A remarkable change in security matters set the course for politics in Latin America in recent years. The putative causal relationship between migration and crime cyclically sustains the discourses that require more safety and police force intervention, police autonomy to suppress, and reduction of the age of criminal responsibility. This panorama, accompanied by the state postponement of prison and security infrastructures, is framed and worsened by the tendency to criminalize borders, which are seen as porous and dangerous zones. The notion that these spaces favor the contamination and corrosion of the nation-state promotes rhetoric about borders that need to be disassembled. Simultaneously, an odd growth of the technological market specialized in border security, suggests specific forms of relationships between the social and environmental conditions, illegal markets, security policies and nationalist discourses in favor of sovereignty. I analyze the municipality of Aguas Blancas, bordering with Bolivia, where the transit between the legal and the illegal shapes specific ways of life and exposes the nets woven through the managing of illegalisms at diverse scales (Goldman 1999; Foucault 2014). My analysis connects ‘simulations’ in Baudrillard’s (1978) sense, performances of imaginary scenarios that become reality, with ‘temporary autonomous zones’ in security matters, areas outside routine legal-administrative governance (Bey 1996). The anthropological approach in this work was based on in situ interviews and observations aimed to understand the relationship between illegal practices and security.

**Keywords:** Aguas Blancas; Security; Temporary Autonomous Zone; illegalisms

**Presentation**

18th Century pirates and corsairs created an “information network” covering the globe: primitive and basically dedicated to forbidden businesses, the net worked admirably. Surrounding and scattered were islands, faraway hideouts where boats could be supplied and loaded with looting takings to satisfy all types of luxuries and necessities. Some of these islands maintained “deliberate communities”, entire mini-societies that consciously lived unlawfully and were determined to remain as such, even for a short—but merry—existence (Hakim Bey 1996).

This article analyzes the cross-border trade of legal and illegal merchandise flowing illegally at Argentina’s border with Bolivia at Aguas Blancas, Province of Salta. From descriptions of the place and routines, I present a situation of conflict resulting from the dissolution of National Gendarmerie control, with the purpose being to reflect on the state’s relevance to local configurations that involve illegal practices. The narrated incidents allow us to connect global economic processes with local particularities in the context of a national state that deploys police agencies, although they don’t necessarily operate in a repressive way despite the evident breach of law. Finally, taking off from the idea of corruption and approaching the two concepts in the title of this work, I present a non-normative or non-moralizing understanding of the described phenomena.
Since Van Gennep (2008) we’ve known that border spaces imply passageways that transform people’s status from native citizens to foreigners or immigrants. This type of passageway requires different actions ritualized under the frame of the Nation-State that define and defend their sovereignty beyond an established limit. The author made reference to the passage-line thinking in the liminal state, defending liminality as a state of ambiguity and temporary nature. By concentrating on the passage rites, Van Gennep recognizes that there is a time and place on which the properties of the leaving state are cancelled, and the properties of the coming state are still to be incorporated, leading to the theory of the ritual subsequently developed by Turner (1988).

The notion of liminality allows us to capture the status of informal workers in this international border context, in which the oscillating movement between one place and another, and between legality and illegality, is continuous. We’ll notice that in Aguas Blancas, located in the international border between...
Argentina and Bolivia, where sociability and trade daily transpose the national and legal separations, the border inhabiting and living, can imply adopting a liminal state indefinitely. Thus, the transit between countries and legal categories is no longer a temporary situation, given that its reiteration establishes people as as marginal and becomes a lifestyle. This way of liminal existence bears the mark of dangerousness due to its ambiguous or unclassifiable nature within the mentioned dual terms that frame the big differences (Renoldi 2013, Benedetti 2020b, Douglas 2007). The *bagayeros*, merchandise carriers who enter without paying import duties, can then be seen as liminal, because the transit adds the illegal work component, which being illegal, remains in force, and depends on the movement between the two countries that are criss-crossed on a daily basis.

My proposed hypothesis points to this liminal state as favorable to shaping ‘Temporary autonomous zones’ created interdependently with control and security simulations’ that, far from being considered a farce, are potential conditions for the existence of both people and state.

Based on historical and demographic data—and on interviews and observations carried out in 2018 with different state agents and local residents in the cities of Aguas Blancas and Orán—I’ll present diverse means of border transportation, business, and control to understand the plot that weaves the legal and illegal, as well as the conflictive expressions that emerge from legally vague scenarios, and the alternative means proposed by the locals. I’ll describe Aguas Blancas, a new municipality of the province of Salta and bordering Bolivia that, due to specificities of local lifestyle, questions theoretical principles of national states. Within this context, the economic initiatives that involve international boundaries demand a reformulation of values to allow adopting as legitimate the illegal ways of earning money, with rights to return and obligations to create.

The influx of people and merchandise at a cross-border level in the Northern Argentinian passage corresponds to the fluctuating relationship between the countries. Some of this movement’s growth could be recognized during Carlos Saúl Menem’s presidential term (1989–1999). While in his government, the peso parity with the dollar offered advantages for some sectors, and the great economic recession ousted the popular sectors from the large-scale benefits that could be offered by the economic disparity with neighboring countries. Argentinian businesses and factories closed or reduced the number of employees to a minimum, and even from such minimum, most were under contract, not permanent, and with no secure job plan.

César, a 50-year-old activist journalist and one of the references in the creation of a ‘Border Workers’ Cooperative,’ stated in conversations that the border was a source of income, because people used to work at the sugar mill or the municipality, but as jobs were scarce, the small and diverse opportunities offered by the border to survive were gaining importance. Thus, under importation initiatives exempt from customs registration or payment fees, the movement of people and non-declared products increased since the 90s. The ferryman or *bagayero* trades expanded in several Argentinian cities bordering Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil. I refer to trade because it is a know-how that in many cases is passed in family contexts where they collaborate since childhood with the tasks involved in ‘passing’ (Schiavoni 1993). This type of exchange is showcased for all to see, and its persistence over time is curious, when ample legislation and state control agencies are created and directed to prevent it. Thus, I refer to some ideas that could help understand these configurations.

The concept of ‘temporary autonomous zones’ (Bey 1996) refers to the creation of associations with short-term goals that avoid the state’s gaze and promote provisional relationships based on cooperation and mutual care principles that occur while people and things are in movement. Declared more as evidence of possible libertarian action than as an analytical concept, I won’t take the idea strictly, but as used, it helps us to understand how this web of relationships and spaces is produced through movement, to which security as a ‘simulation’ becomes an active piece of the process.

I rely myself on Baudrillard’s reflection (1978) where he insists that simulating is not faking, given that simulation questions the difference between what is “true” and what is “fake”, the “real” and the “imaginary” (p. 8), while the ‘whole system keeps floating as a simulation, that is, unable to turn into a reality, but gives itself as an exchange, inside an uninterrupted circuit where reference doesn’t exist’ (p. 12). Perhaps by being cryptic, this conceptualization is inspiring, and valuable for thinking about the deployment of controls at this border, where the autonomy of the zone as a commercial venture becomes interdependent with the control simulation, which by the way, is very real and allows order at a local scale. Paradoxically, this simulation doesn’t infringe the rule of law but promotes its existence by enabling an understanding of what law is in this place. Likewise, this doesn’t prevent the existence of state agents associated with projects of protection of ‘illegalized’ activities that, in accord with Heyman (2013), result from historical processes, as opposed

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1 This article is based in a study performed by a team at the request of the Ministry of National Security (Renoldi et al., 2020).
to the term ‘illegal’ that morally rectifies the law-based practices. The book States and illegal practices already considered, in 1999, the imbrication between both terms, the necessary connections, and suggested more complex analytical approaches that surpassed the simple ideas about the state as guarantor of law (Heyman & Smart 1999). This article is aimed in such direction.

In this case, I’ll consider that the assemblages between the temporary autonomous zones and the control and security simulations can be rendered viable through ‘political goods’ that refer not only to the exchange of economic values, but also asymmetrical relationships between people with diverse status and power, to favor certain goals and generate reciprocal bonds over time (Misse 2017). This idea is directly linked to the notion of ‘illegalisms’ coined by Foucault (2014) with the purpose of tearing up in some way the illusory dichotomy of the legal/illegal dualism, whose management depends on such goods. These operate as the field of procedures to prioritize and differentiate the facts in regard with laws (Telles e Hirata 2010).

In light of these resources, we observe border dynamics as results of exchanges, conditions, and circumstances that shift as variable and elusive to the central legal order.

**Aguas Blancas on the move**

Declared a municipality by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights in 2012, with a superintendent in office since 2014, Aguas Blancas resulted from the processes of change in national economies. With a population of nearly 4,500 inhabitants concentrated at the Bermejo River margins, Aguas Blancas borders with the Bolivian city of Bermejo, a great driving force of the socio-economical regional development, partially promoted through imports obtained from Chilean ports in terms of fabrics, particularly second-hand clothing and other merchandise that enters the commercial circuit via international interaction. The Bermejo river separates the cities, the Bolivian city being the more densely populated and remarkably more urbanized than Aguas Blancas.

The Bermejo river is crossed through a road bridge located approximately 2km from urban centers, with customs and immigration controls, and buses and cars mostly traveling through it. From the Bolivian side, Bermejo extends along Route 1 towards Tarija, Potosí, and La Paz, three relevant centers with demographic

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2 Law 7.739, sanctioned in Salta October 2nd 2012 and published in Boletín Oficial on October 24th of the same year, creates the municipality of Aguas Blancas.
density, mobility, and trade dynamics. Souchaud (2007) offers a valuable depiction of population and base economies in the Department of Tarija, to which Bermejo belongs. From the Argentinian side, the bridge is the most strongly controlled passage and continues along Route 50 towards Orán, the larger municipality of which Aguas Blancas was barely a neighborhood until its emancipation. But the largest movement occurs from the fluvial passage through the Puerto Chalanas vessels and the informal passage through contiguity.

The chalanas are collective boats organized by cooperatives that express the sum of interests and possibilities, both on the Argentinian and Bolivian sides. There are no loading installations in the port; boats are accessed through precarious walkways made from planks. The Argentinian sideline is less urbanized, most of the streets are unpaved, with some irregular distribution of lots and houses, creating diagonals and curved roads, or unconnected to other entries or streets. In the adjoining space to the customs passage installed in 2002, contiguous with the migratory control office since 2013, there are businesses with warehouse products, many taken to Bermejo, where they can often be purchased cheaper than in the Argentinian side, since they’re exported to Bolivia with specific tax regimes that, when sold in Argentina, tend to be cheaper than the final prices with Value Added Tax (IVA, for its Spanish acronym). There are also food stands for those traveling over the day. Members of the security forces are present in these spaces, circulating or standing somewhere, while watching the area in their custodial role.

The Customs offices are not enough to contain the influx of people when purchases from Argentinians increase in Bolivia. Sometimes the merchandise’s income and exit control can’t be done due to the failure of the antenna that control records in the computer system. Connectivity is precarious and has inevitable effects on the site activities. When this occurs, if the 150 dollars allowed per person is exceeded, an amount of money similar or less than the official (the one set when ‘the system’ is working) is often charged to let certain products in. There is no evidence that this charged value will become part of the Customs collection official fund. People do not complain, and pay, and also abandon merchandise when these are retained by excessive amounts or other irregularities, in spite of not receiving receipts for confiscations in exchange (not exclusive of this border).

The state authority is deployed and its agents seem to be respected by the population, even when they proceed with no legal backup (something people may not notice due to ignorance). When ‘the system is
down,’ the duty fees charged by customs agents to allow merchandise crossing would be, in some way, justified as performative continuity of a legitimate practice that, due to the repeated interruptions in the ‘system’ operation, could lead to the loss of credibility of customs controls. At the same time, the ‘system’ paralysis is a favorable moment for the movement of values with no records and with private agreements on site. Everything indicates that procedures in the available border crossing are legitimized by an order that is not strictly law-abiding all the time. A type of interstitial and temporary autonomous controls the zone.

Along with the uncertainty of connectivity, there is added the lack of potable water, diseases such as zika, dengue, chikungunya, and leishmaniasis, and multiple work-related injuries, which put pressure on the fragile health care system. These announce the interrelation between the forms of life and the environmental and infrastructural conditions. On the other hand, there are no ATMs or banks, forcing public servants
to go to Oran for their salary. Cash traders have also been targeted with assaults and robberies, impacting negatively the security of the place.

The movement is predominantly commercial. The diversity of merchandise homogenizes the urban landscape of Bolivian border cities when they are glitzily and beautifully displayed in a space that indicates the urban improvisation resulting from the city’s rapid growth. For sale merchandise is publicized in huge quantities, with color and texture variety, in crowded shops at streets and sites such as fairs, popular markets, and private stores.

That’s where Argentinians go shopping, generally with the responsibility of one shipment per person. *Lonas* is the category that refers to transferred merchandise. But it’s more than that. It’s a set of packages or bales held together by a squared plastic cloth that, despite its weight, can be manipulated by a person. *Lonas* are transported both via huge cargo embarkations and chalanas for passengers. That’s how they go
to Aguas Blancas, then to Orán, as first stop of a long trip whose destination are the great urban fairs of the provincial capitals and the City of Buenos Aires, the main ones known as La Salada (Gago 2012) and the Saladitas (little Saladas).

La Salada was organized in 1991 in Buenos Aires, with growing initiative from Bolivian immigrants to sell fake-brand textiles and other products entering the country from Bolivia and Paraguay, with no customs declaration. Las Saladitas appear throughout the country, as copies of the first one (both involve an effective combination between the legal and illegal, and the management of illegalisms which allow them to prevail). These are routes traveled by the merchandise over and over, of biographies being created while moving (Ingold 2013; Appadurai 1991, Rabossi 2008). Spaces and distances are sorted out through the ‘relay race’ involving different mediators, who gain value for their work, value added to the product’s final price. But above all, they are weaving a web in its multiple dimensions with the people involved, who accompany them and empower them as merchandise the greater the distance they travel. Rabossi (2008) helps us understand how these markets temporalize, move and territorialize, from the textile production circuits to the Brazilian fairs, and their connections with Paraguay.

An alternative fluvial crossing also exists in Aguas Blancas, in practice superimposed on the controlled crossing of chalanas: used by merchants and carriers known as *bagayeros* to avoid customs and immigration controls. This crossing is known by everyone, even by local police and federal forces that control the border. Several products also go from Argentina to Bolivia, energizing the exchange and cash circulation and rendering profits in the trade.

Local workers emphasize the fact that money moves at the border all the time, and that foreign currency movement always leaves some profit margin, especially when it comes to dollars bought in Argentina and used for shopping or exchange in Bolivia, where the dollar gets more in Argentinian pesos, restarting the buying and selling cycle. Compared with formal work that generates income, this type of resource is not constant and when it declines because of monetary disparity between the two countries, or by burdens derived from border control politics, workers are forced to diversify activities to survive. Under such circumstances and, despite the risks, it is not surprising that people needing money for family expenses are motivated to transport illicit merchandise. I’ll detail this later on.
The flow of merchandise between Bolivia and Argentina taken all together is a movement of people, territorialization and definition of values. According to Benedetti and Salizzi 'Border and mobility are inseparable. International borders can be seen as devices created by the nations, located on the established international limits, in an initial attempt of immobilizing everything that seeks to move to or from inside the territory' (2011: 61). When analyzing the current features beyond the physical manifestation of the boundary, we notice walking borders, a kind of moving existence inherent to the border that strives to adhere to the line from which it is being expelled all the time (Renoldi 2015). In these expulsions, the border ends in La Salada, or for example, in the Barrio de Once in Buenos Aires City, which concentrates people coming from Bolivia (Gago 2014) and that, eventually, allows links to coordinate networks of trust in the movement of illegalized substances. Images and concepts about immigrants generate what Misse calls 'restraint of criminals' (2017), which gathers varied information on criminal types related to a certain population, commonly known as 'profiling.'

**Forms and merchandise**

Besides the shoe industry, electronics, and attire, the Bolivian market is now characterized by the entry of coca leaf. Since ancient times, the acullico or chewing coca leaf constitutes more than a habit in Andean societies: it sustains ontologies in the man-earth union. This practice has persisted until today, predominantly in the Argentinian northwest province populations like Salta and Jujuy, but reaching different regions of the country associated with the mobility of people due to study or work (Brabo Guerra 2016). Cocaine has been simultaneously transformed into a long-term use substance, especially among middle class young adults and in political spaces and public official elites of diverse country regions, thus maintaining the demand.

In institutional, particularly security areas, but also among the border workers, they say there are kitchens for the cocaine hydrochloride precipitation in the area, operating on the Argentinian side, mainly in the most densely populated urban centers close to the border crossing, such as Orán (80,000 residents). Therefore, it is also assumed that the crossing of tons and tons of cocaine leaves could coincide with this market phase of illegalized substances in Argentina.
Cocaine processing produces other harmful smokable substances whose consumption has reached the poorest surrounding populations, even in indigenous communities of the region, which shapes a disturbing panorama that, far from improving, worsens with drug trafficking repression, which barely deals with the underlying problem and leaves aside the health and social conditions that affects population.

Since 2015, when president Mauricio Macri took over the national government with a well-defined policy of neoliberal orientation, the situation of people living within these border fluxes worsened due to controls in customs posts and routes, which came along with a policy of separation of local productive economies. Unemployment diversified those activities aimed to make money and despite the legal risks, drug transportation increased.

The consequences of these processes in the provinces bordering Bolivia were many, and the main one lies in the commercialization of the workforce associated with the movement in physical space—transportation. Among the options for those who chose it, besides inventiveness for dodging controls, the transportation of coca leaves and cocaine were added to other goods entered from Bolivia, taking advantage of the routes and protection arrangements. The more difficult the legal market job is, the stronger the transportation and illegal drug trade circuit gets, and greater the impact local consumption had on sociability, manifested by violent changes and increase of robberies and larcenies that, as a hypothesis, would be linked to the use of smokable cocaine distributed in the kitchens’ vicinities. These substances expand not only as a consumer’s decision to access them, but they’re constituted as a payment currency for tasks, carried at some point, in the network. But how does this merchandise get through, despite the controls?

**Technology in the network**

Some people stated that a few years ago, to the risk of crossing the lonas evading the police control was added the river’s conditions, since sometimes the lona would get wet, compromising the condition in which things arrived at their destination.

The Bermejo river has killed people with its rapids and had to be addressed to carry out trade activities. In response to these challenges, the Gomones were created as technical objects that mediate between the river challenges and human abilities. Since early 2015, four inflated chambers with tractor tires have been used to support square-shaped boards of around 3 meters long, on which bundles of clothes and coca leaves are loaded, called chanchos when packed.

![Gomones structure in Bermejo’s port (Bolivia). Photo: Sandra Nicosia (2018).](image)
Between six and eight men paddle while others submerge to function as anchor when they approach the Argentinean riverside. Rafts are loaded 100 meters away from the official Bermejo dock, and when the river is full, they drift downstream by the current, arriving some 300 to 500 meters from the official Chalanás port in Argentina.

Once unloaded, the transport used to bring merchandise to Aguas Blancas returns to Bermejo with Argentinian products that vary based on price. These are generally edibles like flour, oils, and dairy.

Figure 11: Gomones tour over the Bermejo river bordering Aguas Blancas and Bermejo, seen from Aguas Blancas. Photo: Sandra Nicosia (2018).

Figure 12: At the Chalanás border crossing in Aguas Blancas, bagayeros return legally to Bolivia with Argentinian merchandise. Source: LA NACIÓN – Credits: Hernán Zenteno (2017).
It must be recognized that, in this context, control is more ostensive than repressive, and when activated, it appears to be a mesh where some elements and people are detained, and some pass through. It worth mentioning the tension between security in terms of state policy, since in dealing with a border, that generally responds to domestic diagrams shaped in the geopolitical center of the nation, versus the security in local terms, made from specific situations, certain needs, and different conditions from the center. Illegal markets tend to be linked (in the central view) with the state’s absence, violence, and disorder.

However, what it is observed here does not fit in these parameters. The state and its agents are present, using or suspending control technologies as a form of agency, for example when they respond to the ‘system failure’ with non-registered collections, sometimes enabling the plot to be extended throughout the country and strengthen the markets already described. My purpose is to show in terms of scale the complexity of the phenomenon, considering that the rule of ‘law’—which is not a synonym of ‘just’ (Derrida 1997: 54)—materializes in singular means in every place of the border. Accusing those acts of being ‘corrupt’ is not my purpose, since this is an overly central-state category.

When considering how a variable at the scale of the federal level of government, such as the Ministry of National Security, is shaped in a specific way and produces certain effects, in the border spaces (subject to very different conditions than those imagined from the center), it can be manifested in other ways, and sometimes does not even exist (Goldman 1999). Checkpoints are necessary to guarantee the rule of law in the exercise of its territorially limited sovereignty, and operate in a notable deterrent mode. But in the case herein described, it’s about a complex in which the temporary autonomous zone framed as contraband exists jointly with the control simulations. In principle, in spite of conflicts imposed on the state administration in terms of law, this is the possible way so far of surviving along the Aguas Blancas border and in the channels that feed informal work networks, at national level.

**Illegalized work and security**

Imagine the ‘scale’ as an epistemological category that mostly defines the researcher’s situation to observe the studied phenomena, but that also refers to ‘the relationship between the identified time-space units, which can be of proportionality, hierarchical, differentiation, sequencing or opposition’ (Benedetti 2020: 49). In this sense, to comprehend the Aguas Blancas emancipatory passage at the municipal scale that accompanied the border trade development, we have to understand that under these situations, cities are inserted into an economy linked to oil first, then to sugar cane and, finally, to citrus exploitation. As previously noted, the socio-political transformations brought about the progressive erosion of employment sources and gave rise to forms of work developed in-between the legal and the illegal, illegalized forms and goods.

Aguas Blancas became a supply pole, especially in textiles, that remained dynamic due to the Purchase Tours arriving in buses from diverse cities of the country. This guaranteed work for the so called bagayeros who removed merchandise bought by ‘tourists’ in Bermejo, and passed it through established agreements with buyers who paid a certain amount per bundle (bulto). Lopez (2019) describes the itinerary and the ways women perform these activities and provide valuable information on how these activities shape feminine bodies. Although these type of tasks reduced the number of unemployed, nowadays it is not profitable enough since the Argentinian economic crisis decreased the buy-to-resell initiatives. In any case, the activity was written down by the border security policy, and several trade undertakings were suspended with merchandise seizure.

The resulting tension drove different initiatives, among them, the creation of cooperatives to collectively stop the pressure and conflicts unleashed by these practices with state agents. One of the leaders stated that, when intercepting smuggled merchandise, police forces usually strip away goods from people under threat of seizing their vehicles. Afraid of losing them, workers handed over the merchandise, despite the fact that removal records were rarely issued. And, when tension increased, their vehicles were also seized, with no corresponding records.

Workers described these acts as ‘gang robberies,’ an expression used by the police and reclaimed by them to accuse police procedures. These unrecorded seizures are classified according to the means of expropriation of merchandise and because it was carried out with more than one person in charge of security operations. Similarly, as when ‘the system is down’ at customs (an imponderable with no one responsible, a social-technical error), some routine security proceedings in road controls were carried out, but as a simulation, since legal records rarely existed.

However, by informal means inside the formal networks that connect state agents, the interventions and people names were transferred to the federal examining magistrate of the city of Orán, an individual that in
2018 was tried for his involvement in illegal drug trade and protection markets (I won’t dwell further on this in this article). In any case, unrecorded seizures carried out by security forces were supported by the examining magistrate, who decided on the vehicles’ destiny and refunded payments.

These constant stripping actions gradually led ‘border workers’ to organize, resulting in innovative means to facilitate what the state considers contraband and they consider work, within the free framework for trade. Commonly known as the bagayeros cooperative, it was renamed by them Cooperative of Border Workers to remove the negative moral burden. Members of one of these cooperatives stated that around 6,000 heads of household lived from the border work that involved importation economies with unregulated customs.

According to them, the purpose was to reinstate the work conditions in the activities condemned as illicit. With this collective undertaking, which also showed individual entrepreneurship, it was sought to solve the informal and illegal work problems. This would start with the possibility to manage social work for everyone, and rescue those who had problematic effects due to the type of physical work performed (fractures, spine injury, tears), while bringing information to prevent future problems. They even aimed for women to work as textile workers, by redirecting the entire task when the desired free zone was created.

Under the line of reflection initiated by Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (2007) with the ‘globalization from scratch’ concept, Verónica Gago (2014) proposed the idea of ‘neoliberalism from scratch.’ This concept would allow understanding the popular creativity inspired in the assembling of needs and ambitions with the environment’s particular conditions and with institutional presence rooted in the interstitial stitches of law: Formal instances that informalize and vice versa, state agencies and illegalisms managing together.

The cooperative entrepreneurship emerging from the combination of the legal and illegal, especially when they are in conflict, can be seen as result of neoliberal politics at local scale. According to Gago (2014: 9), the neoliberalism in Latin America arises as a regime of existence of the social and a mode of political command regionally installed from dictatorships; it refers to a ‘combination of knowledges, technologies and practices that unfold a new type of rationality, conceived and driven only from above.’ In this sense, solutions emerge from conflicts when the temporary autonomous zone and the control and security simulations are in so much conflict as to compromise the trade activity; they are manifested as neoliberal undertakings from below, and can even appeal to the displacement in search of other transit spaces.

Figure 13: Bagayeros in gomones loading in Bermejo (Bolivia). Photo: Sandra Nicosia (2018).
Governing by fostering freedoms unfolded by the neoliberalism from the top promotes changes in the regime of global accumulation that lead to new configurations in the state-national institutions, and also expressed from below the ‘proliferation of ways of life that reorganize the ideas of freedom, calculation and obedience, projecting a new collective rationality and affectivity’ (p. 10). What is seen from the Argentinian geopolitical center as disorder and absence of state operates locally as a specific way of collaboration with formal and global economies, which is also sustained by ties of affection and loyalty. Thus, it is clear now how the scale operates in these behaviors and in the assessments resulting from them.

**Conflict and organization**

Aligned with the government agenda, some decisions were made in 2015 that aimed to eliminate _contraband_ by considering it a threat to the state and a way to facilitate drug trafficking. Among them, the implementation in April of 2019 of a simplified importation regime for border workers resulted in tensions and conflicts that triggered roadblocks from taxi drivers and border workers. The governmental measure implied that through an official record system, the so-called _bagayeros_ would become micro-importers for a monthly quota up to 500 dollars, and paying the corresponding taxes. This initiative had an impact in the city, altering the _bagayeros_ survival dynamics, since it added an 70% additional cost to the prices (Álvarez Chamale 2019). In addition, these informal workers supply formal markets, hence, one of the main problems is to circumscribe the phenomena of legality and illegality. In 2016, a conflict had already unfolded between border workers and the National Gendarmerie over the suspension of control at the 28 de Julio post, located on Route 50, which connects Bolivia with the city of Orán in Salta, where the merchandise deposits and the bus terminal for distribution are located.

The Gendarmerie checkpoint is located halfway between Aguas Blancas and Orán. The merchandise to Orán is usually detained there and in other cities when it exceeds the stipulated amount for purchases abroad, or the type of authorized merchandise to be entered into the country.

Vehicles heading to Orán or arriving to Aguas Blancas as shopping _tours_, were frequently intercepted by the National Gendarmerie and deprived of the merchandise, as described by a cooperative member. Tensions caused by these situations prompted the invention of a strategy for control evasion, which operates as an infrastructure of services, diverting merchandise along a path through a private property.

The known bypass stabilized the commercial activity in the zone once workers organized themselves to rent part of the property next to the control area. In 2018, everyone paid the equivalent of 0.33 cents per _lona_ loaded on their backs, which added would yield approximately 1,800 dollars to pay rent of the state lot, and would leave an _extra_ for the cooperative capitalization. This shows that the movement was already sufficient and profitable.

It’s estimated that at that time, around 1,500 and 2,000 vehicles passed daily by the 28 de Julio post of the National Gendarmerie, unloading their _lonas_ around one hundred meters before control. There, they transferred the cargo to small cars and walking people with bundles on their backs, supported from their heads by cervical force, to the inner lot known as ‘El bagayero.’ The amount paid by the crossing was then charged by the _pasador_ (border trade crosser), as payment for their service. While merchandise passed by this open crossing between sugar fields, a difficult passage involving the crossing of wire fences or eventual Gendarmerie control inside the property, the car in which it would be moved to Orán went empty through the control and, some 200 meters after ‘the 28,’ it was reloaded with merchandise that had passed the estate on human backs, after it had passed by the gendarmerie. _Lomear_ is used when referring to carrying something on the back. Animals have a ‘lomo’ (back) instead of an ‘espalda’ (human back). The expression situates the task performed at the animal level of human. It’s rough strength work, but also involves corporal technique, in many cases carried out by women (López 2019). By saying _lomear_ the least humanized aspect of work is revealed and gives rise to the grievance of the task lacking healthy and safe conditions.

Other controls could interrupt the merchandise course in routes, but this wasn’t the case for the majority. Generally, once the merchandise arrived to Orán, different crossing allowed the reaching of the destination and thus the supply of a variety of fairs, which mainly sell clothes and are distributed in different parts of the country.

A vehicle heading to the by pass is seen in the following photo.

The checkpoint was evaded as if everything was in order. This is about a control or security simulation, by the state, that addresses specific situations unable to be reversed with a simple interdiction. Interrupting this circuit sparked undesired and even worse situations than the disadvantages of those economies for the treasury.
In 2016, and being aware of these proceedings, the Ministry of National Security Administration considered it appropriate to suspend and dismantle the control facilities, creating a conflict that implied attacks and tensions for several days. There were confrontations that resulted in a forced access to the seized merchandise by the border workers for its withdrawal. The post was a necessary simulation. This was confirmed when the bagayeros demanded its reinstatement because its absence had a direct impact on local work, and since there was no control, avoiding the crossing was no longer necessary, an activity thousands of families lived on until then.

Figure 14: Transfer by route 50 Aguas Blancas/Orán (Argentina). Photo: Sandra Nicosia (2018).
Conclusion

Leaving suspended the categories produced by the state to think about these phenomena is necessary to understand the practices transitioning between the legal and the illegal, practices that, as a whole, describe the state beyond the theoretical postulates, which promote it as a mode of administration that when excellent should be transparent, especially since it is framed in democratic governments. First, because the legal is a universe created by the state based on legislation resulting from a formal and moral representation model that hardly responds to the generation of consensus (Abrams 2015). Second, because both legal and illegal

Figure 15: Aguas Blancas, July 28: National Gendarmerie control. Route 50 via Oran (Argentina). Photo: Sandra Nicosia (2018).
Universes are presented from the state perspective and don’t offer elements to analyze their own folds and unfolds or superpositions, nor even offer efficient elements to attend the realities based on the scales at stake. Recognizing the moral bases of the moral and hierarchical opposition between state/legality/ positive values and population/违法/ negative values helps us to understand, from an analytical perspective the described practices, not to judge them.

The merchandise crossing, considered as work by paseros or bagayeros, according to the state legislation is contraband. And there, the hiatus of context separates two worlds not separated by an international boundary.

But both worlds continue supposedly fragmented but also assembled in different actions, materials, paths, promises, debts, risks, and values. This is evident when it comes to actions not entirely framed by law that comprise liminal agencies, as in this case of the bagayero. They produce zones that win temporary autonomy, such as the non-authorized crossings, and can resort to certain nomadism to ensure their commercial initiatives when the situation worsens, as observed in the successive displacement of the border crossings meant for those practices. At the same time, they’re initiatives sustained in the collaboration with state institutions through political merchan: bribery; favors; but above all, through simulations lying in models and references that don’t longer really exist as they were imagined, as seen with the 28 de Julio Gendarmerie post. The complex plot that assembles state and market forms, is not susceptible to be reduced to the legal action from government management that threaten to eradicate contraband and drug trafficking, since life produced in different scales inextricably connects the legal and illegal in the places’ stories (Byrka-Szklarczyk 2012).

Initiatives taken by worker cooperatives show that they seek, on one hand, to improve the work conditions, protect people from injuries caused by cargo, facilitate physical effort through modernization of transportation, and generate resources to meet medical attention needs in a social works format and, mainly, promote the dream or illusion of becoming importers, like Bolivia, so those arriving to the border from different parts of the country buy directly in Argentina.

As a cooperative, they aim for the state legislation to be considerate regarding tax matters; As a business, they aim to transform Orán (including Aguas Blancas) into the biggest importation and distribution center in the nation, eliminating the current dependence and subordination existing in Bolivia, with a business vision that promises to bring proceeds and development for the place. It means in some way, bringing Bolivia inwards, since the conditions they aim to duplicate can’t be copied given the differences in both countries. That is, the purpose is to expand the autonomy zone inside the sovereign territory, vindicating the local specificities that are in explicit tension with the national laws, but that supply the country’s networks.

As I wrote in the ‘Possible States’ article (Renoldi 2015), I’d like to highlight that these descriptions that show converging of initiatives, contradictions, conflicts, and informal and illegal agreements comprise the state. We cannot keep thinking, I insist, that there is no state, that the state is deficient or a cover up for crimes; this is thinking from the parameters produced by the formal state definitions, this is succumbing to the state-centralist analysis. It is, simultaneously, the consecrated means to deny the ways of state presence in the borders, and omit the local experiences occurring in their own times and variable mobilities, even dissidents of the centralist vision on sovereignty, order, and law. In this sense, there would be nothing more equivocal than considering simulations as a false action. In this context, it is precise action with state presence.

The temporary autonomous zone created apart from the condemnatory state vision can include state key agents, operating unpinned from the institution-based functions while remaining in the simulation-producing model, making it operational. And that is what compels us to research outside the moral models that defend the normative performance of the State as an administration model. The nation is understood as a representation of community and democracies as expressions of their members’ representation and participation in the forms of government.

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Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

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