities emerge which disrupt the territorial integrity of sovereign control. Thus 'the backdrop for discussion of the events in France was an

[33] Sparke, 'A Neoliberal Nexus', p. 153.

[34] Jordan and Düvell, *Irregular Migration*, pp. 26–33; Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, pp. 121–3.

[35] Susan Ossman and Susan Terio, 'The French Riots: Questioning Spaces of Surveillance and Sovereignty', *International Migration*, 44:2 (2006), pp. 5–16.

[36] Henri Astier, 'We want to be French!', (Open Democracy, 2005), available at ⟨http://www.opendemocracy.net/articles/ViewPopUpArticle.jsp?id=6&articleId=3051⟩ (accessed 1 December 2005); Patrice de Beer, 'The Message in France's Explosion' (Open Democracy, 2005), available at ⟨http://www.opendemocracy.net/articles/ViewPopUpArticle.jsp?id=6&articleId=3021⟩ (accessed 16 November 2005).

[37] Ossman and Terio, 'The French Riots', p. 11.

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image of a vague, transnational suburban zone that each national government is engaged with containing and controlling on its own territory.'[38]

In a different context, anthropologist Nicholas De Genova investigates the effect of Mexican migration to Chicago.[39] Mexican migrants have provided a source of cheap, compliant and expendable labour in Chicago for much of the twentieth century. A demand for this type of worker has been integrated into the city's economy and landscape. The presence of irregular migrants in contemporary Chicago is thus typical of that in global cities more generally. De Genova argues that the ways in which the United States and Latin America are understood as discreet, bounded and territorialised identities is radically undermined by the presence and practices of Mexican migrants in Chicago. He emphasises the ambiguous identity of Mexicans as both the measure of the outside of a racialised, homogenised and imagined United States and as evidence of the fiction that constitutes the state and its nationals around an ideal of the citizen. Thus Mexican Chicago serves at once to *reproduce and undermine* this imagined community.

De Genova's argument is suggestive of an alternative political imaginary corresponding to an *already active* everyday recognition of the house-cleaners, builders, child-carers, dish-washers and others who make the city run; an imaginary which moreover, acknowledges as fiction the notion that these people are somehow not really there or do not belong in any substantive way. This amounts to an alternative 'common sense' of political belonging and an alternative basis, therefore, for the making of political claims. Other scholars have also reflected upon this type of implicit recognition, and more specifically, upon particular forms of legal recognition that have the effect of 'a *de facto* consent for the formal membership' of irregular migrants.[40] The provision of drivers' licences, voting rights in school boards and in-state tuition of students with irregular migrant status provide cases in point,[41] as do labour laws applicable to irregular migrants in New York (outlined at the outset of this article). Recognition of Mexican Government issued identity cards by an increasing number of regional governments and businesses (including banks) adds an additional transnational dimension to the politics of belonging in the United States with the Mexican Government increasingly interested in facilitating the stable flow of remittances from its irregular nationals abroad via reliable identity documents.[42]

These examples prompt Monica Varsanyi to articulate a 'grounded' ideal of urban citizenship based on '*presence* and *residence*' rather than a 'bounded' concept based on legal status.[43] This is a form of practical recognition that allows residents a limited form of status in certain jurisdictions whilst essentially undermining immigration and

[38] Ibid., p. 14.

[39] Nicholas De Genova, 'Race, Space, and the Reinvention of Latin America in Mexican Chicago', *Latin American Perspectives*, 25:5 (1998), pp. 87–116.

[40] Monica Varsanyi, 'Interrogating ''Urban Citizenship'' *vis-à-vis Undocumented Migration', Citizenship Studies*, 10:2 (2006), p. 240.

[41] Fran Ansley, 'Constructing Citizenship Without a Licence: The Struggle of Undocumented Immigrants in the USA for Livelihoods and Recognition', in Naila Kabeer (ed.), *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions* (New Delhi: Zubaan, An Imprint of Kali for Women, 2005), pp. 208–10; Varsanyi, 'Interrogating ''Urban Citizenship'' ', pp. 240–4.

[42] Monica Varsanyi, 'Rising Tensions Between National and Local Immigration and Citizenship Policy: Matrículas Consulares, Local Membership and Documenting the Undocumented'. Working Paper 140 (San Diego: The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, 2006), p. 10.

[43] Varsanyi, 'Interrogating ''Urban Citizenship'' ', p. 244.

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citizenship policy at a national level. In this Varsanyi echoes a number of scholars rethinking the terms in which political membership and recognition are emerging in rescaled (subnational and supranational) forms, particularly in relation to regular and irregular migrant communities and the cities around the world in which they live.[44] Others have looked to emerging forms of political claims-making in similar terms, noting examples where the illegal practices of urban residents (from residing in general to squatting in particular) forms the basis for political mobilisations and new forms of political subjectivity as legitimate claimants.[45]

Global cities are by no means the only contexts in which diverse forms of recognition and claims-making are emerging. However, particular conditions apparent in global cities suggest that the politics of belonging they host may be of greater general significance.[46] Firstly, the density of migrant numbers and their frequently high spatial concentration within global cities invites distinct opportunities for mobilisation and politicisation of identities. Secondly, the transnational networks in which global cities are engaged (from labour migration to high finance) determine that local authorities will have economic and other agendas specific to the interests of the city which may differ from those of the host state, creating opportunities for policy divergence between different jurisdictions. Thirdly, the economic status of global cities within host-states suggests that as much as cities are constrained by state policies they also enjoy leverage to influence them. Hence, the politics of belonging emerging in global cities *matters* for other regional, national and transnational policy and discursive frameworks.

'We decided not to be invisible anymore': claims to belong in the US politics of irregular migration

I'm for building a wall at the border . . . But I'm concerned because who's going to build it? The last white guy in construction was in the Village People.

Paul Rodriguez, Comedian at The Laugh Factory, *Los Angeles 1 May, 2006*.[47]

The growing body of scholarship on cities and citizenship anticipates and resonates with recent mobilisations in dozens of cities across the US. In March, April and May of 2006 hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants and their supporters demonstrated for legal recognition and against restrictive immigration legislation passed through the House of Representatives in December 2005.[48] The joke in the vignette

44 Patricia Ehrkamp and Helga Leitner, 'Beyond National Citizenship: Turkish Immigrants and the (Re)Construction of Citizenship in Germany', *Urban Geography*, 24:2 (2003); Adriana Kemp and Rebeca Raijman, ' ''Tel Aviv Is Not Foreign to You'': Urban Incorporation Policy on Labor Migrants in Israel', *International Migration Review*, 38:1 (2004); Mark Purcell, 'Citizenship and the Right to the Global City: Reimagining the Capitalist World Order', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27:3 (2003).

45 Arjun Appadurai, 'Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics', *Public Culture*, 14:1 (2002), pp. 35–8; Kemp and Raijman, 'Tel Aviv Is Not Foreign to You', pp. 37–44.

46 Kemp and Raijman, 'Tel Aviv Is Not Foreign to You', pp. 45–6; Purcell, 'Citizenship and the Right to the Global City', p. 573; Varsanyi, 'Rising Tensions', p. 22.

47 Cited in 'Taking the City's Pulse From the Pavement', *LATimes.com* (2 May 2006), available at ⟨http:www.latimes.com/news/local/la-050106-immigpulse_lat,0,03956656,print.htmlstory⟩ (accessed 2 May 2006).

48 *Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005* (H.R. 4437), available from: Library of Congress ⟨http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:HR04437⟩ (accessed 21 July 2006).

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above was part of a stand-up routine delivered on the same day as the largest demonstrations. The joke is funny precisely because it acknowledges the contradiction between border policing initiatives and the extent to which the construction industry, amongst others, is dependent upon irregular migrant workers. That we can laugh at this joke already suggests that this contradiction and the rupture it represents to the integrity of territorial borders are widely recognised.

According to media coverage, the largest mobilisations (400,000–500,000 people) were held in US global cities and traditional migration hubs of Los Angeles and Chicago. Demonstrations in a number of other cities (New York, Washington, Dallas, and Phoenix amongst them) were estimated to attract between 100,000 and 500,000 people. The demonstrations were organised by coalitions of church, community and labour organisations and promoted by Spanish-speaking media. Over sixty such groups were involved in the Washington area alone, giving weight to the significance of the density of migrant populations and organisations in generating momentum for political action. The demonstrations thus obtained credibility as 'grass-roots' phenomena and according to commentators in the *Washington Post*, had a 'bottom-up, organic quality that often surprised organizers and opponents alike'.[49] In this respect, the demonstrations shared the democratic organising culture that was apparent in the 1997 activist campaign for the Unpaid Wages Prohibition Act in New York. According to Gordon's account of this campaign, the sense of ownership that migrants held over all aspects of the process from initiation to strategic planning and direct lobbying was central to both its sustainability and its public credibility.[50] She contends that such broad participation was made possible through rights based discussions which crucially 'changed not only how . . . [non-English speakers, non-citizens and irregular migrants] saw themselves but what they were capable of doing[,]' and ultimately generated a 'belief in themselves as legitimate and effective political actors' regardless of their formal status.[51] This shift in self-identification is also evident in the terms in which irregular migrants argued the case for immigration reform in 2006.

Terms of protest: demanding the right to belong

Drawing upon a number of slogans and comments made by demonstrators and appearing in coverage of the events by The *LA Times*, *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, this section reflects upon 'the political' in relation to irregular migrants' claims:[52]

We decided not to be invisible anymore.
We are not criminals. We are workers and we deserve respect.
Sí, se puede!/Yes, we can!

[49] Dan Balz and Darryl Fears. 'We Decided Not to Be Invisible Anymore', *The Washington Post* (11 April 2006), available at ⟨http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/10/AR2006041001759.html⟩ (accessed 20 April 2006).
[50] Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops*, p. 294.
[51] Ibid., p. 270.
[52] Slogans and comments are taken from these newspapers' on-line coverage of demonstrations between 9–11 April and 1 May 2006. These prominent reports contributed to the discourse and momentum attached to the demonstrations in those cities in which the newspapers are based (and beyond by virtue of on-line coverage), even though coverage of events included demonstrations in cities elsewhere around the country.

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Most notable in this rhetoric is an assertion of legitimacy and an open display of collective confidence. In strategies reminiscent of 'outing' in other identity-based movements, irregular migrants publicly identified themselves as legitimately present despite the potential for seizure and sanction. This strategy changes the terms of reference in which irregular migrants appear. No longer avoiding scrutiny and pleading for inclusion from a position of little leverage, irregular migrants now *demand* recognition of their social and economic contribution and their pre-existing rights as political subjects. Also significant in this respect is the use of Spanish language alongside English (over 80 per cent of irregular migrants in the US are of Mexican or other Latino/a background)[53] and the waving of various homeland flags alongside that of the US. These symbols express a powerful message that recognition as full political subjects is not dependent on cultural assimilation or the abandonment of transnational ties but rather occurs on terms set by subjects themselves.

Who will pick your fields and build your houses?
Who will pick your tomatoes?

Demonstrators identified and manipulated their now significant economic and political leverage, acknowledging the structural dependence of the US economy upon their labour. On 1 May, a nation-wide boycott of business or 'Day Without Immigrants' was called. The boycott was intended to illustrate not only the extent to which US business depends upon irregular migrant labour, with some major companies forced to close for the day in the absence of workers, but also the collective power of migrants as consumers.[54]

Hoy Marchamos, Mañana Votamos
Today we march, tomorrow we vote.

Demonstrators openly declared their intention to mobilise the Latino/a vote in support of progressive reform. This is a strategy with strong precedents. In 1994, Latino/a activism helped to defeat Proposition 187 in California (a proposal to deny education and other social services to children of irregular migrants). The surge in Latino/a voter registration at the time helped the Democrats to regain political control in the state.[55] The voting power of Hispanics in Los Angeles, in particular (accounting for 47 per cent of the city's population and concentrated in central core neighbourhoods and the Eastern San Fernando Valley) has been evident in recent Mayoral elections.[56] Such spatial concentrations have implications for diverging responses to the politics of belonging within different voter jurisdictions. Beyond Los Angeles, Hispanics constitute the only fast-growing group in the national electorate with numbers of voters growing by 23 per cent between 2000 and 2004. A high proportion of young Hispanics ensures a sizeable potential voting surge as they turn 18.[57]

[53] Jeffrey S. Passel, 'Estimates of the Size and Characteristics of the Undocumented Population' (Washington: Pew Hispanic Center, 2005), p. 7.
[54] Maria Newman. 'Immigrants Stage Protests Across US', *New York Times*, 1 May 2006.
[55] Teresa Watanabe and Ilector Becerra, '500,000 Pack Streets to Protest Immigration Bills', *LA Times*, 26 March 2006.
[56] Raphael J. Sonenshein and Mark H. Drayse, 'Urban Electoral Coalitions in an Age of Immigration: Time and Place in the 2001 and 2005 Los Angeles Mayoral Primaries', *Political Geography*, 25:5 (2006), pp. 571–5.
[57] Roberto Suro and Gabriel Escobar, '2006 National Survey of Latinos: The Immigration Debate' (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006), p. 6.

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Our heroes understand that they had to fight for freedom and democracy, and we are here doing the same.

Irregular migrants have self-identified their cause as a democratic struggle for rights and recognition. Commentators and participants have also drawn comparisons with the American civil rights movement.[58] For Gordon, however, the claims of irregular migrants are more aptly compared with women's suffrage or the struggles of African Americans before the abolition of slavery.[59] For in these cases, the terms of debate were not about formal and substantive citizenship, but the right to have rights at all. It is this primary case of establishing political subjecthood that distinguishes the claims of irregular migrants as contemporary sites of the political.

We are here today, because America represents hope. I know you have to control this country but you have to respect people as well. People just want to be free.

Alongside its more radical implications, the rhetoric employed also attempts to argue the case for progressive reform in terms that appeal to ideals and images associated with US nationalism. In the comment above, for instance, the notion of America as a land of opportunity is invoked. Thus, in keeping with de Genova's discussion of Mexicans in Chicago, there is a sense in which the claims of irregular migrants both challenge and reinscribe existing political identities. On one hand, their assertion of entitlement as rights bearing subjects *despite* irregular status contests the exclusivity of citizenship as a measure of political inclusion. Yet their call for legalisation simultaneously reinforces the authority of citizenship as the foremost measure of belonging.

Radical challenge or business as usual? The significance of the protests

Unlikely allies have emerged in support of progressive immigration reform linking conservative business lobbies with human rights and migrant advocacy networks. While the former are keen to free up the flow of cheap and willing labour that has long underwritten industries such as agriculture in the United States and is increasingly crucial to construction and service sectors,[60] the latter hope to reduce the avenues available to business for labour exploitation and to promote the rights of existing migrant workers. The issue has sharply divided conservative politicians. Traditionally tied to highly restrictionist policies, a number of Republican Congress members have sided with business lobbies, acknowledging the infeasibility of mass deportations, the demand for migrant labour and the need for guestworker programs.[61] In mid May 2006 President Bush released a comprehensive immigration reform proposal.[62] The proposal included a substantial reinvestment in border control but also advocated guestworker programmes in areas of labour shortage as

[58] See, for example, N. C. Aizenman, 'From Latino's Rally, Hopes for a Movement', *The Washington Post*, 9 April 2006; Balz and Fears. 'We Decided Not to Be Invisible Anymore'.

[59] Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops*, p. 274.

[60] Philip Martin, 'Mexican Migration to the United States: The Effect of NAFTA', in Douglas S. Massey and J. Edward Taylor (eds.), *International Migration: Prospects and Policies in a Global Market* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 120–9.

[61] Jonathan Weisman and Jim VandeHei, 'Debate on How to Reshape Law Has Divided Republicans', *The Washington Post* 21 May 2006.

[62] The White House, 'Comprehensive Immigration Reform' (2006), available at: ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/inforcus/immiration/⟩ (accessed 23 May 2006).

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well as qualified routes to citizenship for many of the eleven million irregular migrants currently residing in the United States, dependent on time in-country, payment of substantial fees and taxes and English language acquisition. In late May the Senate approved a more moderate version of Bush's proposal.[63] However, the legislation that finally passed through both Houses of Congress was a purely restrictionist package that abandoned pathways to citizenship altogether and failed to address demand for irregular migrant labour.[64] Notably, Congress has only provided for a small down-payment on the total cost of the 700 miles of border fencing authorised by the legislation, prompting critics to note not only the physical impracticalities of sealing the border with Mexico, but also the lack of genuine investment in any attempt to do so.[65]

This superficial commitment to border policing is a well-established feature of the US political landscape. The build-up of migration enforcement budgets, staffing and technology to police the border over the 1990s, for example, was spectacularly unsuccessful in preventing the flow of irregular migrants from Mexico. Yet it achieved the important sovereign function of projecting an image of control in a decade that was characterised by the uncertain forces of globalisation, the introduction of NAFTA and myriad anxieties about a range of threatening external intrusions.[66] In the post-September 11th environment, the nexus between security and migration has been further entrenched with the newly formed border agency, US Customs and Border Protection, now residing with the Department of Homeland Security and border policing rhetoric strongly connected to anti-terrorism measures.[67] In this context, a commitment to border policing provides explicit recognition of the continued significance of sovereign territorial borders and the priority (and possibility) of protecting the community of citizens they contain. Border policing thus forms part of those ongoing practices through which sovereignty is produced.[68] At the same time, the overall inefficacy of border policing initiatives allows the demand and supply of irregular migrant labour to continue unabated and sustains migrant workers in ongoing insecure status. For as long as irregular migrants lack *formal* recognition they remain constitutive outsiders whose immanent but 'other' identity helps to establish the meaning of the state's 'inside' and 'self'. The unofficial maintenance of irregularity thus becomes a performance in which the sovereign re-enacts its territorial credentials. Territorial sovereignty exercised in these ways provides a reassuring contrast to the far freer flows of goods, services, finance

[63] *Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006* (S.2611). Available from: Library of Congress, ⟨http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:SN02611⟩ (accessed 26 July 2006).

[64] *Secure Fence Act of 2006* (H.R. 6061). Available from: Library of Congress, ⟨http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:h.r.06061⟩ (accessed 9 October 2006).

[65] John Pomfret. 'Fence Meets Wall of Skepticism', *Washington Post*, 10 October 2006.

[66] Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the US–Mexico Divide* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. x, 9–12; Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the 'Illegal Alien' and the Making of the US–Mexico Boundary* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 12; Mark Purcell and Joseph Nevins, 'Pushing the Boundary: State Restructuring, State Theory, and the Case of US–Mexico Border Enforcement in the 1990s', *Political Geography*, 24:2 (2005), pp. 228–9.

[67] See for example, George W. Bush, 'Remarks by the President at District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Operations Center, Washington, DC November 12' (The White House: 2002), available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/11/20021112-1.html⟩ (accessed 26 June 2006). See also Sylvia Moreno, 'GOP Hearing Alleges Risks Of Terrorism Along Border', *Washington Post*, 8 July 2006.

[68] R. B. J. Walker, 'Polis, Cosmopolis, Politics', *Alternatives*, 28 (2003), p. 279.

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and business traffic across borders which can compromise the 'common sense' line between inside and out. Efforts to expedite flows of business class professionals and investors are thus entirely connected to the arbitrarily restricted movements of what some scholars identify as growing 'kinetic underclasses'[69] or 'abject cosmopolitans'.[70]

Yet even those reform proposals that do provide for pathways to citizenship do not represent a fundamental break from previous approaches to immigration policy. Rather they indicate a renegotiation of the neoliberal/territorial compromise. There are two points to make in this respect. Firstly, President Bush justified his proposal via references to the proud tradition of the melting pot and a pioneering work ethic.[71] This rhetoric serves both to appease nationalist critics and to establish the suitability of industrious migrant workers for a role in the flexible US economy. Insofar as irregular migrants are recognised as valuable *workers*, rather than as persons with fundamental rights, the reforms represent the slow and select admission of approved outsiders in line with neoliberal prerogatives, reinforcing the association of entrepreneurialism and flexibility with measures of social and political value.

Secondly, in terms of presenting an alternative account of political belonging, the radical potential of irregular migrants' mobilisations lies in their demand for recognition as integral, visible and rights-bearing members of society *despite* their lack of legal status. When legalisation is the outcome of those mobilisations, much of that radical potential is side-stepped. This lost potential is implicitly recognised in the comments of one movement organiser: 'I suspect a lot of people will start busying themselves with getting on the path to legal permanent residence, and that could take the political momentum out of . . . [the movement].'[72] Ironically, irregular migrants remain more subversive when they are technically 'illegal' but obviously integrated into the politico-economic landscape. Hence the pathways to citizenship contained in reform proposals may have reinforced rather than subverted existing conceptual frameworks of belonging. Clearly, it would be too much to expect irregular migrants to defer legalisation for the purpose of radical politics and there is every reason to suspect that legalisation remains the logical goal of collective mobilisations. The point remains, however, that a shift in 'the political' requires a contestation of the measures of belonging themselves, rather than the provision of belonging, *as conventionally understood,* to 'worthy' outsiders.

A superficial commitment to border policing along with increasing demand for irregular migrant labour[73] suggests that irregular migration will remain an indefinite feature of US society. More generally, migration scholars point to a range of trends that are likely to exacerbate both push and pull factors for this type of migration worldwide: polarising distributions of wealth within and between states, violent conflicts and political and economic upheavals in origin states, opportunities for employment in host states, extensive transnational professional and/or cultural

[69] Sparke, 'A Neoliberal Nexus', p. 169.
[70] Peter Nyers, 'Abject Cosmopolitanism: The Politics of Protection in the Anti-deportation Movement', *Third World Quarterly*, 24:6 (2003), p. 1071.
[71] See, for example, George W. Bush, 'Speech at Yuma Sector Border Patrol Headquarters, Yuma, Arizona. May 18' (The White House: 2006), available at: ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/05/20060518-18.html⟩ (accessed 23 May 2006).
[72] Cited in Aizenman, 'From Latino's Rally, Hopes for a Movement'.
[73] Of some 2.5 million wage earners working in the agricultural sector in the United States, for example, 50 per cent are estimated to be irregular migrants; see Martin, 'Bordering on Control', p. 27–8.

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networks in irregular labour recruitment, and well-established profitable industries in illicit cross-border transport.[74] As eligibility criteria for authorised migration are increasingly restricted in the face of compelling motivations for migration, we are likely to see more creative and professionalised examples of border transgressions. Irregular migrants continue to demonstrate incessant adaptability to physical and technological barriers erected against them and a stark preparedness to risk life and limb on their journeys. Indeed the risks involved in illicit border crossings compound the motivations to remain as long-term residents (rather than seasonal workers, for example) in host-states.

Whether these trends translate into a radical disruption to received assumptions about belonging and not belonging will depend upon the mobilisations to which irregular migrants direct their energies and the forms of recognition that local, regional, national and transnational authorities pursue. Regional variations in irregular populations, migrant lobbies and labour market demands may well determine new and diverse politics of belonging in different jurisdictions within nation-states. These politics may well take shape in ways that we cannot predict, on scales that will vary in ambition, with results that will flow into unforseen strategic possibilities. At the very least, we are likely to see more claims to belong. A survey conducted in the US amongst Latinos in the wake of the 2006 demonstrations revealed that over two-thirds considered the events to be the beginning of a new social movement that would continue for a long time.[75] Elsewhere there are other examples of irregular migrant activism which suggest that dynamics of belonging are at once transnational and localised. In Europe, for instance, the movement of the *Sans-Papiers* emerged in the 1990s. From its beginnings in Paris, this coalition of irregular labour migrants and asylum seekers struggling for recognition on the basis of colonial, economic and cultural relationships with France, has since formed networks across Europe and beyond.[76] The strategies of the *Sans-Papiers* have much in common with those apparent in the US protests, yet they also reflect the more specific cultural, political and historical contexts in which the *Sans-Papiers* have emerged. The task for theorists is to think creatively about the subtle and diverse transformations to which such contestations of belonging might lead.

Conclusion: Dimensions of political belonging

This article has argued that irregular migrants are positioned at the frontiers of the political in the context of neoliberal globalisation. The political claims of irregular migrants challenge those sovereign practices through which they are constructed as apolitical and illegitimate intruders. Those sovereign practices, manifested in border

[74] See, for example, Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration* (New York and London: The Guildford Press, 2003); Peter Kwong, 'Impact of Chinese Human Smuggling on the American Labor Market', in David Kyle and Rey Koslowski (eds.), *Global Human Smuggling: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Douglas S. Massey et al., *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[75] Suro and Escobar, '2006 National Survey of Latinos', p. 8.

[76] Anne McNevin, 'Political Belonging in a Neoliberal Era: The Struggle of the Sans-Papiers', *Citizenship Studies*, 10:2 (2006), pp. 142–6.

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policing, are integral to the ongoing reinscription of the state/citizen/territory constellation. In the contemporary context, reinscription occurs against a sense of crisis and urgency as states negotiate the tensions between neoliberal and territorial rationalities. Mobilising that tension to their advantage, irregular migrants in the US have rearticulated themselves as purposive political actors and contributing workers. As such they are implicated in the generation of alternative conceptions of political belonging.

It is important to acknowledge both the particular vulnerability and the radical potential that inheres in the specificity of irregular status. While forms of '*de facto*' recognition may have transformative potential they are also vulnerable to the whims of sovereign power. Indeed, following the work of Giorgio Agamben, considerable scholarly attention now focuses upon the incarceration of irregular migrants as a central practice in contemporary enactments of sovereignty.[77] Yet it is precisely that vulnerability to legitimised acts of arrest, detention and deportation that makes the notion of irregular migrants as rights-bearing claimants so intrinsically challenging to prevailing frameworks of political belonging. This radical contest of the political is the flip-side of extreme vulnerability.

It is also important to acknowledge that irregular migrants are sometimes positioned advantageously. For many, the earnings from their labour will support a family or community in their place of origin to an extent that may not have been possible through legal means. For some, their transnational experience will present a range of flow-on economic opportunities.[78] Too sharp an emphasis on irregular migrants as ' ''victims'' of capitalist development'[79] obscures the agency enabled in such scenarios. It also creates an oversimplified binary between citizens and non-citizens as types of neoliberal workers and political subjects. This, in turn, obscures what in many cases is the relative disadvantage of formal citizens whether through the labour market or through cultural and racial hierarchies (the case of citizen-migrants in France is noteworthy here). The point to be emphasised is that markers of political inclusion associated with the citizen/state/territory constellation are now cross-cut in a variety of ways with alternative patterns of privilege and marginalisation. A person may be advantaged in one binary relation yet disadvantaged in another (citizenship versus entrepreneurship, for example).

This article has also emphasised the significance of space for political belonging. It has focused upon the example of global cities in order to spatially contextualise the larger demonstrations by irregular migrants in the US. As global cities provide the setting for diverse confrontations between elite and disenfranchised groups, irregular migrants are becoming agents in new types of democratic struggles. Other geographies in which irregular migrants are implicated also challenge traditional

77 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Bülent Diken, 'From Refugee Camps to Gated Communities: Biopolitics and the End of the City', *Citizenship Studies*, 8:1 (2004), pp. 83–106; Peter Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency* (New York and Milton Park: Routledge, 2006); Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 'The Irregular Migrant as Homo Sacer', pp. 33–63; William Walters, 'Deportation, Expulsion, and the International Police of Aliens', *Citizenship Studies*, 6:3 (2002), pp. 265–92.

78 Katherine Gibson et al., 'Beyond Heroes and Victims: Filipina Contract Migrants, Economic Activism and Class Transformations', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 3:3 (2001), pp. 365–86; López-Garza, 'A Study of the Informal Economy', pp. 151–7.

79 Gibson et al., 'Beyond Heroes and Victims', p. 369.

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assumptions about the links between citizen, state and territory. These are spaces within the global political economy: the complex supply chains that problematise the territory in which a product or service is made and which allow the distinction between the formal and informal economies to be blurred. These are spaces where territorial integrity is compromised in line with neoliberal prerogatives in off-shore financial markets and special economic zones. What sort of analytical and theoretical projects take us further in establishing the links between these neoliberal geographies and contemporary dynamics of the political? And how might this intellectual endeavour connect to the critical task of producing knowledge aimed at social transformation?

Some insight into these questions can be gleaned from a recent research project conducted by Women Working Worldwide (WWW), a UK based organisation which networks transnationally with trade unions and women workers' organisations. In 2002 WWW, in conjunction with ten partner organisations in nine countries attempted to map the transnational production circuits of the garment industry in which the women they assisted were working.[80] The research was prompted when the organisations discovered that the links between immediate employers and the companies where contracts originated were not obvious or easily traceable. Neither workers constructing the garments nor companies placing orders for construction were able to identify the full extent of the production process nor the range of actors engaged in that production. It soon became obvious that those workers at the furthest and most vulnerable extreme of the production process, working informally in SEZs where unions were effectively banned, or in isolated home-based environments, were those least able to benefit from consumer-driven campaigns for their protection which were targeted at companies with which they had no meaningful connection.[81] Implicitly therefore, those campaigns were limited by a spatial imagination that could not conceive of the particular ways in which the marginalisation of workers was occurring and which could not, therefore, contribute to effective strategies for resistance.

The resulting project identified a dense web of subcontracted employment arrangements linking multinational enterprises behind designer brand-names and mass-market garments alike to home-based workers, factory workers, managers, distributors and retailers across the globe. Complex vertical and horizontal subcontracting chains obscured a transnational informal economy operating in tandem with its legitimate counterpart. These chains blurred the distinction between employer and employee and often incorporated family and community networks within which familiar patterns of gender and ethnic discrimination were evident. The isolation and pre-industrial conditions of workers in both highly developed and lesser developed countries belied the common perception of a vertically integrated, highly systematised and technologically sophisticated global economy, and belied the distinction between an affluent and advanced north and an impoverished and backward south.[82]

Many of the trends identified in this research are highly relevant to understanding how irregular migrants are implicated in the drive towards flexibility within a

[80] Women Working Worldwide, *Core Labour Standards and the Rights of Women Workers in International Supply Chains: Garment Industry Subcontracting in Nine Countries* (Manchester, 2004).
[81] Angela Hale, 'Introduction: Why Research International Subcontracting Chains?' *Core Labour Standards and the Rights of Women Workers*, WWW. pp. 5–6.
[82] Ibid., pp. 24–6.

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transnational labour market. WWW's project is innovative, however, in its specific intention to *map* the relationships involved in these processes. The project responds to the spatial intricacies of politico-economic relations as they manifest in very local and intimate (home) settings, across transnational and regional networks, within cities, between cities and their hinterlands, through familial and community connections, across formal and informal economies and via identities of gender, class, caste, and ethnicity. The research was developed to inform the activist strategies of organisations supporting migrant workers. It was not intended as an exercise in political theory and does not address explicitly many of the challenges to spatial assumptions that it raises. From the perspective of spatial themes discussed in this article, however, the WWW research contains an implicit call to abandon an exclusively territorial approach to thinking through the spaces and practices of globalisation.

A great deal of conceptual work remains to be done to flesh out the significance, nuances and opportunities emergent in these spatial dynamics. The task for IR and political theory is to link such empirical research to new conceptual frameworks for understanding inclusion and exclusion in transnational contexts. A number of questions help to focus this task both in relation to the example of the WWW research and in more general terms: how does a territorialised spatial imagination hinder a clear view of the networks and relations across transnational space in which garment workers and irregular migrants are implicated? How are particular spatial imaginations linked to hierarchical axes such as gender and race? What are the similarities, differences and networks between the circuits and zones which the WWW research identifies and other geographies such as global cities? To what extent can we generalise about neoliberal geographies? What impact upon geographies do particular state practices or cultural specificities have? What are the implications of these spatially oriented questions for regimes of belonging? Can an alternative spatial imagination not only illuminate the processes and practices through which exclusion occurs but also enable us to see alternative forms of agency emerging in these contexts. How might this nexus between work, space, irregular status and political claims be subverting conventional ideas and structures of belonging?

In light of these questions, political belonging should not be approached from the perspective of simplistic either/or choices between territorialised and deterritorialised space, the decline or resurgence of the state, or the primacy or hollowing of citizenship. Nor should it be envisaged in universal terms that do not allow for regional variations in forms of recognition. Rather, political belonging is most usefully conceptualised in multidimensional terms. This frame of reference enables a far more nuanced reading of reconfigured sovereign practices which draw upon both territorial and neoliberal rationalities. It acknowledges the transformative potential contained in the struggles of irregular migrants without discounting the powerful reassertion of territorial identities manifested in border policing. Such an approach allows us to see the ontological shifts emerging in political communities as irregular migrants become increasingly visible within them, whilst remaining alert to the systematic ways in which their exclusion from those communities is sustained. Additionally it prevents us from drawing too stark a division between irregular migrants and citizens and to recognise how the fault lines of belonging no longer cohere exclusively with this territorialised dichotomy.

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