Seeing like a border city: Refugee politics at the borders of city and nation-state[1]

Julie E.E. Young

Abstract

Local advocacy practices in Detroit–Windsor in response to the refugee "crisis" that unfolded around the Canada–US border in early 1987 revealed a different way of working with the border in the city. They were "seeing like a border city": working as though Detroit–Windsor were one place, even as they made use of the ways in which it remained two distinct places with different political and legal contexts. Advocates mobilized resources and expertise on both sides of the border, drawing on the sense of community offered by the city, and made use of the distinct policy frameworks, securing legal status for refugees who had been consigned to legal limbo through the policies of both states. This approach troubled the state's logic of border control even as it refortified the boundaries of exclusion underlying it. Their work highlights the possibilities and limitations of advocacy work around an international boundary line.

Keywords

Border cities, Canada–US border, Detroit–Windsor, refugee policy, advocacy

The handsome young Latin drew a line on the ground with his foot. 'This is where we are,' he said. 'There's a place in the tunnel you know, where there's the North American [American] flag and the Canadian flag. We are in between, standing on that line.'
(Gutschi 1987b, *Windsor Star*, 20 March 1987)

Introduction

The speaker is José, a young man from Guatemala who was caught up in a series of policy changes around the Canada-US border in early 1987. Not accepted for asylum in the United States because of that government's role in the conflict in his country, further endangered by the introduction of the *Immigration Reform and Control Act* (IRCA) in the US in November 1986, José arrived at the Detroit-Windsor border with unfortunate timing. He appeared one day after the Canadian government had implemented a new suite of policies on 20 February 1987, and was directed back to the US to await his refugee hearing in Canada.

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The line José describes lies in the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel that runs under the Detroit River and demarcates the boundary between the US and Canada in the transborder urban area of Detroit and Windsor. This subterranean connection is one of the many noteworthy features of this border-city relationship. José's situation of feeling "in between" emerged because of changes to Canadian refugee policy that were introduced in response to high numbers of refugee claimants arriving via the US from Central America and making claims at Canadian ports of entry; these arrivals increased dramatically after the implementation of IRCA. Beginning on 20 February 1987, individuals from Guatemala required a visa to enter Canada. José attempted to cross the border on 21 February to make a refugee claim. Lacking the required visa, he was directed back to Detroit where he was "handcuffed to a chair and questioned" by US Border Patrol officers (Gutschi, 1987b). They later released him with a 30-day visa allowing him to remain in the US until his scheduled refugee hearing in Canada.

José's story is one example of how refuge was negotiated around the Canada-US border in the late 1980s. This was a historical moment when larger-than-usual numbers of people arrived in a short period of time at the border to make claims for refugee status. US intervention in El Salvador and Guatemala, offering military and political support to regimes in power, meant the US government was hesitant to accept refugees fleeing regimes it was backing. Although they had economic and military interests in these conflicts, Canadian officials initially took a different stance regarding refugees from these countries. By the latter half of the decade, however, they implemented a series of administrative and policy changes in relation to refugees arriving at the Canada-US border that effectively endorsed the US position. In this hemispheric context, the US

and Canada reasserted their borders, dramatically altering the landscape of refuge in this border city. In response, local community members organized across the boundary line in solidarity with the Central American refugees who had been stranded by these shifting policies. Through their advocacy efforts, they intervened in the nation-statist logic of border control. They worked through the proximity and connections afforded by the border-city location to assert the claims to refuge of Central Americans living in Detroit-Windsor. I explore the dynamic role played by the border and the city in the politics of this place, where local advocates made use of the border city as not only the location of their work but also how they approached it. I argue that local practices of refugee advocacy revealed a different way of working with the border in their city, which I call "seeing like a border city."

Informed by the work of Isin (2007) and Magnusson (2010), I look to the border city not as the place where the nation-state's exclusions are undone but rather as a specific kind of place and one where nation-statist and scalar thinking can be challenged. In the case under examination here, residents of Detroit and Windsor responded to what government officials and the media had constructed as a "crisis" at the border by making the border that cut through their city work differently. Their approach, which I call "seeing like a border city," offers an important epistemological lens that reveals the many ways in which borders, cities, solidarity, and community actually work – or how they could. The collaborative work of these border-city advocates cuts through Canada's humanitarian imaginary and offers lessons to the new sanctuary movement and other contemporary efforts to support people seeking a safe haven from dispossession and persecution.

What is noteworthy about the Detroit-Windsor-based advocacy efforts that unfolded around the border in early 1987 is the way in which individuals on both sides of the border mobilized the resources that were available to them because of the border city location. Local advocates assisted refugees to achieve safety in the city; through this work, they also re-conceptualized the border for their own purposes. They made use of the dual nature of the border, as a line that both separates and joins the two sides. The international boundary line did not limit how they conceived of and carried out their work; rather, they strategically mobilized the border city to achieve their goals. Advocates took advantage of the resources and expertise available to them on both sides of the line, drawing on the sense of community offered by the city, and made use of the distinct policy frameworks on either side of the boundary, securing legal status for refugees who had been consigned to legal limbo through the policies of both countries. Their efforts materially shifted the working out of the border. In the complicated politics of refuge and border control in Detroit-Windsor in the late 1980s, the border city is foregrounded as both the site of analysis and the analytic itself. As Canadian officials sought to reinforce the boundary line that divided Detroit from Windsor through a set of policy changes, advocates based in the border city were re-conceptualizing that line. They worked as though Detroit-Windsor were one place, even as they made use of the ways in which it remained two distinct places with different political and legal contexts. This approach troubled the nation-statist logic of border control even as it in many ways refortified the boundaries of exclusion and security underlying it. Their work highlights both the possibilities and the limitations of advocacy work around an international boundary line.

Situating the research

While the situation of José who found himself in limbo brings the international boundary line into focus, his narration of this experience speaks to the specificity of this place. He describes his feeling of being "in between" using the grounded, local example of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel that connects the two sides of the border. This tunnel connects not only the US to Canada but also Detroit to Windsor. A border city is not just on the border – it is also a pair of cities. As such, the city is an important site and means of analysis of border control practices (Darling, 2013; Ridgley, 2008). The border city is a mechanism for understanding what is at stake in the politics of mobility and a tool for examining what it means to seek and provide refuge. This is because a border city is a place where the spaces and relationships of the city materially intersect with the spaces and relationships of the nation-statist border. The boundary line is essential to official refuge – both for the nation-state and its territorially-located refugee determination system and for individuals seeking protection – and a border city holds the territories of two countries, separated, within its boundaries. At the same time, that line knits the territories together and facilitates a sense of community and solidarity within the border city as a whole. A border city is a strategic location geographically and politically because it holds within it the possibility of making use of the boundary line in either – but better – both incarnations. This has implications for how we understand the border and the city more broadly.

The city is a space of and for politics in two key ways: first, as a site in which the state is engaged in its material forms rather than as a virtual idea (Isin, 2007). It is through the everyday spaces and relations of the city that the state's borders materialize and are both reproduced and contested. The second way in which the city is marked as a political space is because this is where the political, economic, and administrative functions of the nation-state are concentrated.

This concentration of power in cities means they are crucial to how the nation-state functions as well as to how and where it can be contested (Lefebvre, 1996; Wood, 2006). Several scholars argue the city is the most effective space in and through which to hold the national government to account, as the political opportunities available in cities allow for the assertion and enactment of different kinds of politics (Isin, 2007; Lefebvre, 1996; Wood, 2006). The importance of studying various politics and policies through the lens of the city has been most clearly articulated by Magnusson (2010), who encourages researchers to "see like a city." This approach entails understanding that politics work differently at the urban scale and that "cities are not subordinate to states" (2010: page 43). In this sense, he argues that "urbanism" is both a "form of political order" (page 45) and a "way of life" (page 53). Furthermore, urbanism can be an "analytic" – a way of approaching and understanding the world (page 53). In explaining how to work through an urbanist analytic, Magnusson asserts that scholars "have to position ourselves as inhabitants, not governors" (page 53). It is in this way that he distinguishes his approach from that outlined by Scott (1988) as "seeing like a state." Individual identities and social relations are more complex than a nation-statist understanding of either allows: to "see like a city" requires us to think about where and how politics happens. It is as important to look at less formalized interactions between city inhabitants as it is to examine formal engagements with and claims of the national state. As such, "the urban becomes a political ontology, 'a particular way of being political'" (Roy, 2016: page 34).

I focus on the Detroit-Windsor border city as a place where inhabitants – refugees, advocates, policymakers, journalists – make claims of the city and struggle over the meaning of the border. The precarious situations of Central American refugees in this border city in the 1980s meant

they had to engage in a different kind of politics: one that worked at the margins of official political spaces. They did not have access to formal citizenship or to the formal spaces of politics where they could ask representatives to lobby the nation-state on their behalf. Rather local advocates worked from their position as inhabitants of a border city to assist individual refugees as they sought a secure a place to remain. Simultaneously, their efforts re-worked the boundary line that separated the two countries within their city. Focusing on the advocacy work that mobilized around this border crossing reveals how they employed the city as a space of politics. Detroit-Windsor-based advocates struggled over the terms and content of refuge – in both the (national) state and the (border) city. As they negotiated border control policies with and on behalf of people seeking refuge in Canada, advocates were simultaneously working through national policies and legal frameworks and both critiquing and perpetuating the categories and practices that structure refuge and border control. Advocacy work is grounded in a place that affords the perspective of both "governor" and "inhabitant" – opening the possibility of "seeing" both "like a state" and "like a city" (Scott, 1988; Magnusson, 2010). The border-city-location brought these two ways of seeing into relief.

The geographic location of a border city underscores the territorial negotiations involved in seeking and claiming refuge. In the 1980s, Detroit-Windsor was drawn into a very specific set of such negotiations due to its location on the Canada-US border and in relation to the wider US-based Sanctuary Movement. It may seem obvious but in a border city, local actors negotiate the border and the city simultaneously. It is not only that the state's borders materialize in the city (Isin, 2007), but that in a border city the other nation-state's legal framework is also a factor in a much more immediate and available way than it is in other cities – a factor in terms of both

marginalization and possibility. What is compelling about the border city as a place is that it opens the space to analyze these internal borders of the city and how the state's power materializes in these localized places *at the same time as* talking about the distinctions of the nation-state level of refugee and border politics. While US policies are no doubt relevant in a city far from the international boundary (as are Canada's within the US), their power and impact are immediate in a border city. Local collaboration went beyond simply coordinating the border appointment and arranging to meet people as they left the US for Canada. Advocates in both parts of the city worked as though the boundary line was not only an obstacle to be overcome but also a resource and a point of connection. They deployed the borderline as an asset, simultaneously: "seeing like a nation-state" and mobilizing the distinct legal frameworks to secure legal status for Central American refugees; and, "seeing like a city" and drawing on resources and expertise throughout the border city. What I term "seeing like a border city" thus makes use of what is distinctive about both the nation-state and the city[2].

The Detroit-Windsor border city has a long history of cross-border relationships and is a key node in the North American economy. Trade and employment have linked the two cities since ferry service across the Detroit River began in the late 1820s and later the Ambassador Bridge (1929) and the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel (1930), which allowed many Windsor residents to work in Detroit (Smith, 1994). Indeed, Karibo (2015) argues the presence of the border established the economic significance of Detroit-Windsor from the early 1900s onwards and facilitated the development of illicit economies as much as it fed the growth of the automotive and tourist

[2] Rumford (2014) calls for border studies scholars to "dispense with an exclusive nation-state frame when studying the border" (page 45) and "aspire to… 'see like a border' (page 50). This approach acknowledges that "each border (potentially) offers a multiplicity of perspectives" (page 53).

industries. In an act that symbolized the ongoing importance of this border crossing, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and President George W Bush met at the bridge almost a year to the day after the events of 11 September 2001 to announce progress on efforts aimed at securing the common border while facilitating trade. As such, Detroit-Windsor is a compelling site in which to examine how the border and the city were negotiated in the context of the 1980s Central American "refugee crisis."

Border city of refuge: Seeking sanctuary in Detroit-Windsor

Responding to the US role in the long-running conflicts in El Salvador and Guatemala, a network of advocates and religious organizations established the Sanctuary Movement in the early 1980s. Their work was motivated by the reluctance of US officials to recognize refugees from these conflicts, given their support for the regimes from which people were fleeing. In 1981, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees expressed concern to the US State Department "about the near-blanket denials of asylum to Salvadorans and specifically advising that, in its opinion, persons fleeing El Salvador were prima facie bona fide refugees" (Golden and McConnell, 1986: page 71). Despite this assessment, Reagan administration officials dismissed the movements of people from both countries as economic opportunism. In contrast, Sanctuary members assisted Central Americans to enter and remain in US territory, arguing they were upholding a law the government refused to uphold: the 1980 US *Refugee Act* which wrote the 1967 UN *Refugee Protocol* into US law. Rather than conceiving of their work as breaking the law through acts of civil disobedience, most people engaged with the movement considered their work to be acts of "civil initiative": "rooted in the principles of the Nuremberg Trials, according to which citizens are legally obligated to disobey inhumane governments" (Cunningham, 1995: page 40). Whether

conceived of as civil initiative or civil disobedience, a key achievement of the movement was to raise questions about US asylum practices and present alternative visions of refuge. By 1987, more than 440 cities, congregations, and campuses had declared themselves sanctuaries (Cunningham, 1995).

Better known examples of sanctuary work focus on the Mexico-US border or on specific cities and regions of the US (see Coutin, 1993; Crittenden, 1988; Cunningham, 1995; Ridgley, 2008). While several accounts mention a Canadian role, most offer limited but intriguing references to Canadian involvement. For example, Cunningham (1995) reveals, in a footnote, that refugees who were considered at "high-risk" in the US after being detained on immigration violations were "bonded mainly out of south Texas and became wards of Quaker groups working with the Canadian government" (page 216, note 6). Nolin (2006) reports that an Ottawa-based group called the North Star Railroad helped with paperwork and "finding sponsors for 'illegal refugees' channelled through the Underground Railroad to the Canadian border by sanctuary workers" (page 76). Lippert (2005) argues the cooperation of Canadian groups was crucial to the success of efforts to assist Central Americans to reach the Canada-US border and enter Canada's refugee determination process.

Archival research reveals that a number of organizations were active in Detroit-Windsor, with some focused more on refugee assistance and sanctuary and others on Central American solidarity work. The Detroit/Windsor Refugee Coalition (DWRC) emerged in early 1983, when a group of Detroit residents met to discuss how they could help survivors of the situation in El Salvador who were arriving in the city. The Coalition was formed when Windsor residents "with

the same concerns" started to meet with the Detroit group; "the assistance of the Canadians was especially valuable, because for a time, asylum in Canada was more readily available" (Freedom House, 2008). They established an office at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Detroit, which also served as temporary housing for refugees. The DWRC soon began working with the Windsor Central American Refugee Sponsorship Network (WCARSN). The relationship between WCARSN and DWRC emerged when Rose Voyvodic, a Windsor-based lawyer, and Mosabi Hamed, a lawyer in Detroit, "learned Salvadorans seeking refugee status were being sent back to the US by Canadian immigration authorities in Windsor" (Powless, 1984). Together they intervened on behalf of two Salvadoran women to allow them into Windsor to await their final immigration hearing. The two organizations then "joined forces...to help Salvadorans apply for refugee status in Canada" (ibid), with support from churches and community members in both cities. In Detroit, St. Peter's Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan were early and ongoing supporters, along with the Detroit Sanctuary Coalition (DSC) and Michigan Interfaith Committee on Human Rights (MICAH). In Windsor, several local parishes including Roseland United Church and St. Alphonsus Catholic Church as well as the Third World Resource Centre (TWRC) supported the Coalition.

"Seeing like a nation-state"

Some of the justification for sanctuary work came from distinct US and Canadian interpretations of refugee law, whereby Canada had much higher acceptance rates for refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala. For instance, in 1985, the US government was "granting asylum to 3 percent of Salvadoran applicants and fewer than 1 percent of Guatemalan applicants" (Cunningham, 1995: page 205), while the Canadian rates were 60 and 70 percent respectively (García, 2006).

Moreover, Dirks (1995) reports that from the early 1980s, Canadian consulates in Dallas and Los Angeles "[w]ith the knowledge of American authorities…issued entry visas to Central Americans threatened with deportation" (page 74). At this time, both El Salvador and Guatemala were on the moratorium list of countries to which Canada would not deport people. This initially distinctive Canadian approach was regularly used by US-based advocates to justify their rejection of the US stance and propose an alternative response in the form of sanctuary. For example, the preamble to Detroit's sanctuary city declaration read: "The UNHCR has recognized that persons fleeing these countries are bona fide refugees, as have many nations of the world, including our good neighbor Canada[3]." One of their key narratives was that sanctuary in the US was a necessary corrective, given what they viewed as Canada's more appropriate policy vis-à-vis Central American refugees.

These distinctive policy contexts are crucial to the Detroit-Windsor case as they demonstrate why the border was so productive for the advocacy work that took place there. Nevertheless, my focus is on the moment when this terrain shifted and Canadian policies made it harder to arrive at the border and make a refugee claim. This period undermined the humanitarian imaginary of Canada by revealing the "dark side" of the country's projected benevolence towards refugees and continuing its long history of exclusionary migration policies (Bannerji 2000; Wright 2013). In this case, a shift in US law precipitated the Canadian policy changes: the entry into force of the *Immigration Reform and Control Act* on 6 November 1986 motivated thousands of Central Americans who were living undocumented in the US to seek refuge across the border in Canada. The law offered amnesty to those who had been in the US unauthorized prior to 1982, but

[3] OSCA Collection, Box 3, Folder 5: Detroit Sanctuary Coalition, 1986-87.

threatened to deport those who had entered after that year; most Central Americans did not qualify for amnesty. In the weeks immediately following IRCA's implementation, there was an increase in people seeking refuge at the Canada-US border. Crittenden (1988) writes: "more than 6,000 'bus people,' most of them Salvadorans, flocked to the Canadian border in the first weeks following the passage of the immigration bill" (page 348). Lemco (1991) counted 1,884 Salvadorans and 467 Guatemalans entering Canada from 1 January to 10 February 1987, while the *Windsor Star* estimated that 1,000 Salvadorans and 150 Guatemalans had arrived between January 1 and 21 alone that year (Cairns, 1987b).

In response to these much higher than usual numbers of claims, on 20 February 1987, Canadian officials announced a series of administrative measures that reconfigured the geography of how refuge could take place at the Canada-US border. By requiring refugee claimants to have a visa authorizing entry to Canada, this policy pushed the practice of border control out from the international boundary line to Canadian consulates in the US, Mexico, and Costa Rica. If an individual arrived at the border without a visa, Canada would now direct them back to the US to await their refugee hearing. Officials also cancelled the B-1 list, in place since May 1986, whereby nationals of listed countries were granted automatic entry on special minister's visas that gave them access to the refugee determination system. At the same time, El Salvador and Guatemala were removed from the moratorium list. Taken together, these measures made it more difficult for people to get to Canada to claim refuge and, if they were able to enter the country and access the refugee determination system, these changes raised the stakes of the outcome. The Canadian policy shifts stranded many people, like José, "in between, standing on [the boundary] line" (Gutschi, 1987b).

These policy changes also complicated the Sanctuary Movement narrative that Canada was an example for the US to emulate, and dramatically reshaped the landscape of refuge around the Canada-US border. The narrative that emerged, driven by both Canadian officials and the media, was of a "crisis" at the border that necessitated policy changes, with a focus on numbers and the equation of "illegal aliens" in the US with "would-be refugees" arriving at the border. For example, the *Windsor Star* noted the "would-be refugees" who had arrived over the weekend of the Canadian policy shift "are all illegal aliens in the US with no legal status" (Priest, 1987). People who had previously been recognized as "legitimate" refugees were linked to discourses of bogus claimants abusing Canada's inland refugee determination system and to the US crackdown on "illegals." Enacting these policy shifts in this context made it easier for Canadian officials to carry out similar policy moves in subsequent years. Nevertheless, the distinct legal frameworks and interpretations of refugee law remained paramount to the Canadian "end" of the Sanctuary Movement, specifically for advocates in Detroit-Windsor. The intersections between the divergent Canadian and US interpretations of refugee law and the new policy landscape constructed by Canada in early 1987 form the crux of how the seeing like a border city approach emerged. This approach became visible through the advocacy work carried out in Windsor and Detroit at this time, where local residents were simultaneously seeing like governors and inhabitants (Magnusson 2010).

As both countries made it more difficult for Central Americans to find security in either country, groups in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Windsor, and Niagara Falls responded (Brazao, 1987; Lippert, 2005; Nolin, 2006; Rosinbum, 2015). Detroit-Windsor did not

receive the highest numbers of people arriving to make refugee claims during this period; in fact, the number of arrivals there was relatively low compared to other border crossings like Buffalo (NY)-Fort Erie (ON) and Plattsburgh (NY)-Lacolle (QC). These latter crossings saw numbers in the thousands, whereas Detroit-Windsor's figures were in the hundreds: on 25 July 1987, the *Windsor Star* reported that more than 400 refugees, almost all from El Salvador and Guatemala, had crossed the Detroit-Windsor border since November 1986, with more "arriving every day at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, where they stay until their hearings are scheduled" (Gutschi, 1987a). The Detroit-Windsor crossing was significant less due to the relative numbers of people who used the route and more because of the spatial politics of the advocacy work that took place there. Groups on both sides of the border were ready to respond to the shifting landscape of asylum. Just as the Sanctuary Movement made use of Canada's distinctive interpretation of refugee policy to denounce what they saw as a faulty interpretation by US officials and justify the declaration of spaces of sanctuary from the US government, so too did Detroit-Windsor-based advocates deploy these distinct policy frameworks in assisting refugees to find safety within the border city. Despite appeals to the legacy – both locally and more broadly – of the Underground Railroad that had spirited escaped slaves to safety in the northern US and across the border, the Canadian end of sanctuary in fact worked mostly through the legal frameworks of both countries to secure safety and status for Central American refugees. Advocates focused on facilitating the "legal" movement of people across the boundary line. Indeed, discussions from the El Salvador Study Group at First Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan, which was connected to the DWRC, reveal that using "legal methods of helping refugees to safety in Canada" was crucial for this group:

> The idea of our church openly defying the government by offering illegal sanctuary, as a few churches around the country were doing, was emphatically rejected by our conservatives. But even they seemed ready [to] consider actions within the law, such as sending money to the border in Arizona for legal aid for refugees[4].

Working within the legal framework had two strategic effects: it widened the circle of local residents willing to support sanctuary work and made it difficult for government officials to dismiss their work as unlawful.

Although advocates promoted sanctuary in Detroit, there were only a few cases; the declaration of several area churches as sanctuaries and of Detroit as a City of Sanctuary in September 1987 likely played a larger role in public education and solidarity work. The more common route, which focused on helping people to apply for refugee status in Canada, assisted greater numbers of individuals to find safety. It is difficult to assess how many people were supported through this process due to limited records available but from its founding in 1983 through September 1988, the DWRC had assisted more than 350 individuals[5]. With the Canadian policy changes of February 1987, advocates refocused their work on moving refugees from Detroit to Windsor. The main mechanism for doing so was through Canada's refugee determination system, so advocates ensured that people who had been directed back to Detroit had shelter while they awaited they refugee hearings. They also aided refugees after they had been permitted to enter Canada and were in Windsor awaiting the outcome of their claims, including legal support at refugee hearings and in interactions with government departments as well as settlement support

[4] Hathaway papers, Box 3, Folder 11: Deliverance, The Overground Railroad.
[5] OSCA Collection, Box 14, Folder 30: Voice of the Voiceless, 1985-87, Insert in MICAH. (1988). A voice of the voiceless, September.

(Cairns, 1987a; Gutschi, 1986; Priest, 1987). Beyond the obvious use of the distinct legal systems (i.e. making a refugee claim in Canada due to higher acceptance rates), advocates encouraged refugees to make use of various US legal provisions. This included encouraging individuals who were directed back to Detroit to either make a claim for asylum or apply for a 30-day visa to remain in the US. Both options provided refugees with temporary status in the US while they awaited their hearings in Canada; otherwise, they would be at risk of detention and deportation. Individuals with outstanding deportation orders, to whom the previous options would not be available, were advised to make the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) aware of their "voluntary departure" from the US as they crossed into Canada for their hearing (Gutschi, 1987b; Mayne, 1987; Priest, 1987).

This use of the "voluntary departure" provision was especially innovative. Throughout the 1980s, US immigration officials had deployed this category quite strategically and covertly to remove Central Americans from the country. Between 1980 and 1984 the US had deported over 26,000 Salvadorans, which is likely a vast underestimate. INS officials often did not inform people of their right to apply for asylum while waiting in detention centres and had them sign a voluntary departure declaration prior to their deportation (Golden and McConnell, 1986; Loescher and Scanlan, 1986; Ridgley, 2008). They often signed the "voluntary" departure form without being aware of what they were signing or the implications. After the Canadian policy changes came into effect in 1987, Detroit-Windsor-based advocates made use of the voluntary departure provision in a similarly strategic way but with a distinctive impact. They used the provision to declare not that an individual was accepting the US regime's assessment of their "refugeeness" (i.e. that it was suspect) and returning to their country of origin, but rather that

they were leaving the US because they needed protection and the Canadian system would hear their claim. Both examples used the same legal mechanism but towards very different ends. In the first example, US officials used the voluntary departure provision to deport people without having to either process their asylum application or formally count them as deported, since they had signed a document indicating they were leaving the US "voluntarily." In the second example, refugees and advocates made use of the same provision but not to its intended ends. Advocates were authorizing entry despite the positions of both countries that these were "illegal aliens" or "economic migrants." They strategically mobilized the legal framework, putting the border to work to assist people living precariously in the border city. They were seeing as both governors and inhabitants (Magnusson 2010), making use of the categorizations constructed through US laws to arrive at a result unintended by policymakers of either country: the possibility of refuge in Canada.

"Seeing like a city"

The Detroit/Windsor Refugee Coalition (DWRC) is the most obvious example of how local advocates were "seeing like a city," in that the organization's existence speaks to a different conceptualization of the border in this place. Its name symbolizes the border-spanning relationship that defined the group's efforts but what is noteworthy is how it operated: even before the 1986-87 policy changes, the DWRC worked throughout the border city. For example, an undated document entitled "Detroit/Windsor Refugee Coalition" that is directed at a Windsor-based audience reports the Coalition has been "extremely active in reaching out through the Spanish-speaking community in Michigan to assist those Salvadorans and Guatamalans [sic]

illegally in the US and wishing to escape to Canada to do so"[6]. According to the report, DWRC chairperson Sister Kit Concannon visited the Dearborn jail every week to locate detained Salvadorans and Guatemalans. It also notes that the INS Chief Legal Officer and District Supervisor indicated he would "consider a refugee's involvement with the Coalition (and plans to enter Canada) as a favourable factor in setting the amount of bond required to release him or her from custody." In a key detail, the report notes that Sister Kit had indicated the DWRC could "do outreach work on our [the Windsor] side of the border, in attempting to find sponsors" for refugees. It concludes, "The Coalition has a very active staff and membership – we will continue to work together in helping refugees get settled in Canada."

Beyond the existence of this unique organization whose work spanned the border in multiple ways, archival records reveal several other intriguing details that demonstrate how the border-city lens applied by local advocates overcomes nation-statist and scalar thinking. Detroit-Windsor-based advocates made use of the resources and connections that were available to them not just in their (national) cities but in the border city as a whole. Individuals and groups on both sides of the boundary line worked collaboratively and considered that resources and opportunities available on one side of the line were available to them on the other side. Several *Windsor Star* articles published in the week following the Canadian policy changes highlight the local impact of these measures and the localized response. On 23 February, Priest (1987) reported that the DWRC had mobilized to assist people like José who were caught by the sudden policy change. The article reported that Jozef Timmers of the DWRC had helped individuals "find friends or citizen volunteers in Detroit who can accommodate them for 30 days" (ibid). He

[6] From contextual details included, the document most likely dates from late 1986; it does not reference the Canadian policy changes that were introduced in February 1987 (DWRC files, CF6-7).

expected to “be overloaded with people seeking help” following the Canadian policy changes, and planned to call an emergency meeting that weekend with church and volunteer organizations. The article also cites two Windsor residents who planned to work with organizations in Detroit to assist the refugees who had been refused entry. José Sotto, executive director of the South Essex Community Council, indicated he would focus on arranging accommodations, while Linda Edwards, “a Windsor volunteer who became involved with the refugee problem this weekend, said she will try to arrange something where she can put the rejected would-be refugees up in Detroit” (ibid). These responses speak to an important conceptualization of place by inhabitants of the border city and of the role that the international boundary line played within it. The nature of the response in Detroit-Windsor rests in collaboration across the border, even by people who are new to the issues at hand: Edwards, who had begun working on “the refugee problem this weekend,” appeared not to see the border line as an impediment to her ability to help refugees who were stuck in Detroit. Her proposed actions reveal a different way of seeing the border in this place: it is as though Detroit and Windsor are one city. Viewing the events of this time from the perspective of local inhabitants disrupts the nation-statist logic of migration and border policies in that they were not bound by “scalar thinking” (Isin, 2007) that prioritizes national frameworks over local applications and interpretations of those policies.

The records of Detroit-Windsor organizations active at the time reveal numerous ways in which advocates worked as though they were in the same city. The DWRC had mailing addresses and contact numbers in each city and worked through relationships between people on both sides of

the border[7]. Members of groups from Detroit and Windsor regularly sought out each other's advice and insight, sharing expertise about the US and Canadian legal systems and processes and taking part in regular consultations through conferences, workshops, demonstrations, meetings, and phone calls. Speakers from MICAH and DWRC regularly participated in events in Windsor, while members of Windsor's TWRC and WCARSN (and later DWRC) crossed the border to take part in demonstrations and meetings with their Detroit-based colleagues. For example, minutes from the 16 January 1985 DWRC meeting indicate that Sister Kit would moderate the"Immigration, Refugees and the Church" conference at the University of Windsor on 16 February 1985[8]. The event included a panel of refugees that had been assisted by the DWRC. In another example, Larry Cohen of MICAH gave one of the keynote addresses at the 1982 High School Human Rights Forum on "Central America in Crisis"[9] organized by the TWRC in Windsor. Groups in Detroit included Windsor-based schools in their lists of "local" high schools and visited these schools to present on the situations in Central America. For example, MICAH's March 1983 annual report includes four Windsor-based high schools (Assumption, Herman, Kennedy, and Centennial) in its list of high schools where MICAH representatives had given presentations[10]. This is a striking conceptualization of the "local" student body, unlimited by nation-state boundaries.

Another important aspect of advocacy work was that organizations in Windsor and Detroit included media in both cities on their distribution lists. For example, press releases from the

[7] TWRC archives, Box 1, Folder 1: Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, General Application Form.
[8] DWRC files, CF6-2, CF6-5.
[9] TWRC archives, Box 1, Folder 7: TWRC April 1987, Application for funding from the Windsor and Essex County Boards of Education.
[10] OSCA Collection, Box 3, Folder 37: MICAH; reports, corres., 1980-86.

Detroit-based Central America Solidarity Committee (CASC) were sent to the *Windsor Star* and the CBET radio news desk in Windsor[11]. An article in the February-March 1986 edition of CASC's Central America News argues that US media coverage of the situation in Central America is "often grossly misleading"[12]. It suggests instead: "One source available to Detroit area residents is the news service of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Canadian news shows are generally far more independent of the US administration than American programs. … You can hear CBC radio on the AM band at 1550 (CBE-Windsor) and on FM 89.9." The geography of the border city facilitated access to this news coverage but, more than this, it is an important conceptualization of the local media landscape by Detroit-based organizations. Moreover, the CBC is the state-funded broadcaster, with a mandate to tell Canadian stories to Canadians; the border-city audience disrupts the nation-state-situatedness of this official project. Once again, inhabitants of Detroit-Windsor who were active in assisting Central American refugees revealed an alternative way of understanding and working with the border in their city, one that disrupted the nation-statist logic that scaffolds international boundary lines.

Seeing like a border city

In Detroit-Windsor, the city is cut through by an international boundary line and both the political possibility and constraint of this reality were mobilized in local advocacy efforts throughout the 1980s. Individuals and groups made use of the distinct policy approaches of the US and Canada and helped many refugees to secure legal status. Approaching their work as inhabitants of a border city, advocates drew upon resources and expertise on both sides of the line and reproduced their city as a space of refuge for Central Americans. While mindful of the

[11] OSCA Collection, Box 3, Folder 20: Press clippings, media releases; 1986-1991.
[12] OSCA Collection, Box 14, Folder 37: Detroit CASC, Central America News, 1985, 1987-88.

challenges inherent in negotiating the border – in this case, recognizing the danger facing people without status in the US and the shifting grounds of Canadian refugee policies – they re-conceptualized the border and emphasized it as a site for collaboration. The border-city location facilitated their work, allowing local advocates and residents to simultaneously "see like a (nation-)state" (Scott, 1988) and "see like city" (Magnusson, 2010), and anticipated Rumford's (2014) call for a "multiperspectival border studies" (page 42).

"Seeing like a city" and "seeing like a nation-state" are pithy encapsulations of different ways of seeing, but the neatness of each phrase risks implying this is an either/or proposition. The tidy symmetry of the phrasing seems to set up a binary opposition in which seeing like a nation-state must be bad while seeing like a city must be good. In my deployment of these concepts, I am not juxtaposing a malevolent state with a beneficent city. The city does not redeem the state or undo its exclusions; rather, it is where the state's exclusions and inclusions are worked out (Isin, 2007). Moreover, inhabitants can and do draw boundaries just as violently and definitively as do governors. In the Detroit-Windsor example, the engagement of advocates with the border and the city simultaneously reveals that the border is "woven into the fabric of everyday life" (Elder, 2009). Seeing like a border city emphasizes the multiple scales at which the politics of refuge are negotiated and does not downplay the exclusions that result across them. It offers a lens for cutting through the nation-statist and scalar thinking that characterizes much border thinking, but it does not represent a place from which the exclusionary logic of border control has been banished.

The “seeing like a border city” concept is useful because it emphasizes the border and the city simultaneously: as part of the strategic possibilities enabled by a border city, emphasizing difference and connection at the same time. The existence of the international boundary line in Detroit-Windsor is part of what enabled the politics and resistance of the wider Sanctuary Movement as well as of its Canadian “end.” The border is crucial to how they did their work and how they justified and framed it. In the case examined here, advocates strategically mobilized the border: they made use of the distinct policy frameworks that exist within the space of a border city – so much so, that to a certain extent, their work reinforces the border and its distinctions because it relies on the distinguishing mechanism of the border itself. At the same time, local actors challenged the underlying logic of how nation-states make use of the border to categorize people who seek to cross it, by putting the border to work in ways unintended by the US and Canadian governments. This did not change national laws and policies but it did question their logic by making the border work for people seeking refuge rather than for state officials. The efforts of local advocates resulted in their authorization of the entry, through the legal framework, of people who had been constructed and dismissed as illegal aliens and bogus abusers overwhelming the system. There is thus a lot to say about how the border works in a border city and how it is put to work by different actors at different scales simultaneously; hence, the importance of “the border” in the border city.

There is also much to say about “the city” in the border city – or the city within the border. Many local actors did not see the international boundary line as an impediment: it did not constrain how they conceived of the space of the city, the domain of their work, or what was possible. The ways in which they worked revealed that, for them, the border city was not two separate cities

cut through by a boundary line but rather a singular space that is interrupted – one city interwoven with the border. Detroit-Windsor-based advocates mobilized the density, solidarity, and publicity of the city to facilitate their politics. Part of the example they offer to advocates in other locations is the collaborative effort to make use of resources and expertise, regardless of where in the city they were located. Here it was the way in which the city facilitated networking that was important, drawing on established communities like religious congregations and legal practitioners and fostering more informal and personal connections. Through regular communication and collaboration, local refugee advocates determined when to mobilize what they had in common and when to make use of the distinctions that existed within the border city to achieve their aims. When the Canadian government introduced policy changes in February 1987 that effectively closed the border to refugees, residents in both Detroit and Windsor worked together to find places for those refugees to live in Detroit and support them during their stay. On the other hand, advocates agreed there was a better chance of securing legal status in the Canadian part of the city and focused resources on understanding and accessing the refugee determination system there. They identified and made strategic use of what was shared and what differed within the border city to help people find security.

While this approach is likely not representative of the broader population of Windsor-Detroit, it is reflective of a different way of understanding and working with the border in this city. It contradicts nation-statist narratives of what the international boundary line ought to mean to people who confront it: i.e. not a demarcation of sovereign territories but rather a point of connection. This approach did not dramatically shift how the border worked in this place going forward: the border remains an obstacle and an entrenched and often violent mechanism of

exclusion. Indeed, the focus of local advocates on working within the legal framework did not on the surface challenge notions of legality and legitimacy scaffolding refugee policy or practice. However, in that historical moment, it made a difference in the lives of several hundred refugees because it changed the materiality of the border: where it worked, how it worked, for whom it worked, and who claimed authority over these decisions. Advocates facilitated the entry of Central American refugees into Canada, despite the positions of both governments that these were "illegal aliens" and "bogus refugees." In provisional but consequential ways, advocates made the border work in a different way to assist people seeking refuge in the city. Their efforts subtly shifted the terrain of refuge in this place in this moment by both rejecting the nation-state's authority to decide and exclude and, to an extent, ignoring the international boundary line that cuts through their city. In doing so, they reframed the border and revealed that how and for whom it functions are unsettled questions. Just as not everyone experiences the same border in the same way – recall Balibar's (2002) "polysemic" border (page 79) – there are always multiple ways of seeing and mobilizing a particular border.

Conclusions: Who can see like a border city?

This episode from the history of the Windsor-Detroit border resonates into the present. The "new" Sanctuary Movement is active throughout the US and hundreds of mayors, religious communities, and universities are re-committing themselves as sanctuary cities, congregations, and campuses; the relationship between national and local jurisdictions and authorities promises to be tested through these commitments to offering sanctuary to those the national state defines as deportable. As the global spaces for asylum shrink, it is important to draw attention to the histories of border work. The advocates whose efforts I examine here draw our attention to the

utility of working as though this were one place, rather than two cities separated by an international boundary line. Their border-spanning work, while influenced by geography, was not inevitable in this place. The emergence of collaborative work within the border city in the 1980s required a certain level of radical thinking. It does not take the whole city to rethink the border: recall that the DWRC emerged from an initial collaboration between one lawyer in Detroit and another in Windsor and grew from there. What is important about their example is that local advocates were working with the border and the city simultaneously. While the confluence of socio-economic-political-historical factors helped this collaborative advocacy to emerge, in fact the same conditions of possibility exist in all cities. In addition to being the actual place where the nation-state's boundaries are worked out (Isin, 2007), several features of the city lend themselves to re-workings of these borders even as they enable the state's authority to materialize. The complexity of the city produces space for resistance, through its density, diversity, and public spaces and networks that allow for both anonymity and solidarity. The collection of people in the city fosters both differentiation and a sense of community. Moreover, it offers a degree of anonymity that allows for the creation of "shadow places" where people can stay out of view of the state (Leerkes et al., 2007). At the same time, the city offers publicity in the sense of public spaces where people can gather and organize. Finally, the border is in the city – in all cities: this is where both fortifications and contestations of exclusive conceptualizations of membership and solidarity are worked out. All cities are embedded in the border and its practices, which means that inhabitants of all cities are engaged in practicing the border. To put it more boldly, all cities are border cities – and all inhabitants have the potential to "see like a border city."

What does it mean to "see like a border city"? It means understanding the border in the city as not only an obstacle to be overcome, but also as a point of connection, a resource, and a strategic asset that can be mobilized to various ends. Perhaps the best way to conceptualize the border is as a relationship. Approaching the border as a relationship captures the tangled and complicated ways in which a specific border works and considers both the positive and negative connotations of the term. A relationship is never settled and is not always uplifting or fulfilling – a relationship can be damaging, violent, and traumatic. It is worth noting that nation-states are increasingly recasting borders through discourses of partnership and harmonization, and that there is a long history of depicting the Canada-US border as a relationship[13]. Indeed, José's poignant commentary in the epigraph belies this harmonious narrative, unearthing the exclusions and violence underlying how even the "world's longest undefended border" works. The border is produced and reproduced through unequal power relations, uneven access to mobility, and the discretionary authorities required by both. As such, we must interrogate the authority claimed by Detroit-Windsor-based advocates as they sought to assist Central Americans caught in legal limbo at the boundary line. Although they challenged nation-statist logics of the border as they authorized the entry of several hundred individuals who had been stranded by US and Canadian policy changes, local advocates left the exclusionary infrastructure of the border intact. Even as their refusal to interpret the border as an impediment to their work revealed an alternate way of conceiving of the relationship between border and city, this ability to mobilize resources throughout the city presumes a subject position with a secure socio-economic and legal status. What is the political subjectivity of seeing like a border city? In other words, who can see like a

[13] As in John F. Kennedy's 17 May 1967 address to Canada's Parliament, in which he echoed the words of the marriage ceremony, "Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies. Those whom nature hath so joined together, let no man put asunder."

border city? The people whose work I described in these terms were not refugees themselves, and benefited from class positions, racialized identities, and immigration status that made possible acts and actions that would not necessarily be available to those seeking refuge. My focus on advocates means that I cannot comment on how individuals like José saw the border city. However, his depiction of feeling caught "in between, standing on that line" (Gutschi, 1987b) is striking. His words call to mind Khosravi's (2010) reflections on how it felt to be an "illegal immigrant" in Europe: "I was indistinguishable from the border; I *was* the border" (page 98; emphasis in original).

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