Abstract: Drawing from fieldwork conducted in Arica, a northern Chilean city, this paper addresses the process of ‘emplacement from the margins’ as a performative force in which materialities, affective dimensions, and claims are tied together. It analyses how migrants become settlers in unauthorised camps on the fringes of Arica. I argue that in this process a ‘politics of presence’ emerges, intimately imbricated in the material constitution of these settlements. I explore the potential of such politics to break the ‘sensible’ order and open the possibility for ignored actors to become present as legitimate urban interlocutors. I discuss aspects of what Kathleen Stewart describes as ‘ordinary things that matter’ because they shimmer precariously, such as the dynamic contingency derived from the building procedures commonly used in unauthorised camps.

Keywords
Unauthorised Camps; Emplacement; Migrant-Settlers; Politics of Presence; Urban Margins.
Here we have a man whose job it is to gather the day’s refuse in the capital. Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot hecatalogues and collects. (Walter Benjamin. The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire 2006, 108).

On the outskirts of Arica,1 a Chilean border city, a desolate landscape of unauthorised camps is emerging. This does not fit the image of the ‘Eternal Sunshine City’ promoted by the city’s authorities. Despite their dream of turning Arica into a tourist destination, the city is a transit point. Tourists pass through on their way to Peru and Bolivia, as do migrants from non-bordering Latin American countries hoping for opportunities to migrate further south into Chile. However, the situation is different for Peruvian and Bolivian migrants from border areas, for whom this city and its adjacent rural zones have been central places in their lives for decades. For local employers, these migrants, many of them indigenous, represent a source of cheap and docile labour, especially those who work and live ‘illegally’ in informal camps on the fringes of Arica.

The performance of the Chilean neoliberal state, today one of the most unequal economies among the OECD nations (see OECD 2015), the unprecedented increase of migrant populations from neighbouring countries living in northern Chile (Liberona 2015), and the socioeconomic deprivation and marginalisation of Andean populations (Berg 2015; Goldstein 2012; Ødegaard 2008) frame this inquiry. The border conditions of Arica make it a city where intense frictions (Tsing 2004) between logics of the free market, police control, and humanitarian intervention take place. This border status, instead of reducing human life to the ‘secret tie uniting power and bare life’ (Agamben 1998, 6), presents unexpected possibilities for the emergence of collective forms of life. Such dynamics take shape especially in the Arica camps. In these places, as we will see in the following pages, the struggle of its inhabitants for housing, political presence, and legitimacy, engenders exceptional conditions, in which points of view and modes of subjectivation have a concrete political rootedness.

Migrants living in the Arica camps have become especially exposed to state control as well as to labour exploitation, the latter accentuated by the informality of the labour market conditions. It is in these border contexts that this paper discusses the process of ‘emplacement from the margins’ as a performative force in which materialities, affective dimensions, and claims are tied together. It analyses how migrants become settlers in unauthorised camps. Through this process of migrants becoming settlers, I explore how housing and place are co-

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1 Arica became Chilean territory after the signing of the Treaty of Lima in 1929, which ended the conflict triggered by the War of the Pacific (1879-1883). After the Chilean army’s 1883 defeat of the Peru-Bolivian Confederation, the coastal cities Arica and Tacna were administered by the Chilean state. Chile was to ensure the realisation of a plebiscite to settle national ownership of those cities. However, the plebiscite never took place and, in 1929 via the Treaty of Lima, Arica became a possession of Chile, while Tacna was recovered by Peru (Skuban 2008). Currently, Arica is a free port for Bolivia and a commercial centre for Peru and northern Chile where various industries – chiefly fishmeal processing – have developed. The irrigated Azapa and Río Lluta valleys yield farm produce for Arica and olives and citrus fruit for export. Arica is a transportation hub with a seaport, international airport, railways to Tacna (Peru) and La Paz (Bolivia), and a location on the Pan-American Highway.
produced through people’s struggles to create a space for themselves in the city. I argue that in such processes a ‘politics of presence’ emerges, intimately imbricated in the material constitution of these settlements (Aedo 2017). I explore the potential of such politics to break the order of the ‘sensible’\(^2\) and open the possibility that ignored actors become present as legitimate urban interlocutors.

Based on fieldwork carried out on the northern border of Chile, mainly between 2012 and 2015, I explore these issues in light of the forms of life that emerge simultaneously at the state borders and the urban margins. The substance of this paper comes fundamentally from moments of everyday life shared with camp residents in their homes and workplaces. I also accompanied them in their interactions with NGOs and state agents. I completed this fieldwork process through in-depth interviews and material culture analysis in the Arica camps. Based on these elements, I discuss aspects of what Kathleen Stewart (2012, 519) describes as ‘ordinary things that matter’ because they shimmer precariously, such as the dynamic contingency derived from the building procedures commonly used in unauthorised settlements. The paper also explores how matter and place become entangled in ways that point to a hidden geography of informality, in which spaces of the city can be opened to the emergence of political forms. Zones of abjection, many of them on urban margins, are not without resistance (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007, xxx). As we shall see, camp residents do not lack the potential to claim rights, nor the will to transform their material and political conditions of existence.

**Shaping Margins, Enabling Agency**

Arica, from its foundation by the Spanish Colony in 1541, was born as a port city for the export of raw materials. During the centuries of colonial domination and much of the 19th century, the city imposed restrictions on the indigenous population, who were allowed to work but not live within the urban boundaries. Early in its existence, Arica formed a segregated urban space, establishing limits between the city proper, planned and inhabited by a population that perceived itself as essentially white, and the ‘other’ populations, mostly of indigenous origin (Araya et al. 2010).

Borderlands and urban margins are usually regarded as critical zones, at the limits of state security and the edges of national imaginaries (Hutchison and Haynes 2012; Jones 2012; Kalir and Sur 2012). The northern border of Chile has historically been a place of transboundary and transnational human mobility, from the traditional circulation of the Andean population between the highlands, the valleys and the coast to the movement of Latin American migrants in search of better economic opportunities (Abercrombie 1998; Murra 2002; Stefoni 2011). Today, in these territories, the migrant population, mainly from Bolivia, Peru and Colombia, has significantly increased their number (Tapia 2015). In fact, the far north of Chile has become, according to the Department of Foreigners and Migration, the area of the country with the highest proportion of foreign residents in proportion to the

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\(^2\) This is, in Jacques Rancière’s terms, the system of divisions and boundaries that define, among other things, what is visible and audible (see Gabriel Rockhill’s Introduction to Rancière in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 2006).
This situation has begun to transform the social and cultural geography of a country that, during the Pinochet regime, was represented by its authorities as a homogenous and unitary people (Cuevas 2014). Such a particular representation, housed in what Foucault (2009) understands by the ‘order of discourse’, has found echo since the War of the Pacific during the second half of the nineteenth century. In this conflict, nationalist discourses intertwined with racial and moral conceptions about the superiority of the Chilean people were invoked in the local press. At the end of this war, and through the signing of peace treaties with Bolivia in 1904 and Peru in 1929, Chile increased its territory by one third, taking possession of the Peruvian provinces of Arica and Tarapacá, and the Bolivian province of Antofagasta. In this process, Bolivia was left landlocked and Chile secured its control over the most productive nitrate mines in the world (González 2008).

In the 1950s, Arica became a duty-free port, the government established an industrialisation plan, and created the ‘Junta de Adelanto’, a state institution for decentralised development. Such measures, together with the mining and agricultural crisis, triggered the internal migration of people from the south of the country in search of better life prospects. This resulted in an explosive growth of the Arican urban population (Oyarzún 1962). Echoing this phenomenon, the *Enciclopedia de Arica* optimistically stated: ‘A great city was born and needed houses and urbanization’ (1972, 89). Certainly, the situation was less prosaic for migrants who arrived in a city lacking infrastructure. They had to inhabit the urban periphery, on the banks of ditches, and in those places where the land was of no interest to anyone. It was thus that urban settlements, called *callampas* (mushrooms), began to form (Garcés 2002). It was also from these places that the *tomas* (land seizures), as a new way of inhabiting the urban space, began to emerge in Arica as well as in other cities of the country (Sepúlveda Swatson 1998).

Unlike the *callampas* settlements, characterised by transience and uncertainty, residents of *tomas* treat their settlements as permanent and lasting (Mancilla 2017). The attitude of the residents in relation to their settlements’ durability plays a relevant role. Woronieck-Krzyzanowska shows in this special issue that the inhabitants of a protracted camp in Ramallah develop mechanisms of negotiation with the state, and their own ways of maintaining social order. The camps born in Chile from land seizures do not exclude former inhabitants of *callampas* settlements, in fact many *tomas* have been partially formed by this population. However, what differentiates the *tomas* from other kinds of informal settlements is that they are the result of organized actions (Guzmán *et al.* 2009). Its settlers recognise themselves as inhabiting a collective land seizure that, in turn, gives them identity and capacity to make shared claims.

**Matter and Emplacement**

In light of migrant experiences on the margins of Arica, in this section, I approach the act of emplacement as a performative process where affects, matter, wills, temporalities, economic conditions, and political forces become entangled in the urban landscape. Any form of...
emplacement in a city requires some form of displacement beforehand, which is particularly visible in migrant contexts. Once dis-'placed’, Grundy-Warr (2002) remarks, you are automatically ‘lost’ in ‘sovereign space’, whether inside an international border (as an internally dis-'placed’ person) or outside (as an irregular migrant). Displaced people represent, in the eyes of the state, an actual or potential threat to the political body, the social fabric, and to urban management (see Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004). From the perspective of state security institutions in northern Chile, Andean migrants (from bordering countries) epitomise the condition of displacement. They are mostly non-contract workers who feed the region’s informal economy. Excluded from the social rights that national workers are entitled to, they are exposed to labour exploitation.

According to the police assigned to the Arica periphery, unauthorised migrant camps give shape to an urban landscape that results from Andean migrants’ natural predisposition and ability to adapt to ‘niches of misery and informality’. How police officers treat these migrants at their meeting places and abandon them when their employers violate their rights, reinforces the ontological and political boundaries that separate them from urban life. Although irregular migrants disrupt the social order through their displaced status, the city’s inhabitants tolerate them at the price of their silence and invisibility. According to police perceptions, these migrants have become specialists in surviving on the margins of society. Sergeant Palma explains:

Actually, these are families that are dedicated to living in squatter settlements. For example, you can find whole families living in these zones: grandparents, uncles, aunts, and mothers with five, six children from different fathers. There are children who don’t even go to school. [...] In this zone, most are violent, very violent; what prevails is the law of the jungle, the law of the strongest. I remember five years ago there were real battles between families. They fought and attacked each other with iron bars, sticks, guns, and revolvers and didn’t consider consequences. [...] There, in the slum, live many people who are broken, are lawbreakers, and have pending cases. They often walk around as if they are hiding something; most people only leave the camp at night, some of them work nearby.

As displaced people, migrants from Arica’s camps lack a permanent and legitimate place in the city. But displacement is not necessarily a restrictive condition; it can also favour the emergence of new possibilities, living spaces, and ways of dwelling at the margins (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007). Indeed, on the outskirts of Arica, ‘illegal’ migrant camps are the concrete result of how displacement can become a social and material force of emplacement. In line with this argument, research in transnational studies draws on the notion of emplacement to highlight the way mobility relies on spatial inscription (Glick Schiller and

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3 The International Bus Station and the Agricultural Terminal are some of the main meeting places for Peruvian and Bolivian migrants in Arica.

4 With the exception of recognisable public figures and institutions, all proper names in this article are pseudonyms. Names of the urban camps have also been changed in order to maintain the confidentiality of inhabitants.
Çağlar 2013; Smith 2005).

On the fringes of Arica, between a clandestine landfill and the edge of a dry ravine, a heterogeneous population of migrants is creating a day-to-day life in areas closed-off by the city government, banned by the state, and dismissed by society. In this context, unauthorised migrant camps emerge as sites where needs, longings, and efforts take material expression. This occurs through the act of settling in spaces that, later, come to be thought of and lived in as one’s own. In this sense, the act of emplacement denotes affective and experiential processes contingent on material and social contexts.

Government reason does not necessarily design or capture emplacement as a social force. Focus on emplacement as a performative act allows us to explore how, on the margins of a city, spaces for urban life can emerge. To understand this emergence, the analysis should not underestimate the tenacity of homeless migrants to create (in their own way and with their own means) a place for themselves. Here, the act of emplacement serves as an analytical axis, allowing us to explore the performative dimensions of both rooting and belonging, without neglecting the crucial role of the materialities involved in the production of infrastructures of everyday life (Gilroy and Booth 1999; Mbodj-Pouye 2016; Simone 2004).

The rise, eviction, and re-emergence of squatter camps in Arica is entangled with the city’s history. Today, displaced people from the Andean border countries (mainly from Bolivia, Peru and, more recently, Colombia) have become the main population of these settlements. Several areas of Arica that are now urbanised were formerly clandestine settlements – yet this part of the local history has disappeared from public conversation. This omission is somewhat paradoxical, since the emergence of irregular and ‘unhealthy’ settlements of ‘foreigners’ is now a topic of concern and debate in the Chilean media (see Alonso 2017; Jarpa and Rivera 2014).

By pushing the boundaries of how the city can be inhabited and used, both the tomas of the past, and the camps of current migrant-settlers, operate complex combinations of places, materials, affects, values, and practices through the actions of its residents. This is, in other words, what Simone understands under the prism of people as infrastructure: ‘a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city’ (2004, 408). More specifically, in El Resplandor camp, occupants make use of all sorts of available materials, most of them decomposed objects and remains of things discarded by the city, which they utilise for very different purposes, giving them new and sometimes unsuspected functions.

At the southern margin of Arica, surrounding El Resplandor, there is vast heterogeneity of discarded materials, which accumulate due to the existence of a clandestine rubbish dump and the presence of abundant debris from shacks dismantled by past administrations. In the eyes of many city dwellers, this squatter camp forms a large dumpsite. They not only view the settlement as an insalubrious space, but, in fact, also feed this image by disposing of animal carcasses and other household waste there. However, for its inhabitants, this place constitutes a conquest, in the sense of an occupation (which is not just a metaphor, since that is what it effectively is). Despite the condemnation of municipal and state authorities, squatter camps are the materialisation of the will of their residents to settle, take root, and become present in the space of the city.
Emplacement is both a political question and a practical matter. An illustration of this last aspect appears in the following excerpt from a conversation I had with Rosendo, one of the settlers who hosted me in El Resplandor camp:

R: Before coming here, I was working on a farm in the valley [Azapa], I lived there for three months, then we had to go back to Bolivia, but returned to Chile shortly after. When we arrived in Arica, we had nowhere to go. We stayed in a room we paid for every day, but after a few days they kicked us out because we had no way to pay. A woman my wife knew told us that there were some vacant lots nearby that were being occupied by squatters.

A: How long ago was that? [I asked him]

R: Almost three years ago […]. When we arrived we had nothing, little by little we collected things people no longer used. Here at the back [of the settlement], you can find all sorts of things: chairs, wood planks, plastics, zinc sheets, clothes, containers, ornaments, and even toys for children. I told myself that with ingenuity one can get ahead; that’s how we built this house.

Figure 1. House built by Rosendo, El Resplandor camp (photo by author)

Remains of building materials, furniture, electrical appliances, and other products discarded by the city are carefully selected and stored by settlers outside their houses. As shown in the image of the front of Rosendo’s home (Figure 1), disparate parts of things are collected and
placed at house entrances. There, goods discarded by the city’s economies wait to be re-assembled by camp residents in order to gain new life.

The recovery of discarded objects and their creative reassembly by camp residents makes infrastructure a key device in the recalibration of value. But it is not only discarded commodities that acquire new value when reused in the squatter camps; it is also the ‘moral economy’ of dwelling (Fassin 2005, 2015) – that is, the production, circulation, and use of norms, obligations, emotions, and moral values concerning the right and wrong ways of dwelling –, which becomes more complex by the emplacement processes of migrant-settlers at the urban margins. The will to emplace and the individual and collective efforts to have a place in the city also carry a moral dimension. The names of neighbourhoods, such as Renacer del Pedregal (Rebirth from the Stones) and Sueño de Familia (Family Dream), written by inhabitants on the walls of their houses (Figure 2), as well as the gardens that many residents try to keep alive despite the dryness of the area and the lack of potable water, reflect how this moral dimension – which emphasises dignity and appeals to social recognition – is indivisibly entangled in the co-production of dwelling and meaning.

Figure 2: Name of the neighbourhood ‘Family Dream’ inscribed on the wall of a camp shack (photo by author)

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5 I use the concept ‘moral economy’ in Fassin’s sense to explore moral order phenomena that take place in experiences of urban dwelling.
Through a combination of need, ingenuity, contingency, and improvisation, migrant-settlers are building the infrastructure of their emplacement in Arica. As a result, settlements comprised of streets, neighbourhoods, meeting places, and small shops emerge at the edges of the city, outside of municipal jurisdiction.

Urban margins are zones of varied, differentiated, and often unexpected encounters that can go beyond the domain of the state. In these zones, heterogeneous and seemingly contradictory emplacements and temporalities take shape. At Arica’s southern end, military infrastructure coupled with unauthorised camps exemplifies this phenomenon. In this area, the Pan-American Highway – an icon of the country’s road infrastructure – plays a pivotal role in shaping Arica’s periphery. If, as Simone (2018, 21) notes, ‘infrastructure points to the simultaneous presence of many temporali ties’, this is dramatic in border cities such as Arica, where multiple temporalities are manifestly entangled with social, economic, national, and ethnic differences.

Specifically, the Pan-American Highway sharply separates two sets of temporalities. On its West side, the Granaderos infantry brigade materialises the Chilean nation-state order. To the East, a once-abandoned site has given rise to precarious settlements, which, from the perspective of ‘the national order of things’ (Malkki 1992), are uncertain and unreliable. The irregular status of migrant lives that are located there, mark a physical and conceptual frontier to urban management and governmental reason. On the east side of the highway, another space and another temporality emerge, a sort of counter-emplacement in Foucault’s terms (1984), a heterochronic zone, in the eyes of the state and urban planning, which is both a real localised site in the city and a contested inversion of its boundaries.

The Arica camps are related to what Michel Foucault describes as ‘heterotopology’ because of its power to simultaneously challenge the space in which we live mythically and actually. Suspended between the inaccessible interior and the threat of being outside the law (Montag 2013), migrants become settlers from urban margins. In such a process, entanglements of affects, building materials, values, and actions challenge social invisibility and open up the possibility of what I call ‘politics of presence’ (to be explored in the next sections).

**Social Denegation**

El Resplandor, along with two other squatter camps, El Esfuerzo and La Quebrada, form a large shantytown. Here, Bolivian, Peruvian, and Colombian migrants live, sharing the area with Roma and Chileans – mainly poor single mothers, young addicts, and those suffering from illnesses. The location of these camps in the urban landscape highlights its paradoxical condition of invisibility and maximum exposure. The transparency of the atmosphere, the bright sunshine, and the slight rise of the highway, offer a clear view of these settlements. However, its recognition in the eyes of the state is not so clear. People live in these squatter camps without basic services (water, electricity, sewage), constantly under police surveillance, and threatened with eviction by government institutions. During harvest season, many camp settlers move into shelters in the nearby Azapa valley to work as seasonal
farmworkers. This leads the residents of nearby urbanised neighbourhoods to question the intentions of El Resplandor’s inhabitants, who, as a resident accused, ‘claim to be poor but are merely opportunistic’.

Anyone entering or leaving Arica will see a large shantytown composed of three camps on the roadside. On the western edge of the settlement stands a huge, Coca-Cola sponsored billboard that reads, ‘The City of Eternal Sunshine wishes travellers bon voyage’. Naturally, these words are not addressed to the people living (literally and metaphorically) under its shadow. The poor that live on the borders of the state and out of sight of the media are not much cause for concern for most city dwellers in Chile, but there is a strange feeling aroused among the residents living outside this shantytown. Discomfort about, and even open denial of, its existence is common, as reflected by Mario, a resident of a neighbourhood near the squatter settlement: ‘Are you talking about the El Resplandor camp? That’s just a façade [pantalla]! [...] people there take advantage [se avivaron] of the situation, [and] just say they live there to get state aid. [...] What are really there [in the camp] are “poor-rich people”. Have you seen the cars parked there? Everyone has a car in the camp!’.

Although subtle and complex modes of attachment may arise in contexts of social abandonment (Berlant 2011; Povinelli 2011), pervasive forms of violence manifest in the intrinsic ‘negativity’ (Bessire 2014) that poor migrant-settlers in northern Chile embody. It is not a matter of social invisibility in the literal sense, but rather an ambivalent condition of absence-presence in the wider context of market forces. It is within this configuration that migrants living on the margins of Arica appear to be suffering a peculiar kind of speechlessness. People excluded from logos become visible when, as Jacques Rancière (1999, 126) observes, they are ‘armed only with a voice expressing a monotonous moan, the moan of naked suffering, which saturation has made inaudible’.

What is it to live a rootless existence, caught between several languages and, as Balibar (2002, 83) says, ‘waiting-to-live at the border’? What kinds of forces operate in the lives of migrants who inhabit the urban margins of Arica? In the sections that follow, I address these issues through ethnography – that is, by tracing situated experiences of urban dwellers, assessed through long-term field research.

**Makeshift Infrastructures and Public Speech**

Infrastructure makes specific materialist ethics durable in its forms, which allows people to claim a right to res publica or public things. Such a hypothesis, held by AbdouMaliq Simone in a recent debate on how infrastructure reconfigures anthropological theory (Venkatesan et al. 2018), forcefully resonates in migrant makeshift settlements on Arica’s urban margins. This is because squatter camps on the edges of Arica provide ethnographic material to rethink how infrastructure, affects, and values get entangled, discouraging political claims in some cases and favouring them in others.

Whenever a land seizure by migrant people occurs, forms of self-organisation are set in motion through which bonds of solidarity and trust among settlers arise. In these contexts,
public speech\(^6\) is intense. At first, especially before a land seizure is carried out, rumours circulate stealthily but effectively between homeless migrants to transfer valuable information such as where and when a land seizure will take place, the availability of sites for homes, and who else is looking to settle there. Once people have settled in a squatter camp, collective claims emerge as a preeminent form of public speech.

According to the memories of elderly residents of Arica’s unauthorised camps, public speech appears to be closely linked to the enactment of collective land seizures. What emerges through this phenomenon is a form of politics of presence – a form also exhibited in the endurance of generations of migrant workers who withstood the constant threat of eviction from the unauthorised settlements where they live. It is a politics of presence that continues to emerge today, especially in the strong will of the inhabitants of the Arica camps to make the land they occupy a place of life, recognised by society and legitimised by the state.

A central feature of the squatter camps is the high level of residents’ associativity, which contrasts, for example, with the fewer interactions between farmworkers in the shelters of the nearby Azapa Valley. This disparity is somewhat paradoxical considering that there is no significant difference between the social composition of rural shelters and that of squatter camps – in fact, in some cases it is the same population that moves from one place to another depending on the labour demand. Azapa shelters and Arica squatter camps rise in the shadow of official infrastructure. The informality of both settlements is also a characteristic of the status of their residents, who do not have citizenship rights and cannot count on city government and regional policies. Infrastructure in both places emerges spontaneously, using improvised skills in response to the needs of the moment. Yet, while the inhabitants of the shelters have limited participation in the conception and transformation of their housing, residents of squatter camps are involved in all aspects of the creation, permanence, and development of the infrastructure where they live.

From Arica’s urban margins, we see that squatter camps provide more room for political agency than nearby rural shelters. In the case of the Azapa rural shelters, disaffection leads to a general feeling of apathy among occupants, which pervades social life. In contrast, as we shall see below, the engagement of Arica’s squatter camp residents in the production of vital infrastructure leads to a sort of release of public speech, which opens up the possibility of making political claims.

Among the seasonal labourers in the Azapa valley, it is rare to hear anyone speak out about their working conditions, the local population’s lack of hospitality, or the indifference of state institutions in meetings with labourer bosses, state officials, and NGO staff. In fact, these kinds of meetings are uncommon, and when they do occur Chilean authorities usually monopolise the words and control the talk time, drowning out the voices of those they are supposed to be helping, attempting to speak on their behalf. In these situations, seasonal

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\(^6\) By public speech I would like to emphasise the performative dimension of language use in urban contexts. Public speech among the residents of El Resplandor camp is not limited to the mere transmission of information; above all, it creates neighbourhood and a sense of public for camp dwellers. Thus understood, public speech is based particularly on illocutionary and perlocutionary acts (Austin 1975). For an Austin approach within the framework of the anthropology of language, see the work of Ahearn (2012).
farmworkers thus give the impression of being in agreement with their employers and ‘NGO relief providers’.

The apparent public speechlessness of foreign farmworkers in Azapa contrasts with the vibrant use of public speech by migrants living in urban squatter camps. Seen from the perspective of rural migrant shelters, the act of public speaking appears to be in a state of constant agitation in the urban migrant camps. In fact, in these squatter settlements I did not encounter a single adult inhabitant who does not belong to at least one committee. Health, drinking water, and especially housing, are the most active committees. To participate in a committee is also to be involved in the constant divisions, mergers, declines, and re-emergences that characterise them. But these committees do not occupy the entire space where public speech circulates in the squatter settlements. People in the camps are also the target of initiatives by state institutions and NGOs.

What attitude do people who are targets of such initiatives have? In the urban camps, inhabitants receive state and NGO aid, such as health interventions (for example, vaccinations, dental prophylaxis, gynaecological exams, and so forth), legal assistance, micro-credit, and even seemingly enthusiastic educational talks conducted by the police. The scepticism that characterises the migrant farmworkers’ ‘non-expression’ is replaced, in these contexts, by hollow speech without ‘true’ content: a functional speech, for survival on the margins of the city.

At the recent closing ceremony of the government program ‘Yo Emprendo en Campamento’ (I Invest in My Camp), Magda, a settler from El Resplandor camp, declared in the hall of a downtown hotel in front of an audience composed of regional government authorities: ‘I want to thank FOSIS for the support they have given us since the beginning. I started with a small cart and now, with work and effort, I am applying for a loan to buy a vehicle in which to prepare and sell fast food’.

How does one interpret this discursive act? In situations like this, a problematic dimension of political inequality is perceptible. Here, it is not a matter of inability to express what is ‘inside’ – that is, it is not a problem of not being able to say what one feels or thinks. The problem of political inequality can be grasped in experiences of not being in what one says. In contexts shaped by unequal power relations, we should not take expressions of gratitude at face-value. Magda’s act of public speaking is over-determined by the entrepreneurial beneficiary position she is made to occupy, which, it can be argued, she consciously performed as a sort of forced concession, a ‘commodified’ counter-gift, in exchange for the micro-entrepreneurship training provided by the state.

Admission to the national ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 2006) is established by the recognition of who is and is not a part of it and requires, as shown by Magda’s speech, an act of public expression of willingness to adhere to the ‘national interest’. Magda’s words were

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7 I use the expression ‘NGO relief providers’ in the context of the humanitarian organisations studied in works such as Didier Fassin’s *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (2011) and Miriam Ticktin’s *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (2011).

8 FOSIS (Fund for Solidarity and Social Investment) is a department of the Chilean Ministry of Social Development.
framed by a language game of entrepreneurial self-making; her verbal expression implied a tacit agreement, which was not based merely on opinions, but on activities that, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, have to be accepted as ‘given’ – as a ‘form of life’ (2009, 23, 241, 345). But what does this particular form of life demand? It demands being in accordance with what Ahmed (2012) calls ‘the general will’ and, from time to time, displaying such willingness in public events. The violence of the ‘given’, in its form as ‘the general will,’ lies in its ability to provide an affective basis for the moral necessity of becoming worthy. In these experiences, the banalisation of inequality opens up new possibilities for the perpetuation of precarious lives. What chance then do those whose political status is contested have to speak with their own voices? How can ‘urban agency’\(^9\) gain the potential to emerge from Arica’s unequal margins?

Certainly, there is no single or simple answer to this question. In order to address such issues within the complexity of a situated process, I focus on the emergence of collective claims and their encounter with police logics that unfold through techniques of government, which, as Foucault (1994) observes, take the well-being of their subjects as their object. Through this procedure I approach politics in its litigious and contingent status or, in Rancière’s terms, as the staging of a disagreement. The emergence of unauthorised migrant camps on the margins of Arica reveals a new heterogeneity, whose very existence disturbs the ‘police order’ (Rancière 1999) that regulates urban life in northern Chile. In this sense, the tenacity with which migrant-settlers in Arica manage to turn inhospitable spaces into places of life shows how, as Rancière eloquently puts it,

> politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world. (1999, 27)

However, since politics runs up against the police, it may be convenient to think of this encounter as ‘a meeting of the heterogeneous’ (Rancière 1999, 32). It is in this spirit that, in the next section, I attempt to show how the contingent vitality of migrant-settlers’ experiences opens a way to deepen our understanding of politics as an event that takes on material and social presence from the urban margins. Disclosing such a phenomenon will not solve the question of the relationship between political subjectivity (speaking with one’s own voice) and political precariousness (the flatness of disagreement) on urban margins. Instead, the emergence of political claims, and their governmental normalisation, can provide us with clues to understand what the politics of presence means on its fleeting side and in its potential to shape what is seen and what can be said, as well as ‘around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak’ (Rancière 2004, 13) in interactions between migrant-settlers, police forces, and state institutions.

\(^9\) See the introduction by Aceska, Heer and Kaiser-Grolimund in this special issue.
Politics of Presence

In 2010, Sebastián Piñera became president and was determined to end ‘illegal’ camps in Chile to send a clear signal to the public of ‘his commitment to the country’s development’ (Piñera 2011). Subsequently, Piñera’s government ordered mass evictions across squatter settlements, without considering housing alternatives for the significant number of people who lived in the camps. The residents of El Resplandor camp, on the southern periphery of Arica, were among the first inhabitants in the region to receive the government’s eviction order. As a result, at the end of 2011, homeless settlers organised an unprecedented mass meeting in Arica.

The threat to sweep El Resplandor camp and remove its inhabitants from the occupied zone not only aroused the settlers’ fear of losing their homes, but also opened a space for political struggle and urban agency. To rhetorically justify the eviction, the government needed to stop treating the occupants as residents, act on the basis of their lack of rights, and see them as ‘human waste’ (Bauman 2004). Before the government made its intention clear to ‘clean’ the city of illegal camps, camp residents already felt threatened by the state’s attempt to deactivate their organisation and close the possibility of official recognition. Teresa, a resident of El Resplandor, expressed it clearly, ‘they don’t want us to organise, they are throwing us out of here [...] When we get together with people from SERVIU you cannot express an opinion, you cannot say anything. [...] They want to cut at the root, divide us; we are accused of doing illegal things, treated like criminals. They seek to diminish us [aminorarnos]; to take away our strength’.

Far from feeling diminished, the imminent expulsion of the inhabitants of El Resplandor led them to intensify their organisation and become urban actors in their own right. Arriving home after a day’s work in the agricultural terminal, Blanca, a settler and social leader of El Resplandor, and Emiliana, the aunt of my host at the camp, shared with us some experiences of their struggle for housing, which offer a way to understand how a politics of presence can take shape and place:

When I realised they wanted to wipe us out of here, I said to myself, ‘what are we going to do?’ I told the neighbours that we had to go to SEREMI [a ministerial department], that we had to go to Ciudadano Global [an NGO] [...] We quickly organised and started making onces [snacks] and lunches to raise money, we are going to do whatever it takes, we are not going to just sit around. We get together as a team and that way they can’t defeat us. That’s what I like.

A: How do you do that? How do you organise yourselves?

B: We just do, I put in an idea, another person puts in his idea and everything becomes clearer. [...] I say to myself, I have to be conscious of what I’m doing, if we don’t organise ourselves, time will pass, we are going to disperse, nothing will happen and we’re going to be left without a place to live. [...] I tell people [in the

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10 Boeck and Plissart (2004) analyse a case in Kinshasa that has similarities with the urban agency phenomenon present on the margins of Arica.

11 SERVIU, an executive department of the Ministry of Housing, aims to provide subsidies and mortgage loans and oversees the distribution of social housing in Chile.
camp] that everything takes time. I know nothing is easy; everything has a cost, but it’s worth it, because we can do it. [...] I tell myself that they cannot kick us out of here for being foreigners. I have to speak up; [...] The worst is that the housing service directors change all the time; when we agree with them about something, they disappear and commitments fall through [...] so that’s why we’re there, pushing to be heard, to be seen.

Emiliana, drawn by the story of her neighbour, recalls some events and how the authorities could not ignore their urban presence:

Then we began to form a group ... What do they call that? Ah! A grouping of ladies, but a grouping with legal personality! We began to be watched by police officers from afar, they wouldn’t come into the camp, but patrolled around outside in the evenings.

A: Why did they do that?
E: Because they don’t want us to complain, become noticed [...] they want to run us out of here saying, ‘Yes! Yes! Yes!’ that’s what they want! But, I say ‘No!’ I won’t do that!

The persistence of El Resplandor’s residents in making a settlement that occupies a legitimate place for urban life has opened a space to ethnographically understand what Rancière (2001) calls ‘political part-taking’ – that is, a disruptive dynamic driven, in this case, by migrant-settlers who ‘have no part’ in the established order. As we have seen, when an act of claiming takes place in conditions of deep social exclusion, legal exception, and spatial segregation, the character of what we have called ‘politics of presence’ becomes clear. Its radical potential to break the ‘common sense’ order (Stoler 2009) revealed its key role in enabling political interlocution for new urban actors.

Conclusions
Let me conclude by focusing on an image of El Resplandor camp, specifically a shack (see Figure 3), that has the potential to deliver insights into how an abandoned site becomes a place where a plurality of modes of agency arises (Barad 2007; Bell 2010). In this zone of social abandonment (Biehl 2005), inhabitants are not only claiming visibility but also creating possibilities for new forms of life to emerge in urban spaces outlawed by the state.
Figure 3: A shack and garden in El Resplandor camp (photo by author)

What does this place, on the edge of urban life and the fringes of the desert, express about human rooting? The phenomenon in this picture does not point to the common metaphor of roots as a metaphysical image of the consubstantial link between people, soil, race, and territory (Balibar 1991). This does not mean that migrant-settlers who live in these places are not subjected to discrimination, racism, and exploitation by the Chilean national society, which has historically thought of its relationship with its territory as predestined. Rooting, from the perspective of people living in Arica’s margins, has to do with the individual and collective will to persist in a place that was initially denied to them. ‘To take root’ also has to do with a social and material force of emplacement. Through the experience of the residents of El Resplandor camp, we have approached emplacement as a political form because of its power to turn marginal spaces into crucial places for urban life (see also Das 2014; Das and Walton 2015).

What is at stake, in terms of the politics of presence, does not fit into essentialist representations, but rather into the order of experiences and everyday actions. It is a matter of potentiality: the possibility that forms of life may emerge in places neglected by national society and outlawed by the state. Rooting life from urban margins is thus an event in which lively infrastructure (Amin 2014) materialises the persistence of people. It is in its disruptive potential that its political reach lies – a moment of exception when, to paraphrase Rancière (2011, 242), unimaginable things can very quickly enter into the field of possibilities.
Through the imbricated processes of emplacement and housing, in which the inhabitants of the camps were protagonists, we were able to recognise how affective and political forces struggle to build a sense of homeliness. The in-betweeness embodied by people living at the margins of Arica opened possibilities for new forms of political subjectification on specific and local crossings. The strong will of the migrants dwelling in squatter camps to root their lives in the city, reflects aspects of a politics of presence that pushes them to give public expression to their convictions about the social inequality and discrimination that they face. Through these struggles, forms of attachment are at stake that may have the power (or the political momentum) to create new frames of social infrastructure (Elyachar 2010). The challenge that arises in these experiences, as the El Resplandor camp teaches us, rests in the possibility to transform urban spaces of relegation and mere survival into places of vital plurality for the city.

References


