

## Democracy in a fragmented nation: Vignettes from the Congress of the Republic of Peru



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Le poulpe

Jetant son encre vers les cieux,  
Sçant le sang de ce qu'il aime  
Et le trouvant délicieux,  
Ce monstre inhumain, c'est moi-même.

Guillaume Apollinaire, 1911

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is (not) about representation. Here, I will not argue that representation does not work, nor that representation is impossible. On the contrary, this thesis argues that the problem of representation diverts our attention from the fundamental problems of Peruvian society: classism and authoritarianism.

Using an ethnographic approach, I address the current suppression of alternative political trajectories in Peru by analysing the performance of representatives in a very old "democratic" institution, in this case, the Congress of the Republic. My aim in this research is to counterpoise the practice of democratic politics with the underlying assumptions of democracy as a principle: the democratic political and the notion of equality.

Throughout this work, we will see a very blunt form of authoritarianism coming from the right and, at the same time, the fears and anxieties of the left, that make their representatives fall short in the contestation of the status quo, keeping themselves away from what they precisely should do: incite class struggle.

What we will find is a left rightly described by Dean as melancholic; a melancholia deriving from compromises and betrayals inextricable from its history and its accommodations with reality.

The conflict between left and right, as portrayed here, will prove to be a very superficial veneer, where the status quo and the political trajectory are carefully maintained, taking us to the conclusion that without having clear ways of asserting difference and dispute, without antagonisms, the presumption of equality cannot be exercised and the seat of power cannot be contested.

*Keywords:* Peru; democracy; equality; representation; political institutions

## CHAPTER I

### THE NEED TO QUESTION

#### 1.1. Introduction

When I was sixteen, I went to a demonstration against maids being forbidden to swim at the beach in front of a very exclusive seaside town in the outskirts of Lima, my hometown. I remember we were a bunch of high class private university students, mainly from the social sciences, hopeful that the world could turn into a better place. We were there dressed as maids, even though we were not, jumping into the water rebelliously, even though we could, contesting something that was not affecting us, while people continued with their holiday activities, looking amused, like we were a curious group performing some kind of avant-garde dance.

What I had not realized back then was that we were also authorized to protest, to express our discomfort. I could not spot one single maid in the crowd; they were probably afraid to complain and lose their jobs. I also think about the fact that at that time I did not even know where the maid working at my home, since I can remember, was from.

Reflecting back on the situation, I see clearly now that even if we are all equal by law, the reality is that, in the words of George Orwell, some of us are more equal than others.

Back then, in 2007, I was starting my Bachelors' in Anthropology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, one of the best private universities in the country. I took some introductory courses, met some fellow anthropology students and, after some time, I ended up studying Philosophy because I felt that I would not find the answers I was looking for at the Social Sciences Department. Still, in my life, many doors have opened because I went to that university. It did not seem to matter what I did my Bachelors' on or the grades I got; the alumni from this university are always well received. Many people in high positions in governmental organizations, especially when a reform or analysis is required, come from 'La Católica'.

In 2017, when I travelled back to Lima to start with my fieldwork after a long stay in the Netherlands, I was again confronted with the harshness of our social relations. After two months, I sent an email to my thesis supervisor saying this:

"I am doubting about the desire for equality that I address in my thesis' proposal. The truth is, and I am really sad to say this, but I feel that, in Peru, very few have a desire for equality and I think this is rooted in racism. The white people want to take

advantage of the 'cholos'<sup>1</sup>; the 'cholos' want to take advantage of the white. I do not feel any desire for equality; what I feel is a very strong resentment".

When I said the same thing to Eduardo Ballón, an older product of the same university as me, he said "white people want to take advantage of the cholos. The cholos...they do not want to take advantage of the white; they want to have the white people's place. This is part of the great complexity of this issue; an issue that has not been faced as a country because, among other things, we [Peruvians] have always had a terrible education system. That's it. And also because elite spaces like Católica, Pacífico, Cayetano Heredia [private, renowned, universities] are ivory towers and only some of the 'children' of these spaces manage to walk the 'real reality' and not the reality that these worlds create. And the State reproduces these encapsulated worlds"<sup>2</sup>.

These racial terms have come to signalize distinctions that transcend ethnic heritage. Belonging to one of these categories can also depend on social status, education level, economic opportunities and even on the way of dressing or presenting yourself. Despite the fact that we have had a lot of racial intermingling in Peru, we can still distinguish two very broad social categories: the people that have a maid and the people who do not. The group that has a maid will not always be racially white but will usually be considered white; the maid will never be racially white and will never be considered white.

People with maids can be politically conscious, have social and environmental concerns, go to protests to defend human rights, even animal rights; they can assume, in the words of Jodi Dean (2016 II), "an arsenal of identities: sex, race, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, religion, citizenship". However, there is one identity that is very much felt but rarely talked about: class identity. And this is why 'white' people –in class, not race– will almost never invite their maids to sit at their tables.

And the State, as Ballón said, reproduces these encapsulated worlds. Neoliberal capitalism 'markets' the victims, the minorities and, at the same time, obfuscates the existence of 'objective' class relations.

With the growing mistrust in institutions, many people today believe that they can only rely on themselves. They are sceptical of experts; they speak from their own experience and draw legitimacy from the identity that makes them who they are. They project attitudes onto others and imagine them as enemies and rivals. At the same time, social media relies on intense statements of personal feeling and these views are repeated in the growing number of "mainstream outlets that consider reporting on social media to be journalism" (Dean, 2016 II).

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<sup>1</sup> An often derogatory term for mixed-blood descendants in the Spanish Empire in Latin America or an indigenous adopting western customs. Derogatory or not, in Peru "cholo" is always the opposite of "white".

<sup>2</sup> In original Spanish: "Los blancos quieren hundir a los cholos. Los cholos... no quieren hundir a los blancos. Quieren su sitio. Esa es parte de la complejidad enorme de este asunto. Que nunca ha sido afrontado como país entre otras cosas porque siempre hemos tenido una educación de mierda. Es eso. Y porque los espacios de elite estilo la católica, la pacífico, la Cayetano Heredia, son torres de marfil, en donde sí pues, algunos de los hijos de esos espacios logran caminar por la realidad real y no por la realidad que esos mundos crean. El Estado reproduce esos mundos encapsulados".

In Peru, there is widely spread disconformity with the way things are going, but there is also a lack of emancipatory egalitarian political imaginaries to support this desire for change.

The idea that the personal is political, taken from second-wave feminism, has become twisted into the presumption that the political is personal. "Solidarity feels like a demand to sacrifice one's own best thing, yet again, and for nothing" (Dean, 2016 II). Even more, all this social media 'activism' helps to alleviate some of the guilt of the privileged, going from one scandal to the next without even touching the underlying structure that reproduces it all. In Peru, this social media activism is characterized by individualization, identity politics (but never related to class) and scepticism of institutions. Everyone complains but no one does anything about it, unless it affects them directly. In Jodi Dean's words, "The added bonus of this weaponized identity politics is how the privileged can use it against each other even as they leave communicative capitalism's basic structure intact" (Dean, 2016 II). As far as this continues, all social causes are just empty signifiers that act as stand-ins to cover up for the absence of political projects. In Peru, we can talk about corruption, we talk about gender violence, animal rights, climate change, but we do not talk about the structural factors that condemn the poor to stay poor.

Margaret Atwood (2018) states that this kind of 'vigilante justice' begins as a response to a lack of justice –in Peru's case, to the corruption in the governmental system– so people –in Peru's case, the privileged– take things into their own hands. We feel we cannot be heard through our institutions, so we use the internet. But what comes next? What remains after our political rants turn into silence?

Regarding political institutions, Peru has a very weak and volatile party system. Parties are built around individuals rather than political projects. Left wing parties have embraced individualism instead of emphasizing solidarity and collective strength. In practice, politicians only exist inside of the government or during campaigning to get in the government: parties have virtually no life outside of it. Because of this, and because of the enormous presence they have in the national media and, consequently, in dictating the national political agenda, I decided to focus my research on the Peruvian Congress.

The Peruvian Congress, as a result of the lack of political projects in political parties, acts, in some ways, as a crowd: because Congress' representatives only discuss specific contents or ostensible topics, "political dynamics, affective flows of contagion, suggestion, and imitation that exceed the conscious will of individuals [arise] as they form a provisional being out of heterogeneous elements" (Dean, 2016, p. 116). "This provisional being is mainly concerned with its own survival so, for this group to exist, the goal [in this case, of the Congress] must remain unattained" (Dean, 2016, p. 123). Bills are reviewed, discussed, approved, rejected, delayed, "representing" everyone's and no one's will. During debates, names are called, egos are busted, tears are shed, but the discussion ends and there is no party to pick up where the crowd left. "The left enthusiastically supports transformation, yet in the same breath they scoff at institutionalized practices strategically oriented toward the pursuit of radical political change" (Dean, 2016, p. 209). And, again, the country's encapsulated worlds remain the same; class struggles avoided at all costs.

It is easy to say that nations are too big, and within them there are too many and too diverse groups of people to achieve true representation. It is easy to say that representation nowadays is impossible. But “saying there is no representation in the state and just averting it is not constructive, but it turns our heads away from the increasingly authoritarian face of it” (Swyngedouw, 2000).

Despite the discouraging picture, I think it is important to note that there is a desire for change in society. We use mass personalized media; “the networks of mobile phones, Wi-Fi, social media, and mass distraction through which we circulate our feelings and opinions in ways that make us feel important, engaged, political”; and, may I add, people want to feel important, engaged and political. This is something, but it is definitely not enough. We are mostly cultivating our individual identities and what we need to start doing is building solidarity. “Taking the side of the oppressed means that we have to make sure the struggles of the oppressed appear as a side, a side in the class war that cuts through them all” (Dean, 2016 II).

Through this work, I want to address the current suppression of alternative political trajectories by analysing the performance of representatives in a very old “democratic” institution, in this case, the Congress of the Republic of Peru. Throughout this analysis, we will see a very blunt form of authoritarianism coming from the right and, at the same time, the fears and anxieties of the left, that make their representatives fall short in the contestation of the status quo, keeping themselves away from what they precisely should do: incite class struggle. This thesis is, in a way, also about me, and about the numbness surrounding my privileged, white, leftist class.

What we will find is a left rightly described by Dean as melancholic; a melancholia deriving from “the real existing compromises and betrayals inextricable from its history –its accommodations with reality, whether of nationalist war, capitalist encirclement, or so-called market demands” (Dean, 2011, p. 15). It is, after all, the left's responsibility to fight for equality, isn't it?

## **1.2. The Peruvian Context**

Going way back in Peruvian history, in 1824, Peru went from being a Spanish colony, were the “Republic of Spanish” governed and commanded the so called “Republic of Indians”, to being a free and independent republic, freed by Venezuelan, Chilean and Argentinian liberators. Back then, the liberation from the Spanish rule was not a very present issue in Peruvian society, but it rather came from the outside, as part of a bigger Latin-American independence movement. After this “forced emancipation”, the legal separation between Spanish and Indians disappeared, and they all became equal, or at least they did on paper. Peru had no local libertarian politicians, thus José de San Martín, our Argentinian liberator, was appointed Protector of Peru. In 1921, San Martín convoked the citizenship to free elections to establish a Congress. The elections were delayed and, in the end, only citizens from royalist provinces were allowed to vote, meaning the people who were against independence and who supported the Spanish monarchy. Shortly after the Congress was established, San Martín

resigned to his position and left Peru. In practice, the Spanish descendants took up just where the Spanish left off.

While our independence was still in the making, the newly founded Peruvian Congress named José de la Riva Agüero President of the Republic of Peru under pressure from the military still fighting against the realists. Many of the members of that first Congress resigned or fled the country because they did not tolerate such a coercive attitude towards them. When the conflict between the remaining Congress and Riva Agüero became unbearable, a new president was appointed, the Venezuelan general José de Sucre. Riva Agüero did not abide and ordered the dissolution of the Congress. Sucre summoned the Peruvian libertarian José Bernardo de Tagle as an interim president and they convened a new Congress who recognized him as the legitimate president. Riva Agüero started negotiating a truce with the Spanish only to prevail over the Congress and Tagle. Tagle, under Sucre's orders, was also negotiating with the realist troops and armistice. After some months of struggle, Riva Agüero was imprisoned and Bolívar, the liberator who came after San Martín left, took charge of the country, reducing Tagle to a decorative figure. The reasoning behind this was that the Congress wanted to appoint a president that would not be seen as a threat by the elite. Incredibly, this very old vignette from independence times, almost 200 years ago, can still shed some light on how political struggles are carried out in Peru nowadays. Even if Peruvian independence meant a political rupture with Spain, thanks to the successful intervention of the northern (Bolívar) and southern (San Martín) independentist armies, this did not ensue into the rupture of the colonial economic and social order (Bonilla & Spalding, 1972, p. 15).

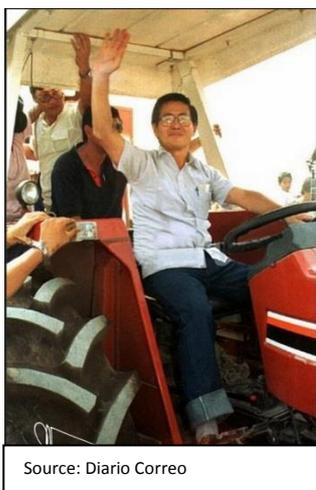
In 1845, 21 years after our independence, we had our first democratically elected president, Ramón Castilla, although these elections were done through electoral colleges and only the selected members of these colleges could vote. In 1854 slavery was abolished, but illiterate people could not vote and only elites had access to education. In 1899, electoral colleges disappeared and the voting process became direct. In 1931, we had our first parliamentary elections. In Peru the concept of "citizen" may have expanded with time, but somehow the status quo remained the same. During the XIX and XX centuries, we had an alternation of democratically elected presidents and dictatorships that maintained the same kind of social inequalities and oppression to different degrees. The tables have not turned, the majority, with its right to participate in politics, keeps being oppressed.

Despite all this, at least in juridical terms, equality continues to be a fundamental principle of society. The drama of the Peruvian Republic, as stated by Antonio Zapata (2016), was proclaiming equality and doing the exact opposite. He argues that at least the colonial regime was consequent with its legislation and, because of this, its principles were open to contestation. Other academics such as Alberto Vergara state that the republican promise never came through in Peru. A Republic, by definition, is liberty of the citizens by self-government, where the country is considered a public matter and not a private concern or property of the rulers (Vergara, 2013). However, the beginning of the Peruvian Republic was plagued with conflictive and turbulent relationships that were made invisible in the legislation, establishing the basis for what it was, and continues to be, a general distrust and strong

hypocrisy in our relations with our fellow citizens. In Peru, as in many countries around the world, some cultural identities are strongly associated with poverty, exclusion and suffering.

In the 1970s, there were some political parties that stood for increased democratic representation. There was a strong presence from regional movements and left wing parties with clear political agendas, and there was a general feeling that something would happen at any moment and things would change. What finally happened was different than what was expected.

Between 1980 and 2000, Peru experienced an internal armed conflict that proved to be both the most prolonged and violent in our republican history and, at the same time, it revealed the painful gaps and animosities lingering in Peruvian society.



Source: Diario Correo

The first two presidents dealing with this conflict, Fernando Belaúnde and Alan García, failed to confront the armed subversion and terrorism effectively within a democratic framework. The presidential elections of 1990, which occurred in the midst of this internal conflict and came after one decade of political neglect, facilitated the triumph of an independent, Alberto Fujimori, who quickly revealed his lack of interest in democracy. But this did not happen out of the blue. When Fujimori appeared, society handed its liberty to him. In the second round of elections, running against Mario Vargas Llosa –the now famous Nobel prize-winning author who defended the values of the coastal 'white' elite–, even the left-wing parties supported this outsider, an engineer riding a tractor coming to save us.

After two years of government, Fujimori dissolved the Congress of the Republic, changed the constitution of the country and reformed the judiciary powers. The separation of powers became blurred and, back then, there was surprisingly little criticism. As Alberto Vergara puts it, we, as a national community, renounced precisely to that which defines republican liberty: self-government (Vergara, 2013). Fujimori did not build a political project or stable organization to support him and, in order to address the large problems that he inherited, he placed a group of technocrats in charge of economic issues who introduced the neoliberal policies that Vargas Llosa advocated in the first place, and then adopted the military's counter-subversive strategy against 'the terrorists'.

In 1995, shortly after the beginning of Fujimori's second term, his supporters changed the Peruvian Constitution in order to allow him to run for another term in 2000. In 1999, Fujimori announced that he would run for a third term. The elections were plagued with irregularities and, after he assumed the presidency of the country for the third time, they were almost daily demonstrations against his regime in front of the government palace. On September 14th 2000, Canal N, a nation-wide TV station, broadcasted footage showing Vladimiro Montesinos, Fujimori's closest advisor, bribing opposition congressman Alberto Kouri for defecting to Fujimori's party. After this, Fujimori's support collapsed. A few days later he announced that he would call new elections, in which he would not participate. On November 13th, Fujimori

left Peru for a visit to Brunei to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, left for Tokyo and sent his resignation letter to the Peruvian presidency via fax. He gained Japanese citizenship and stayed in Japan five years, until he went to Chile in 2005, where he was detained and then extradited to Peru two years later to face trial.

In 2001, after the fall of president Alberto Fujimori, interim president Valentín Paniagua created a commission to examine the abuses committed during the 1980s and 1990s, when Peru was plagued by the worst political violence in the history of the Republic. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (in Spanish: Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (CVR)) stated in its final report that there was a strong relation between poverty and social exclusion and the probabilities of being a victim of violence in those times. 40% of the dead and missing persons resulting of this conflict were concentrated in Ayacucho, the third poorest department of the country, and one that represents only 2% of the country's population. Peasants were the main group affected by violence inflicted both by the terrorist group The Shining Path (in Spanish: Sendero Luminoso) and the Peruvian Army instructed by President Alberto Fujimori. Of the total victims reported, 79% lived in rural areas and 56% were engaged in farming or livestock activities. The tragedy suffered by the rural population, both in the Andean and jungle regions, Quechua and Ashaninka, the peasant, poor and poorly educated, was not felt as its own by the rest of the country. This demonstrates, in the CVR's judgment, the veiled racism and scornful attitudes that persist in Peruvian society almost two centuries after its birth as a Republic (CVR, 2017). Peru's tragic history reveals, as many others do, that no matter who is ruling, no matter who is fighting, the victims are always the same.

In the 2006's elections, in the middle of Fujimori's extradition process, a new fujimorist party was already there; "Alianza por el Futuro" [Alliance for the Future], reborn from still warm ashes. Martha Chavez, one of Fujimori's closest followers, was the presidential candidate of fujimorism for these elections, reaching a not negligible 10%. Keiko Fujimori, Fujimori's daughter, got a seat in the Congress, being the most voted Member of Congress. Alberto Fujimori was sentenced to six years of prison in 2007 for authority abuse and then, in 2009, sentenced to 25 years of prison for crimes against humanity.

Since Fujimori's government, populism and neoliberalism have coexisted in Peru in a very counterintuitively way, managing to capture the political support of the working classes. Every president we have had since then has not defended neoliberalism openly in campaign but always applied these kind of measures once in power. This says much about the subservience of Peruvian national politics to larger global economic interests. After Fujimori's government, and after the trauma that the conflict between the State and The Shining Path meant for the country, left wing parties and movements became virtually inoperative.

In 2011, when Keiko Fujimori, Alberto's daughter and political heir, was asked whether she was a candidate of the extreme right in an interview during her presidential campaign. She replied the following:

"They are trying to pin me down as a right wing candidate, but if it was like that I would not have the support of the poorest of the country. We will maintain an open economic policy that welcomes foreign investment, but that does not mean that we

are a liberal party. No. Our policy and social programmes are very serious and will arrive to the poorest of the country. That is why we have more support than nationalism [left wing party] in the humblest sectors of society. Stating that Keiko Fujimori is right wing is a lie" (Alonso, 2010).

The interview continues with Keiko explaining why she supports the death penalty.

"Authoritarianism, oligarchy, aristocracy, representative democracy, parliamentary democracy –none of these forms worries too much about the disconnect between government and people" (Dean, 2011, p. 34). But the disconnect, the gap, should matter for left wing parties. In practice, left wing governments after Fujimori, such as Humala's government (2011-2016), have followed exactly the same neoliberal model; left wing candidates after Fujimori have participated in the same kind of populist politics. The disconnect between the government and the people is assumed by both sides of the political spectrum. The conflict between left and right is a very superficial veneer, where the status quo and the political trajectory are carefully maintained. Without having clear ways of asserting difference and dispute, without antagonisms, the presumption of equality cannot be exercised and the seat of power cannot be contested. As Chantal Mouffe would argue, we must always allow for the possibility that conflict may appear and to provide an arena where differences can be confronted. The democratic process should enable that arena (2005).

Despite all the "formal" and institutional democratic developments we have had in Peru since the creation of the Republic, it has proved impossible to build democratic political projects for our nation as a result of the damaged reputation of political parties and the loss of confidence in political organizations product of our history.

Peru is the country with the highest average of electoral volatility for the period 1978-2002, with a rate 51.9% higher than all the other countries of the region (López Jiménez, 2016). This situation is accompanied by a lack of partisanship: individualism, political fragmentation and the absence of clear political projects results in high mobility of politicians from party to party. As no other country in Latin America, Peruvian political parties appear and disappear one after the other, and the absence of political projects still is taking its toll on the citizens. In Mouffe's terms; "we's" and "them's" are being constituted and dissolved permanently (Mouffe, 2005).

Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, Peru's President at the time of this research, supported the campaign of Acción Popular (centre right) in 1966 and 1980; then supported Peru Posible (centre) in 2001 (both times obtaining positions in Ministries or state organisms after these parties won the elections) and, in 2011, he ran for president with "Alianza por el Gran Cambio", a coalition party that joined two centre right, one evangelical right and a centre left party with no ideology whatsoever. Following their electoral defeat, the coalition dissolved.

After this, Kuczynski finally created his own right wing political party, called "Peruanos por el Cambio (sic)" and abbreviated as "PPK", the same as Kuczynski's own initials. PPK's political manifesto is plagued by high-sounding words and expressions such as "economic development", "political consolidation", "equity", "solidarity", "modernization", "individual freedom", "human rights", "freedom of expression and press", "unrestricted respect to our

democratic institutions", "guarding of our constitutional norms" (PPK, 2016). In practice, he found popular support by having a dancing guinea pig as a mascot. He, like almost every candidate in Peru, was getting votes by dancing, making up catchy songs and slogans and hugging babies. In the presidential elections, he won over Keiko Fujimori by a difference of 0.24% of the votes. On account of his training, and probably his skin colour, the local and international press augured it to be a "luxury government". Because the subservience of our national interests to the larger global economy was not enough, this time we were lucky enough to get an 'almost' American president<sup>3</sup>.

For the parliamentary elections, Fuerza Popular, Fujimori's party, won by a landslide, obtaining 73 out of 130 seats. Peruanos Por el Kambio got 18 seats, and Frente Amplio, the left wing coalition, got 20. From this point, it was already a fact that governability would be difficult.

To understand what this meant, it is worth mentioning that Peru has a presidential-parliamentary hybrid that is quite unique. Presidential regimes usually have full control over appointment and dismissal of ministers. In Peru's case, however, the executive power and the Congress coexist for five years and, during that time, the Congress needs to approve the Ministerial Cabinet and can censor one minister or the whole cabinet at any point in time.

After one year of government, the executive power was completely blocked by the legislative power. Even with its maximum leader in prison, fujimorism under the leadership of Keiko Fujimori was acting at the time like a very disciplined bloc. The Congress' representatives of Fuerza Popular –the current name of the fujimorist party– were not representing their voters, they were not expressing their own opinions either; they were following orders of the head of the party, who was making decisions based on what clearly was anger and resentment. The executive power, on the other hand, composed of technicians more than politicians, did not know how to deal with the situation and this resulted in the exacerbation of social conflicts in the country. The situation was repeating itself again: technocrats in charge of economic issues and a complete lack of political projects. The governing party and its opposition faced each other without having a clear idea of what political stand they have.

To summarise this section, and to keep in mind for the next chapters, I want to stress that, first, Peruvian politics has always had a strong dependence of foreign interest; even since independence times. Second, there are high levels of authoritarianism and the population has a very high tolerance for it; many citizens even have a taste for it, asking for a "gobierno de mano dura" [heavy-handed government]. Third, the divisions in race, class and geography are both negated and performed in actual politics, and they lead to the perpetuation of authoritarianism.

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<sup>3</sup> As a teenager, Kuczynski left to study in England, then Switzerland and, finally, in the US, where we lived and worked for many years. In 2015, due to pressure from the press, he resigned to his American citizenship to improve his chances of being elected.

### **1.3. The theory behind the research: Representative democracy as a smokescreen**

To be clear about what we are talking about, we should consider some concepts first, starting with that of democracy. Democracy, from the Greek δημοκρατία, means literally "the rule of people". It is a system of government as old as western civilization, and its critics are as old as western civilization as well. I agree with Dean in stating that "if democracy means rule by the many, democracy is impossible" (Dean, 2016, p. 172)

With time, democracy has come to constitute an almost fixed set of political institutions (parliaments, governments, juries) and a set of political procedures (such as elections, referendums, etcetera) which give legitimacy to its practices. This constitutes the institutionalized form, i.e. the politics of democracy. But what is the essence of modern democracy?

#### **1.3.1. Politics/ the political**

My aim in this research is to counterpoise the practice of democratic politics with the underlying assumptions of democracy as a principle: the democratic political and the notion of equality. "The democratic political expresses the contingent presumption of equality of each and every one qua speaking —and hence political— beings" (Swyngedouw, 2009).

But what is the difference between 'politics' and 'the political'? Some theorists, following Jürgen Habermas, consider that the political is about reaching consensus. Some follow Hannah Arendt in seeing the political as a space of freedom and public deliberation. Others, such as Jacques Rancière and Chantal Mouffe, see the political as a space of power, conflict and antagonism. I understand the political following the latter, meaning that, for me, the political is about division and disagreement.

The distinction between politics and the political, according to Mouffe, is the following: "by 'the political' I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political (Mouffe, 2005, p. 17).

Politics is always specific, particular and 'local', while the political goes further: the political is the arena where, when conflict appears, differences can be confronted. This is built on the philosophical distinction between ontics and ontology; i.e. concrete, specific realities vs. deeper underlying structures of reality.

#### **1.3.2. The liberal democracy paradox**

According to Mouffe (2000), modern democracy as a political form results from the articulation between two different traditions: democracy and its core values —equality, identity between governing and governed and popular sovereignty—, and liberalism —with its emphasis

in the rule of law, individual liberty and human rights. There is no necessary relation between these two distinct traditions; liberal democracy is the result from a contingent historical articulation. This is what she calls "the democratic paradox", because these two logics are incompatible at their core and they cannot be perfectly reconciled; the tension can only be temporarily stabilized through negotiations between political forces.

Mouffe continues by saying that "the dominant tendency today consists in envisaging democracy in such a way that it is almost exclusively identified with the *Rechtsstaat* [rule of law] and the defence of human rights, leaving aside the element of popular sovereignty, which is deemed to be obsolete. This has created a 'democratic deficit' which, given the central role played by the idea of popular sovereignty in the democratic imaginary, can have very dangerous effects on the allegiance to democratic institutions" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 4).

In countries such as Peru, where there were no popular democratic uprisings, the idea of equality is even further removed from our collective imaginary, and this is all the more dangerous regarding our acceptance of what can come out of "democratic" institutions. The difficulty for counter-hegemonic projects to express themselves in the political sphere is a real problem. In the past there were political parties that contested the existing hegemonic bloc, but after Fujimori's government and the trauma following the internal war, being left wing turned to be extremely difficult. The result was a 'post-politics' based on the de-legitimization of any attempt to construct a 'counter-hegemonic' bloc.

Because of this, it is of the outmost importance to question the "democracy" part in "liberal democracy". We need to guarantee, as Mouffe asserts, the establishment of a set of institutions through which the hegemonic view can be limited and contested.

Every political order is based on some form of exclusion: A political trajectory is selected and, as a consequence, the other possibilities are repressed. However, it should be possible to reactivate these alternatives. Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, i.e. practices which attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony (Mouffe, 2005).

These practices, which attempt to disarticulate the hegemonic order, are becoming more and more scarce in a global scale. In the words of Saramago & Jacob, "we live in an era where we can discuss everything. With one exception: Democracy. She is there, an acquired dogma. Don't touch, like a museum display. Elections have become the representation of an absurd comedy, shameful, where the participation of the citizen is very weak, and in which the governments represent the political commissionaires of economic power" (Swyngedouw, 2011).

### **1.3.3. Equality as the 'impossible' kernel of democracy**

For the notion of equality, I follow Rancière (2017) in saying that equality is "a capacity through which individuals act as the holders of a common power, a power belonging to anyone. This capacity itself is not a given whose possession can be checked. It must be

presupposed as a principle of action but it is only verified by action itself". This means that equality is a capacity that needs to be enacted to be true; it breaks what Rancière calls "the sensible", i.e. the existing order of things.

Equality is not something that can be reached by strategic action or historical evolution; it is a point of departure. Following Rancière, Todd May poses the following questions; "How might we think about equality in a non-hierarchical fashion? How might equality be conceived with some degree of equality? The problem with the presupposition of liberalism is that, by distributing equality, liberals place most people at the receiving end of the political operation. There are those who distribute equality and those who receive it. Once you start with that assumption, the hierarchy is already in place. It's too late to return to equality. Equality, instead of being the result of a political process, must be conceived as the pre-supposition of those who act. It must be the expression of political actors rather than the possession of a political hierarchy" (May, 2009, p. 4).

#### **1.3.4. The sham of representation**

Democracy for Rancière and Mouffe is about disruption, conflict, the breaking of the sensible. Mouffe, following Lefort, argues that a vivid democracy should institutionalize this impossibility of filling the void of power, therefore representation and elections in modern democracy are a sham. In the "Democratic Paradox", she says that "for some people, the main difference with ancient democracy lies in the fact that in larger and more complex societies, direct forms of democratic rule are no longer possible; it is for that reason that modern democracy has to be representative. Others, like Claude Lefort, insist on the symbolic transformation which made possible the advent of modern democracy: 'the dissolution of the markets of certainty'. In his view, modern democratic society is a society in which power, law and knowledge experience a radical indeterminacy". And this indeterminacy needs to be made evident, leaving the seat of power open for contestation and making evident that whoever occupies it, does so only temporarily. This indeterminacy, Mouffe continues, "is the consequence of the 'democratic revolution', which led to the disappearance of a power that was embodied in the person of the prince and tied to a transcendental authority. A new kind of institution of the social was thereby inaugurated in which power became 'an empty place'. I think it is vital to stress, as Lefort does, the emergence of a new symbolic framework and the modern impossibility of providing a final guarantee, a definite legitimation" (2000, p. 2).

No social actor can attribute to himself the representation of the totality; no 'representative' Congress can think they can give legitimacy and justify the continuity of an uncontested hegemonic model of government. "Democracy requires that the purely constructed nature of social relations finds its complement in the purely pragmatic grounds of the claims to power legitimacy. This implies that there is no unbridgeable gap between power and legitimacy" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 100).

Because of this, and because we should ask ourselves, for the sake of democratic politics, how can we constitute a form of power which is compatible with democratic values (the 'democracy' in 'liberal democracy'), I will analyse the concept of representation as part of the

ontics of democracy. In Peru, as in many countries, we need to begin by addressing the lack of political parties that are able to articulate a counter-hegemonic project.

"While elections certainly exist and can change governments, public electoral debate is a tightly controlled spectacle, managed by rival teams of professional experts in the techniques of persuasion, and considering a small range of issues selected by those teams. The mass of citizens plays a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part, responding only to the signals given them. Behind the spectacle of the electoral game, politics is really shaped in private by interaction between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business interests" (Crouch, 2004, p. 4). Representation is, paradoxically, causing the exclusion of the majority.

For Rancière, the problem of democracy is not, as it is for Habermas, about the number of people who can reach consensus, but about the capacity to invent new forms of collective enactment of this equality. Democracy is very present in peoples' discourse because the media and the politicians have made it so present in our imaginary. Some argue, and I include myself in them, that it has been for quite some time an empty signifier, that stands for the expansion of neoliberal capitalism. Democracy should refer us to equality. However, given the conditions, the possibilities to enact equality and break through the status quo are very rare. "The lack of understanding of 'the political' in its ontological dimension is at the origin of our current incapacity to think in a political way (...) What is a stake in the discussion about the nature of 'the political' is the very future of democracy" (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 8-9).

The idea behind this work is the hypothesis that words such as democracy, equality and representation have become empty signifiers that render invisible the difference, the hierarchies, the oppression, the injustice; and this fiction avoids the expression of disagreement, i.e. the political, and end up being used for the opposite of what they promise: they turn out to be a smokescreen for authoritarian practices. The issue I want to tackle is how this is done.

Considering this, I will examine the politics of democracy as portrayed in the Peruvian Congress motivated by the current suppression of possibilities for true, meaningful political debate.

#### **1.4. The entry point: The Congress of the Republic of Peru**

"The Congress has become the lawyer's paradise. There is a law, a law to implement an article of this same law, and so on. So a great amount of these annoying elements come together in a place where there is a lack of political discourse, meaning that there is no narrative to captivate the people. What exists in the Congress is fugacity; the instant; the immediate. No one wants to think about developing a political narrative. All this young people make the same mistakes that my generation did: looking outside for a narrative. Back then, the left wing parties looked at China, Cuba or Russia, and some fools like me thought that Mariátegui was a national bible and we tried to make narratives from his writings. In more recent times, they looked at Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa and, when everything failed, they look at Podemos. What they don't realize is that the ideologists of Podemos are the ones

that made the political constitutions of these three countries [Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela] with knowledge coming from their PhDs in Political Science with very entertaining and likable British men that know nothing about Latin America. This has to do with mental laziness and insecurities, I guess. And with the religious nature of this country [Peru] and the religious mind-set that gives them the false idea that there is one truth...and if there is one truth then we are in trouble because I have the truth and you do not. I have the feeling that we are in the exhaustion process of these palliatives...but it is still going to take a long time, right?"

- Eduardo Ballón, Anthropologist and former left-wing party member

The Congress is a very old and classical democratic institution that has as its principle of action the defence of democracy. At the same time, it is the best place to understand the flaws of the current ideology, that swears by liberal democracy.

Even if, as we previously said, democratic institutions are not effective representation mechanisms, they are doing something and, whatever it is that they are doing, it is worth studying. My aim is that this analysis, were we will observe the reproduction of the oppression in our society and the normalization of injustice and inequality, serves as an entry point to a bigger discussion: the discussion of the viability of our governmental model and the lack of inventiveness of the Peruvian left to articulate a national, counter-hegemonic project. If we cannot find democratic practices in the quintessential institution of representative democracies, then something is wrong, and we should not avert our attention from that.

In the Peruvian Congress, justice and equality are trivialized and political debate is a shameful show. The Members of Congress' political positions are based in the order of the day rather than being related to a broader political project.

The fractiousness, competition and opportunism in the political game played in the Congress belongs to the ontic: the struggle for political power and capital. However, the ontological question is whether the political is completely foreclosed by the politics. The political is about keeping open a void that ensures the possibility of radical division. Yet, in the Congress I did not find any clear-cut antagonistic positions. Coming up with these alternatives should be the task of the leftist representatives, but the left, instead of thinking about class and party, just draws upon palliatives imported from foreign lands, turning its head towards everyday life and individual rights and particularities. Collectivity, as stated by Dean (2016), has become undesirable because it is suspected of excluding possibilities, effacing difference and enforcing discipline, which goes against the highly predominant 'liberal' character of 'liberal democracy'. The hard work of creating a disciplined party is being neglected by the Peruvian left, while they get more and more involved in petty struggles and competition.

## **1.5. Defining the questions**

While writing my research proposal, I initially decided to focus on the issue of legitimacy. Inspired by James Ferguson's question in *The Anti-Politics Machine*, I wanted to consider the following question: "What does the idea of political legitimacy actually do, even behind the

backs of political representatives?". To deepen in this issue, I thought of the following sub-questions: (1) How is the idea of legitimacy constructed by a Member of the Congress? (2) How is the idea of legitimacy reflected in a Member of Congress' practices?

However, during my fieldwork, things got complicated. I arrived and I had the privilege of seeing the internal workings of such a secretive institution as the Congress. During the three and a half months I was there, the Congress tried to impeach the President in December in relation to a corruption scandal, then the President exchanged votes for the freedom of Alberto Fujimori to prevent his impeachment and, finally, Alberto Fujimori was released from jail on Christmas Eve. Fuerza Popular, Fujimori's Party, split in two factions because of a fight between Fujimori's two children: Keiko, the leader of the party, and Kenji, a Member of Congress. After this, it became evident that the division of powers in the Peruvian State was very shallow.

In the polls, the approval of the Congress was dropping since the beginning of the government and, with the so called political crisis that unleashed in December 2017, numbers started dropping even more dramatically.

		2016					2017											2018			
		Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Congress of the Republic	Approval	46	46	38	37	32	29	29	30	30	29	28	23	23	25	26	26	26	23	21	14
	Disapproval								57	60	62	59	68	66	64	65	66	69	67	72	77

Source: Own elaboration from Ipsos' data.

The legitimacy given by elections was clearly not enough to give legitimacy to the things the government was doing. Before my arrival in Lima, when I talked about representation and legitimacy to Marisa Glave, the Member of Congress that granted me access to the institution, she told me this: "The disconnection is real. Even in my case. The rhythm that we have at the Congress does not let you solve things with a 'consultation'. Most of it is done by intuition and personal opinion, not even as a political party. And that is where many get lost. I try to have defined ideas and be clear about how far I can go. Then stop and look for collective validation. But it is not easy to establish the limits".

During my fieldwork, legitimacy was not really a very present topic in the discussion. When I first asked about legitimacy and representation, an advisor at the Congress told me that Members of Congress have once a month a thing called "representation week", where all the meetings at the Congress are suspended and they are supposed to go meet with some of the people they represent. However, these visits do not work at all as an accountability mechanism. In practice, it does not matter if the population continues to accept the authorities they have after the elections; the "legitimacy" given by elections diverts debate over Congress' rulings, and, as a consequence, after the elections, the damage is already done: people will complain but settle for what they have.

With all of this going on, and with the realization that not even Members of Congress believed in legitimacy, it was very difficult for me to focus on my original research question. With all that was going on, it also became really difficult for me to believe in representation.

When I started with fieldwork, and given the broadness of my research questions, many people tried to tell me what to focus my research on. Marisa Glave tried to dissuade me of focusing my research on her and her team, telling me that there were many other more interesting cases; that she was fed up with the Congress; that she was about to give up.

One of her research assistants, an anthropologist, suggested me to focus on one bill of law and write a story about the process it went through: from the writing, through the commission, to the discussion and voting at the plenary meeting of the Congress.

A fellow social sciences researcher proposed that I study a political party, but not a left-wing one as the one I was working with, but one older and more stable, such as Christian Democracy.

Many people outside the Congress asked me why, why in hell, I had decided to focus my research in the Congress of the Republic. My mother was convinced that I was doing it to finally destroy my relationship with my home country and never go back. The government was having what many considered the worst Congress in a very long time. I was getting too much information all at the same time, all confusing, all discouraging, all affecting me very personally because after all, it is my home country we are talking about.

What I was struggling with, and I think this is a personal de-formation due to my philosophical background, was choosing the right level to approach the situation. All these options people kept suggesting to me seemed as lesser problems inside of a very frightening big picture that none of them was willing to see.

Because of this, I continued to focus on very broad questions and very basic concepts, one could say almost worn out ones, precisely because of how worn out they are. Maybe Congress' representatives do not believe in legitimacy, but they do believe in liberal democracy; we all do. But why?

I decided to focus on the analysis of representative democracy's institution par excellence, the Congress, in order to address democracy's founding concept: equality. After this, I will address the concept of representation, to show how the 'empty' seat of power is not really empty: presidents come and go, representatives change every five years, but the same hegemonic model is maintained. This is how I came to the following research question:

#### **General research question**

What does the Congress of the Republic of Peru actually do, even behind the backs of political representatives?

To deepen in this issue, I pose the following **sub-questions**:

How does the Peruvian Congress as an institution (the ontics of democracy) shape political representatives?

Can equality (the ontological) be enacted through an institution like the Peruvian Congress (the ontics)?

How is the fiction of representation played in the Peruvian Congress?

These questions, one might add, are not exclusive to a country such as Peru, and given the current deficit of legitimation worldwide, the same questions could be posed in many other countries.

## **1.6. Methodology**

For this research, I decided to first examine the ontics of democracy through the Peruvian Congress. I considered that the best way to do this was by conducting an ethnography.

I conducted fieldwork within the Congress between the 9<sup>th</sup> of October of 2017 and the 16<sup>th</sup> of January of 2018. I got access through one congresswoman in particular, Marisa Glave. She was part of Frente Amplio, the left-wing coalition for the time being and, after irreconcilable differences, she and some others former members of Frente Amplio created "Nuevo Peru". I chose her because she is part from the most powerful left wing group in Peru: the white, highly educated people from Lima's Católica University. This group of people represent, in a way, the inequality and limits of 'leftist' representation in Peru. They defend human rights but they do not talk about class<sup>4</sup>; they are against fujimorism but they do not really have a political project of their own; they defend abstract concepts but are immersed in the same class dynamics as everyone else and will never question their own privilege.

During my fieldwork, I accompanied her to many meetings, both public and private, inside and outside the congress, and also became part of her work team. I laughed with them, I drank with them and I also I got frustrated with them and about them. I know I only got access to this very private environment because I had a contact and I am very grateful to Marisa for this. I found her particularly interesting because she has a background very similar to mine: she grew up in the same city as me, we went to the same university and studied social sciences. She, however, always had a public political side: she was part of the student council at her school, at the university and then at the city council. I assumed we would share the same values, and it seemed to me (and still does) that she was one of the few members of the current Congress who took her job seriously. I wanted to observe if, even with all of her good intentions, the structural inequalities that the Congress reproduces were not only being maintained but also reinforced through her.

After reviewing the physical and factual experience I had in this particular democratic institution, I will attempt to clarify its ideological basis by raising ontological questions about what underpins 'representative democracy': the idea of equality, to then go back to the idea of representation as a fiction.

Political science usually deals with the empirical field of politics, i.e. the ontics, and philosophers usually enquire about the essence of the political, i.e. the ontological. Because I

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<sup>4</sup> The conceptualization of class that I use is not an economic one, but that it refers to life/career possibilities shaped by factors such as social background, race, school, and lifestyle characteristics.

am somewhere in the middle of those fields given the academic path I have pursued, I will try to see both sides of the coin, thanks to the deepness that the ethnographic method allows.

Regarding research ethics, I informed Marisa and everyone in her team I would be conducting research while working with them and that they would unavoidably end up in my notes because, even if my aim was to observe the Congress as a whole, they were my focal point and the people I could see from a closer distance. Every time I recorded a conversation, I informed them I was doing it. This being said, I also need to say that some of my field notes' contents came from informal conversations during lunches, car rides and drinks. Some of the things I observed were the product of rage or happiness attacks, frustration, tiredness or of a degraded moral compass.

I thought long and hard about whether I should keep the characters of these chronicles anonymous. I came to the conclusion that this work would really suffer from it if I did. Understanding political party inter and trans dynamics as well as the roles of different people inside of a politician's office is hard enough as it is and, even if I did change the names, everyone would still be perfectly recognizable.

The result of this work and the tales told in here are the result of a very particular environment, place and time. I think it is important not to judge the individuals of this stories or turn this into yet another personal witch hunt; we already have too many of those. Instead, we need to try and see a bigger picture, and try to see the ideas that underlie what is going on: the things that guarantee the eternal return of the same: Inequality, oppression and a lack of a space for true political debate.

## **1.7. Structure of this document**

In this introductory chapter, I explained the Peruvian context and current political situation. I also presented my theoretical framework, research questions and methodology.

The second chapter will be dedicated to the ontics of democracy, meaning, in this case, the Congress of the Republic as a democratic institution. There I will try to make a sketch of its internal workings and how its structure shapes political representatives. My aim in this chapter is to answer the first research sub-question: How does the Peruvian Congress as an institution (the ontics of democracy) shape political representatives? What I found was the reproduction of the very hierarchical social structure present in Peruvian society, reinforcing the status quo, causing the suture of the political and avoiding the rising of true disagreement.

The third chapter will be dedicated to answer the ontological question: Can equality (the ontological) be enacted through an institution like the Peruvian Congress (the ontics)? For this chapter, I picked two cases related to violence against women, but the discussion in the Congress did not revolve about gender violence: It went to a discussion about censorship and the death penalty. With this, I want to show how when equality's transgression happens in the

Congress, it is trivialized and turned into a show where citizens' struggles are just used as political tools.

In the fourth chapter, my aim is to answer the last research sub-question: How is the fiction of representation played in the Peruvian Congress? Here, I will talk about the impeachment process and the subsequent political crisis that came not from the citizenship, but from the Congress. When the impeachment failed, the representatives turned to the citizenship, shifting responsibilities. When the citizenship failed to deliver, the Congress started a new impeachment process. I want to show here how citizens are seen and kept as "underage"; as people who cannot make their own choices.

The fifth and last chapter presents a final discussion of the theory and the final conclusions. The reproduction of the oppression in our society and the normalization of injustice and inequality observed in the Congress raise important questions: the discussion of the viability of our governmental model, the limitations of the left and the current suture and colonization of the political.

## CHAPTER II

### RIDING THE WHITE ELEPHANT: DEMOCRACY AS AN INSTITUTION

#### 2.1. Introduction

As stated in the first chapter, I will now proceed to analyse the ontics of democracy; in this case, the Congress as an institution and its associated political procedures. Institutions are the result of sedimented social practices that establish themselves as an order. And, as already stated in the previous chapter, every order is political and based on some form of exclusion (Mouffe, 2005). Counter hegemonic practices should be able to challenge the hegemonic order. However, in Peru, we have not seen true counter hegemonic practices appear in a really long time. What I want to analyse in this chapter is how the Congress as an institution shapes representatives in order to perpetuate the established order and its particular structure of power relations and how this is availed by both right and left sides of the political spectrum.

In Swyngedouw's words, "It is through politics that society comes into being in the form of a functioning, a socio-spatial distribution and allocation of people, things, and activities, quilted through forms of institutionalization, modes of representation of the social order, and routinized or ritualised practices of encounter, relating and exercising power. But it is also this procedure that sutures or colonizes the space of the political, and through this, disavows the political origins of politics" (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 373).

What I found in my research was that the Congress reproduces the very hierarchical social structure present in Peruvian society, reinforcing the status quo and suppressing the emergence of the political, i.e. the expression of disagreement. Even if political parties do not have clear political projects, some of the new Members of Congress can arrive with a will for change. However, the Congress will most likely trap them in a world of privilege, shielding them from the social reality of the country and, subsequently, causing the suture of the political and avoiding the rising of true disagreement.

#### 2.2. Getting to know the Congress

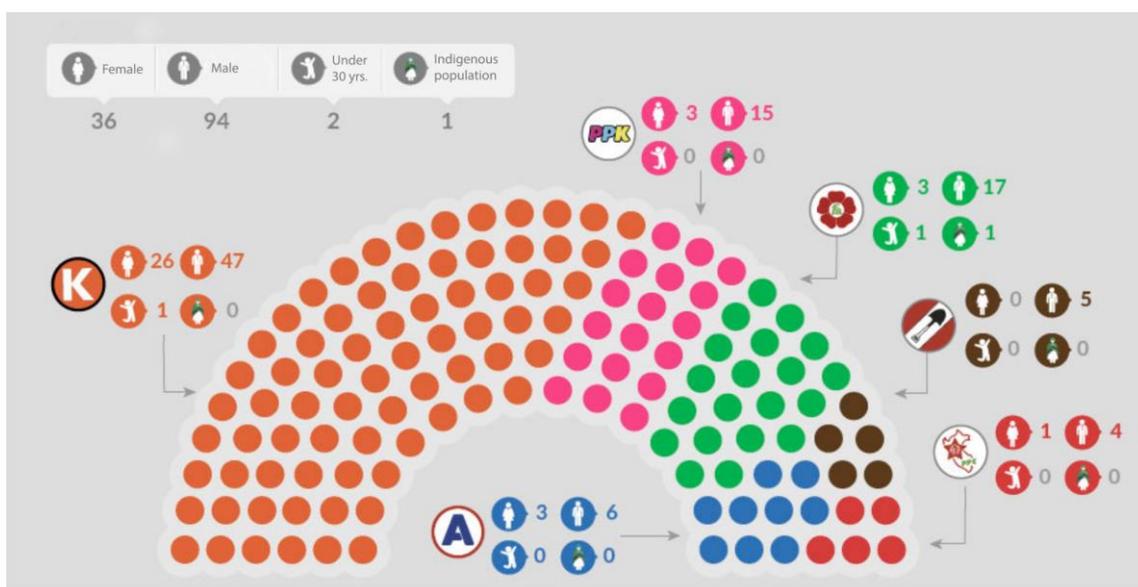
The Peruvian Congress was founded in 1822 and, from 1924, it housed two chambers: one of senators and one for congressmen. In 1992, Fujimori dissolved the Congress in order to neutralize the opposition to his dictatorial regime. After the presidential and parliamentary elections of 1995, the new Congress became unicameral and, since 2011, it holds 130 seats.

Its functions, according to the article 102 of the Peruvian Constitution of 1993, are:

1. To legislate, as well as to interpret, modify and annul the existing laws.
2. To guarantee that the laws and constitution are respected and to sanction the offenders.
3. To approve treaties, according to what is stated at the Constitution.
4. To approve the yearly national budget.
5. To approve loans, according to what is stated at the Constitution.
6. To exercise the right of amnesty.
7. To approve the territorial demarcation as proposed by the executive power.
8. To consent the access of foreign troops to national territory, as long as this does not affect national sovereignty.
9. To allow the President of the Republic to leave the country.
10. To carry out other functions that are part of their legislative tasks, as stated by the Constitution (Constitución Política del Perú, 1993)

The Congress is situated in Lima, the country's capital. 31% of the country's population lives in Lima, which only represents 0.2% of the area of the country. Everything is located in Lima, were the disproportionate share of economic activity and the regional disparities in growth and well-being of the country are obvious. The society maintains its elitist nature since colonial times, but at the same time it is very comfortable with informality and with pushing the boundaries of the law; something called, usually with pride, "criollada". The Members of Congress –MOCs for short– representing other regions get trapped in Lima's dynamics and usually lose contact with their home regions, even if together they represent around 65% of the Congress. This can be seen in their very low re-election rates: In the elections of 2011, 45% of the MOCs from Lima were re-elected, while only 10% of the MOCs belonging to other regions were so (Aragón Trelles, 2016, p. 142).

The Congress configuration, at the beginning of the 2016-2021 presidential and parliamentary term, was this:



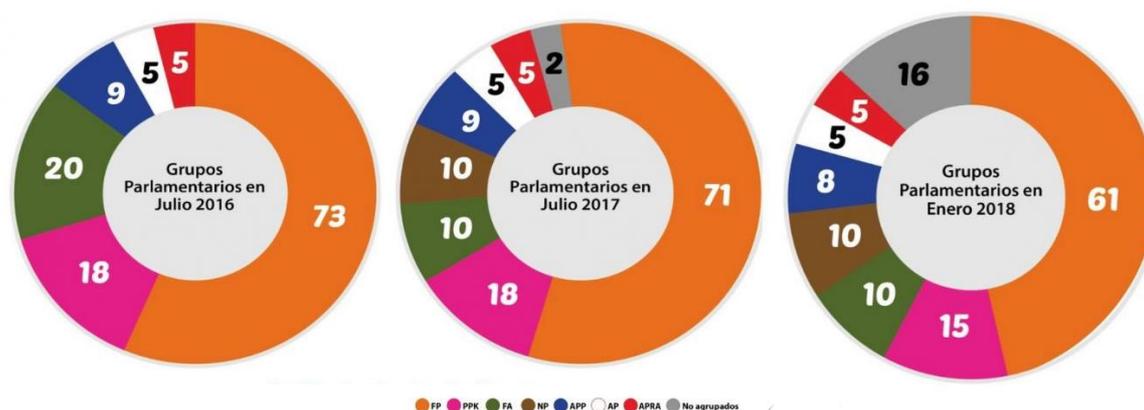
Source: Voto informado, 2016

As we can see in the graph, the vast majority of the Congress is male and still, 200 years after our independence, there is only one representative who is a member of an indigenous group. Peru uses a regional representation system, based on the population in each region. Because Lima, the capital city, houses approximately a third of the national population, it also gets a third of the seats of the Congress. Minorities are not defended; decentralization is not even attempted.

Peru also has a quite unique presidential-parliamentary hybrid, where the Congress needs to approve the President's Ministerial Cabinet and can censor one minister or the whole cabinet at any point in time. This translates in the fact that the Peruvian Congress, for some years now, spends most of its time overseeing the performance of the executive power. This fact, together with the existing animosities between parties that exacerbated during the last elections, resulted in massive obstacles for the executive government. By the first year of Kuczynski's government, four ministers had been censored by the Congress. Just before I arrived for my fieldwork, on October 2017, Kuczynski had been forced to change the whole cabinet for the second time.

During this period, many things also happened regarding party configuration. After one year of government, Frente Amplio, the left wing coalition, broke in two fractions: Frente Amplio and Nuevo Peru. The left in Peru rarely stays together in one party, and in this case, the party broke because of a clash of personalities. In addition to this, two members of Fuerza Popular, Fujimori's party, became independents after having internal quarrels. During my fieldwork, the landscape changed even more (see graph 1).

**Graph 1: Parliamentary group configuration in July 2016, July 2017 and January 2018.**



Source: Asociación civil Transparencia, 2018

Even if MOCs spend most of their time creating political intrigues, they still manage to approve around 1000 new laws every year (PQS, 2018), which is way above what is already considered legislative inflation. To get a better idea of what this means, the US congress approves an average of 350 bills in the same amount of time (MIC, 2013). A great amount of the laws

approved in Peru are what we call "declarative laws", meaning that they do not have real consequences. Some laws of this kind are, for example, "Law N° 23856, that names the Peruvian ocean as 'Grau's Sea'", or "Law N° 30678, that declares October 31st as the day of evangelic churches in Peru". Many of these laws also start with the words "it is declared of public interest ...", but without attributing any budget or suggesting any concrete actions to carry out whatever is supposed to be of public interest.

Other considerable quantity of laws has, what we call in Peru, "nombre y apellido" [name and surname], meaning that they are tailored to the requirements of a particular company or group of people. Usually they involve tax waivers or special benefits for people or companies that already have a privileged situation.

### **2.2.1. Getting access to the Congress**

Because I was trying to learn about the everyday life in the Congress, I decided to conduct an ethnography. However, I had to get access first. I tried contacting several Members of Congress that I thought would be open to the idea of having a researcher around. I got no replies for many months, until I realized that one of my cousins was friends with one of the people I had written to: Marisa Glave, from Frente Amplio.

When she replied, some months afterwards, she told me she did so because she is very close friends with my cousin and also because her father went to high school with mine. She told me she had great appreciation for my father, who had recently passed away. I felt somewhat uncomfortable by this, but I also knew it would be very difficult to get access to such a restricted space without any connections. At that time, Marisa and half of Frente Amplio had quit the party and were in the process of creating their own political party, called "Nuevo Peru".

I worked at the office of Marisa Glave for three and a half months, starting at the beginning of October 2017. The deal was that she would let me accompany her to some of her meetings (inside and outside of the Congress) in exchange for me to work as part of her team. These were the other people working at her office:

Marisa - The MOC (Sociologist)

Vladimir - The main advisor (Lawyer)

Karina - Press Manager

Mariela - Advisor specialized in Gender Rights (Lawyer)

Gustavo - Advisor specialized in Economy (Economist) [left the team around November and was replaced by Catherine and Inés]

Inés - Advisor specialized in Land Tenure (Lawyer)

Sayuri - Assistant (Anthropologist)

Catherine - Assistant in Economics (Economy student)

Jhon - Photographer

Noelia - Secretary

Óscar - Chauffeur

I would go there every day and accompany Marisa to her meetings or, if it was a meeting she or Vladimir did not want me to go, I would stay at the office working on something that was asked from me, usually by Vladimir or Marisa herself. The meetings I was "banned" from where her political party's meetings and some meetings with people in high positions, such as ministers. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I would coordinate directly with Marisa and had little contact with the rest of her team. After some weeks, Vladimir became my primary source of information about Marisa's schedule and my activities. With the political tension rising around the impeachment of the President that would come later, Marisa became more and more sheltered and would spend most of her time in private meetings I had no access to. By the end of my fieldwork, I would still go to Marisa's official meetings (the plenary meetings and commission meetings) but I would usually spend the rest of the time at the office with the rest of the team members. By then, most of my contact was with one of the advisors who was not really close with Marisa, one of the assistants, the secretary and the chauffeur.

I found it remarkable how, by the end of my fieldwork, I could go everywhere without a security pass. Being white skinned and a young woman influenced this greatly, but I also think that this was related to the fact that every day I greeted every security guard, secretary and member of the cleaning staff as I walked pass them. This very basic sign of acknowledgement of a fellow human was already more than most people working in higher positions at the Congress do. In Peru, not every person who is a Member of Congress or an advisor is white, but every white person in the Congress is a MOC or an advisor. Sometimes advisors I did not know would greet me in the ladies' bathroom by saying "Good morning, doctor!" in a very respectful manner. As one of my co-workers noted when I told her this story: If you are white and you are well dressed in Lima, it is not necessary for you to work your way through a PhD; you can have an honorary one because of your looks, like I did.

Workwise, I did a little bit of everything. I reviewed and synthesized relevant policy and academic literature, analysed data, made many drafts and reviewed hundreds of bills of law. I also transcribed interviews, made press summaries and printed files Marisa or for one of her advisors when needed. Sometimes I would also carry Marisa's things for her, bring her coffee, go fetch something from her office or go buy the newspaper for her.

Peru has a special working regime for state entities, in which basically the State exempts itself from giving any of the benefits it demands from private entities to its own workers. Public workers usually have bad salaries and few to none benefits, but certain State organs have a state of exception.

In 2017, the Central Bank of Peru (BCR) and the Superintendence of Banks and Insurance Companies (SBS) sent separate projects to the Congress to be excluded from the State's labour policy, justifying themselves by saying that they are specialized organs of the State. Before voting on these projects, the Congress joined them in one project, where it was added that the same was applicable for Congress workers, even though the Congress is not a specialized organ nor constitutionally autonomous.

From then on, an average worker, from the approximately 4000 workers the Congress has, earns 14 salaries a year, each of them including monthly bonds for food, education, and a very complete private health insurance (including dental). The State gives its representatives bonds to pay for private education and health, as if it were recognizing that the public services they offer are bad and, instead of fixing them, giving people –who are already privileged and do not need any kind of subsidies– access to good quality private education and healthcare.

In January 2018, they even got an extra bond for 11000 PEN (approximately 2800 euros) each because there was a surplus from the budget of the previous year and the worker's union of the Congress did not want to give what adds up to around 11 million euros back to the State. This is a very common practice I have seen before in other Peruvian State organisms, and the reasoning behind it is this: if you do not reach the expected level of expenditure, you need to use the remaining money in any possible way, because if you do not, you will get less money the following year. It does not matter that you do not actually need said quantity as an organism; you need to take as much you can from the government. This is part of the enjoyment Peruvians get by playing with the boundaries of what is legal, by taking advantage of an organism they feel to be very foreign from them. The person who told me about this extra bond, a worker of the Congress and a member of a left wing party, thought the bond was wrong, but accepted it and said to me "everybody else is accepting it and I can use the money to pay for a Master's degree abroad. If I do not take it, someone else will and, in the end, it will not be used for 'something good'". In reality, this kind of practices are a way of stealing from our own; a way of rejecting the collective interest and solidarity, yet again.

Another weird and little known fact about the Peruvian Congress is that the political party that holds the majority gets to choose the company that provides cleaning services, which changes with every new election and it is an open invitation for clientelism.

I have hundreds of little facts and anecdotes from my fieldwork, but I think now it would be interesting to use two to show, among other things, the distinction between the informal (the internal workings of the office, the WhatsApp chat conversations) and formal settings (the plenary or commission meetings). For this, I will first tell the story of my first days in the Congress, and then the story of a particular plenary meeting. In both stories we will see how the formal and informal spheres get intertwined and, in this, the advantages, carelessness, political promiscuity and lack of the kind of commitment and professionalism that we would expect from people at this level.

### **2.3. First impressions of the Congress**

It is Monday at 9:55 in downtown Lima, the city of kings, nickname that remains from colonial times. Marisa Glave, the Member of Congress that I contacted but have never met, asked me to meet her at her office at 10. The address she gave me does not exist, so I ask around but no one seems to know. Finally, while in panic because of the time, I discover that the old hospice in front of me is now occupied by Congress's offices. I go in, it takes me a long time to get past the security control because no one is at Marisa's office yet and I cannot get through without

an authorization. Finally, around 10:20, I am let in by Marisa's senior advisor, who introduces himself as Vladimir. After that, he starts telling me what he thinks I want to hear: Representation...there is a representation week each month where members of Congress don't have any official meetings and go "to the field", to meet the people they are representing.

Around 10:30, Marisa Glave arrives. She is walking with one of her advisors, talking cheerfully. She says hi to me and she asks me to get information about state-owned enterprises. I know absolutely nothing about this topic, but I take note of the request. She stops from time to time to see what's going on in the closest TV at hand. She tells me to check her schedule and tell her which of her meetings I want to join. She says that tomorrow she will wear red clothes because of the football match scheduled. Everyone runs around, like headless chickens in her presence. Once she leaves, calm settles.

Vladimir shows me the way to an empty desk with a computer. It takes forever to turn it on and, when it finally does, the internet is not working. After a while of trying to make the computer work, Karina, the press advisor, comes into the office and says "Is something going on? Where is Marisa? I will go to her, then, to cover whatever is going on". I convince her to take me with her and go see Marisa participate in the Education Commission meeting. She is not part of this commission but is interested in the topic and knows one of the people who is being subpoenaed at that meeting from university times. He now works at SUNEDU, the National Superintendence of Higher Education, organization in charge of the higher education reform.

While the Members of Congress pose questions to the summoned, a man walks around serving water from individual-sized bottles. No one says thank you; no one notices him. You can feel that the Congress' members and the "water carrier" do not belong to the same group; that they are not worth the same.

All the MOCs present at the meeting check their phones incessantly. They are not listening to each other; it is more like a performance. They read, they talk, they disappear from the stage and immerse themselves in their phones. Most of them don't even listen to the replies to the questions they posed; the important thing is questioning, not getting answers.

Some MOCs speak much more than others. Bocangel, a member of Fuerza Popular, is talking and then he says "I have worked and my children are in La Católica and La Pacífico [the most expensive private universities in the country]. Because I made efforts to do so, unlike those who were born with 'the right foot'". Karina whispers to me "that one was for Marisa", who is considered to be white and privileged by most. Bocangel finishes talking and I see another waiter bringing him a tall glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. He does not thank the waiter either.

It takes me a very long time to figure out the topic of the meeting because all interventions are so disconnected from each other. Marisa starts texting me:

**Marisa:** Do you know who is who here? The one that just talked, Bocangel, was headmaster of the Hermilio Valdizán University and he is a teacher in the San Martín University. He hates the law that is being discussed and wants to get rid of SUNEDU.

**Vera:** Yes, I know him. I am somewhat overwhelmed by this; it is so different from watching the news!

**Marisa:** Yes... It is nastier. There is no filter or mediation. The "interest management" [gestión de intereses] like they call "lobbies" here is very coarse.

**Vera:** And so few people at the table!

**Marisa:** Yes, I should not be here; Indira [fellow MOC from Nuevo Peru] neither. We are not part of this commission, but evidently today they [Fuerza Popular] would go for the head of the lady from SUNEDU [the Head of SUNEDU, Flor Luna Victoria], so we had to come.

**Vera:** The level of the discussion is very bad.

**Marisa:** It is very sad. Some days I get depressed. It is not easy to withstand this. I am starting my second year and I am exhausted.

When the meeting ends, Marisa goes to greet the visitors and then she asks me if I want to have lunch with her in the cafeteria reserved for Members of Congress. You can only go there if you are a MOC or you are having lunch with one.

We enter the cafeteria, everything is golden, red and old. The waiters are so respectful that they look almost afraid. Marisa talks to me in a very familiar way, even though this is the first time we meet; we have only had some telephone and email contact. She tells me about how hard it is being a woman in this context, how everyone hates her because she is strong; she talks about her personal life, even about her dating life. I wonder why she is telling me all these things. I guess it is because we are 'the same'.

After this, I go with her to a TV station where she has an interview.

I arrive the next day, I am too early and I need to wait at the door. The doorman says to everyone who arrives: "today we win", "today we win", "today we win". An hour later, the secretary calls Marisa's office so I can get a pass. While she waits on the phone, she tells me "we have to win!", "everyone is so excited we need to win! It would be a pity if we don't". There is a football match today, Peru - Colombia, on which Peru's participation on the FIFA World Cup depends.

I go to the Constitution Commission's meeting. The promoter of the first bill project to be reviewed is absent. Marisa asks for that to be pushed until the author arrives. "In favour?" the president of the commission asks, to start with the voting, while she talks on the phone. The members lift their hands in a distracted manner, while tending to other business.

Some of the Congress' members are wearing Peruvian football shirts over their formal clothes. There are only ten people sitting at that table, approving bills carelessly.

Everyone is chatting happily with their neighbours while the president of the commission talks. There are people voting from outside of the table, just yelling "in favour, president!" while they talk on their phones.

Suddenly, Mauricio Mulder, member of the APRA (short for American Popular Revolutionary Alliance<sup>5</sup>), starts presenting a law about 'transfuguismo', meaning the action of changing political parties. I see Marisa get worked up and, when Mulder finishes, she starts talking. The president of the commission leaves mid intervention and leaves the chair to the secretary, another MOC who looks very confused with what is going on. Marisa votes against, but then the president returns and says it has been unanimously approved.

The meeting is adjourned. All the MOCs stand up and they take a picture together, I don't understand why. I ask the person sitting next to me what did they approve last, and he doesn't know. I ask the person on my other side, he does not know either.

I go back to the office. Vladimir enters the room and tells me to now help another advisor or, if I prefer, to do research on Mauricio Mulder's bill about political parties. He says that we are going backwards in Peru, that in Chile and Colombia political parties are not that important anymore. Mariela, the gender advisor, contributes with examples. I am surprised to hear this from members of a left wing party. From time to time, waiters come inside of the office and my left wing co-workers order coffee and snacks, even though the cafeteria is 100 meters away. The waiters take the order by phone, then they come to the office with their orders and then again to pick up the dirty plates.

The advisors watch Marisa appear on the TV. They comment on her looks: "she looks so pretty today, but why is she wearing blue? She should be wearing red".

Noelia, the secretary, tells us that another MOC from Nuevo Peru has sent a document asking for tickets for the football match to the Congress' serving desk. Karina, who used to work with Marisa when she was a Councillor at Lima's Municipality, says "When we were at the municipality we would send a document and we would get a little envelope and that was that. No traces".

Suddenly, Marisa enters the room wearing blue jeans and a Peruvian football shirt. "Let's skip the Budget Commission meeting, I want to go root for our team!" she says as she enters the office. Noelia, the secretary, says "Arce [Another MOC from Nuevo Peru] got two tickets for the match. He should have gotten some for everyone [from the party]!" She and Vladimir, the main advisor, have worked in the Congress for a long time. They used to be part of the team of Javier Diez Canseco, a left wing politician that was a congressman for 30 years and, when he died, they started working for Marisa.

The other people at the office tell Vladimir "Vladi, call. Marisa can get a bunch of tickets!", "Say that Marisa Glave wants to buy. Many Congress' people have gotten tickets for free but she wants to buy. And then she will get them for free".

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<sup>5</sup> APRA is the oldest surviving political party in Peru, born in 1924 as left wing and, since the 50s, characterized by opportunistic ideological swings to the right.

Marisa calls Richard Acuña, a fellow MOC from Alianza por el Progreso, and the owner of the Cesar Vallejo, a university football club from a university owned by his father, Cesar Acuña, a prominent man from a humble origin with unclear ties to drug trafficking and corruption. He is not racially white, but he is rich and, as a consequence, he is considered socially white. Marisa talks to him in a very friendly way and asks him how she can get some tickets. He tells her she can have two, on him. She hangs up the phone and justifies herself by saying that her intention was to buy two tickets, not to get them for free.

Marisa then says that she is hungry, so she wants to go eat Pollo a la Brasa [peruvian fried chicken] and drink a chilcano, a signature Peruvian cocktail. Everyone from the office goes with her, even if it is only 15:00. We take two cars and go to a shopping mall in a fancy neighbourhood one hour away from the office. We arrive. Oscar, the chauffeur, and Esperanza, Marisa's security guard, stay in the car. We enter the restaurant, Marisa checks the menu, points at everything she wants to order and then leaves because she wants to buy a pair of sneakers to wear during the football match because she does not want to go home to go pick up a pair. She comes back with some flat shoes and a new pair of pants. She eats; she pays; we leave.

This happened the second day I was at the Congress. I was appalled, especially because for me, and for many, Marisa Glave is one of the most "decent" members of Congress. With time, I realized that all these advantages, plus the carelessness, political promiscuity and lack of the kind of commitment and professionalism that we would expect from people at this sphere were a daily sight at the Congress. Everyone did it and if a MOC did not do it at the beginning, would eventually end up doing it too.

All the things I saw as contradictions from a left wing politician, i.e. the chauffeur and the security guard staying at the car while we ate, the consumerism in Marisa's spontaneous shopping spree, the lack of recognition and self-criticism about her privileges, are things so characteristic from Lima's society that, in reality, it does not matter if Marisa belongs to a left wing party. Both things coexist in a weird and very hierarchical fight for "equality".

#### **2.4. A day in a Plenary meeting**

Every Thursday I would go to the main building of the Congress to observe the weekly plenary meeting. The Members of Congress would seat in the main chamber, next to their fellow party members, and the main advisors and service personnel would be seating or standing around the hemicycle.

Formally, only two advisors are allowed per political party but, in reality, if you enter with a MOC or they know you already, they will let you in without any fuss, unless something particularly important is happening that day. They would usually even let me in, not because I

was there for long, but because I am white, I am a girl and I am young, which I assume makes me seem both harmless and like a potentially important person.



The second floor had galleries reserved for the press and (important) guests; the third floor had the galleries for

(unimportant) guests. I would usually seat in the third floor galleries, with my notepad, my cell phone and my phone charger. During these meetings, half of my attention was on the meeting itself and half of it was in the WhatsApp chat conversations of Marisa's office that I was part of. On average, I realized my co-workers were part of at least five chat groups each. Some of these groups were dedicated to media, some to general coordination, gossip, frustration venting, etcetera. Each of these groups existed in two versions: one with Marisa and one without her. My cell phone battery has never lasted as little as it did while I was working at the Congress. I also had to top up my phone constantly to ensure I would have internet to reply as fast as possible to Marisa's constant questions about topics I had no idea about.

For the plenary meetings, I would usually arrive before 9:00 (when the meeting should start) and wait for Marisa to arrive so I could enter the building with her. Once inside the building, I would usually go to the galleries and Marisa to the chamber, because I had a better view from the top. Sometimes I would go down to the chamber if Marisa needed something, or back to the office to pick up papers, her make-up bag, another pair of shoes for her, etcetera.

I want to tell the story of a particular plenary meeting that took place on the 2nd of November of 2017. I arrived at the Congress at 8:40 and, while waiting for Marisa to arrive, I saw some workers building a scaffolding around the fence that confines the Congress. Óscar (Marisa's chauffeur) and Marisa arrived at 9:20, after Marisa had been complaining on the team's WhatsApp chat group to Gustavo (one of her main advisors at the time). The issue was that Gustavo wrote an opinion in minority [dictamen en minoría] against a bill of law but he did not send it for her to read it before the plenary meeting. I get in the car. Marisa is putting on her make-up while we are trapped in a line of cars waiting to enter. I ask about the scaffoldings to break the silence. Marisa tells me that probably they are going to paint the Congress again, because they repaint it every six months. She adds that she has never seen a building get repainted that often. When she worked at the Municipality of Lima, they painted it once in five years. We enter the building and, before parting, I ask her if she needs a pen. She checks her belongings and tells me she does. I give her my extra pen (the pen I learned to carry because Marisa was always asking for pens) and go up the stairs to the third floor galleries.

The meeting starts at 9:52 when they reach quorum. The Members of Congress are chatting, some sitting, some standing up in little groups. Some of them review the papers on their desks; the rest is, as usual, absorbed in their cell phones.

Even if the meeting already started, there is also movement at the presiding table. The President of the Congress, Luis Galarreta, from Fuerza Popular, chats with a fellow MOC from his party, sitting next to him, even though she is not part of the board. She leaves, and another MOC from Fuerza Popular comes and takes her place. She is also not a member of the board. She leaves after a while, when they are already discussing a bill of law. Every political party gets a number of minutes to discuss the bill, depending on the quantity of seats that they have. In reality, everyone gets extra time, and for no good reason. If a MOC keeps talking when the timer has finished, the President of the Congress just automatically presses a button giving him or her an extra minute. This can happen up to three or four times, if the President of the Congress likes you, or only once and with a note of warning if he does not. Unless there is a heated argument going on, when a MOC is discussing a bill of law, no one is listening: the President of the Congress is usually on the phone and the rest is chatting or texting. The cameras in the press section usually frame the shot only to show the MOC speaking, so the fiction of the debate lives on. It is of no surprise how repetitive the speeches are, because when MOCs talk, they do not know what the previous MOC has talked about. Everyone already knows what their vote is going to be and, when a bill is approved, if it is not too controversial or if the forum is distracted enough, someone will ask for an exemption of the second vote (that, by rule, should happen the following plenary meeting in order for the bill to be definitely approved) and this will be granted.

Its 11:30 and the President of the Congress, Luis Galarreta, has been gone for a long time. Mauricio Mulder, the third vice-president of the board, is sitting in his place. He has a different style: he gives less extra minutes and he does not agree when the MOCs ask for the exemption of a second vote. I find it curious how fortuitous the destiny of the bills can be. Until now they have only reviewed and voted what we call in Peru "declarative bills" [proyectos declarativos]. These bills are quite common in the Peruvian Congress and usually go something like this: "Law that declares the 6 of November as the National Day of the Scissors Dance", "Law that promotes the development of the capitals market", "Law that declares of national interest and public necessity the enlargement of the track of the Chachapoyas Airport, in Amazonas"<sup>6</sup>. These laws have no direct consequences for anything, but can be used to justify a project and get budget for it in an easier way.

The secretary of the board, Richard Acuña, appears talking on his phone, votes and leaves again. They start discussing a bill "to promote permanent political organizations". This is the bill proposed by Mauricio Mulder (MOC from APRA) mentioned in the previous story, that aims to avoid that political parties younger than three years can participate in general elections. This is also the topic of the minority report Marisa was asking Gustavo for. Currently, APRA only has 5 seats in the Congress, and to pass the bar in order to get those seats they had to

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. PL 1186: Ley que declara el 16 de noviembre como el día nacional de la danza de las tijeras, PL 1659: Ley que promueve el desarrollo del mercado de capitales, PL 565: Ley que declara de interés nacional y de necesidad pública la ampliación de la pista del aeropuerto de Chachapoyas, en el departamento de Amazonas.

make a coalition with another party: the Popular Christian Party. The aim of this bill is to leave out of the competition many new parties (such as Nuevo Perú) in order to favour APRA, a decaying party, in elections.

Marisa sends me a text. She tells me her mind is somewhere else because "Parwa" has accused "Abraham Valencia" of psychological abuse. She sends me a Facebook post with a testimony by Parwa making the accusation. I have no idea who these people are, so I google them and find out that the accused is one of the advisors of Marisa's party and the accuser is his ex-girlfriend, a women's rights activist.

At 12:26 Mauricio Mulder leaves the presiding table to go to his seat and defend his bill. He is replaced by another member of the board, that allows speakers to talk carelessly. Hector Becerril, a MOC from Fuerza Popular, shouts and insults other MOCs, without any interruptions. After this, the presiding table salutes the Argentinian National Team participating in Dakar Rally 2017. Everyone applauds. They are sitting in the second floor, where the important guests usually are.

Marisa returns around 13:06 for the voting of APRA's bill. She and almost all of the MOCs from Nuevo Peru were gone from the meeting because they were discussing what to do with the psychological abuse accusation of the advisor of the party she told me about. Marisa and everyone from her very young party vote against this bill, but the bill gets enough votes to be approved. A member of Fuerza Popular asks for the exemption of the second vote. Galarreta, who is back presiding, allows it. Now Mulder does not complain.

Marisa texts me to say that Abraham Valencia has admitted to all the "charges" and he is quitting his position in the Congress. She tells me she does not want to think about that any more, that she is on the verge of crying. Around 13:30, they pause the plenary meeting for a lunch break.

The meeting was supposed to restart at 15:30, but it does so at 16:15. Then, again, they start with declarative projects. I see Kenji Fujimori, Keiko's infamous brother and the most voted congressman of this Congress, go to his seat. It is the first time I see him since I started with fieldwork a month ago. He comes, he votes, he leaves. He does not speak to anyone; he does not check his phone. He is just seating there, playing with his hands.

After a while, a large group –around 40 people– comes into the third floor and sit around me. They are wearing typical clothing for peasants in the highlands. Richard Arce, a MOC from Nuevo Peru representing Apurimac, a region in the highlands, comes to greet them. The man sitting next to me is writing down a list. I manage to read "highway", "Espinar" (name of a town in Cusco), "we are not going to say it again" from it. He looks very serious, reviewing his notes, adding something to them from time to time.

Arce says to them "here we are only going to approve the bill of law, but what is really important is the budget". Arce says to them that the presiding table of the Congress is going to salute them, that they should stand up when he says so. After a couple of minutes, the

presiding table salutes them. They are from a rural community in Abancay, a town in Apurimac, close to Cusco. I hear the applause, they stand up, here at the third floor, and sit back again. Arce tells them to wait, that he will coordinate a room for talking later, and then leaves.

The security guard standing close to them, who was listening to the previous conversation, tells them the meeting is going to continue until very late and then laughs. The people from Abancay start talking to each other and decide to leave. I take a deep breath while they go; they smell like leaves and wet soil in the middle of the Congress' stale air.

Marisa sends me a text. "Go back to your original case study!! If you focus on me, you will only find someone who is one step away from leaving all this". Even if Marisa always tells me she is done with this job and wants to quit, I know this is not true. I always see her take some kind of pleasure in the suffering brought to her by this place, and light up in front of the cameras every time she is interviewed. Every person around her tells me she eventually wants to run for President.

I see Marisa votes red to the exemption of the second voting of bill they are discussing. Before they close the voting, she changes it to yellow (abstention). I ask her why. She said "Indira abandoned me and I didn't want to vote alone".

At 18:20 they present a bill that comes from the Constitution Commission, the PL 616-2016, that proposes to ban permanently people condemned for terrorism and glorifying terrorism from running for public office. Bills are supposed to pass by a specialized commission before being discussed in a plenary meeting, but this one was exonerated of this discussion by decision of the president of the Constitution Commission. The project is presented to the plenary by Úrsula Letona, President of the Constitution Commission and member of Fuerza Popular, and written by Hector Becerril, an infamous member of Fuerza Popular.

Letona starts by saying that "to hold public office, to represent a country, a region or a town constitutes a PRI-VI-LE-GE! It is an honour, a great responsibility. The success and efficacy of public management not only depends on great technicians, but also on people who know the reality of the country, that have contact with the population beyond their political campaigns, who are committed with the population they represent and, of course, with our country. The candidates need to be suitable from an ethical perspective. What does being an authority in a Democratic and Constitutional State imply? Being respectful of the principles in which the rule of law is based. What does this imply? Being respectful of democracy, representation and legality. Being respectful of public goods and of those rights that define us as a society. In this sense, it is UN-AC-CEP-TA-BLE to have candidates that do not believe in our rule of law, to the point where they attacked it. This is why we need to ban people condemned for terrorism to hold public office".

The discussion of this bill was pushed because, two weeks before, Maritza Garrido Lecca, a former terrorist from Sendero Lumioso, was released after 25 years in jail. Nothing weird happened; she just did the time that was sentenced to do 25 years before. She had not made

public any intentions to run for public office and she had hardly given any declarations to the press, even if she was being almost harassed by them.

This is, I feel, another characteristic trait of the Congress. If the executive or the legislative powers do something and a group of the MOCs do not like it, like, in this case, releasing a prisoner that did her time, they are going to try to bypass their ruling in any way possible instead of going to the root of the problem.

Hector Becerril, the author of the bill, also from Fuerza Popular, talked next. He said "I think today each and every one of us is going to show their true colours regarding terrorism. There will be MOCs who are willing to have mayors, governors or presidents that have done time for terrorism charges. People who never believed in democracy, and who wanted to destroy our country with the power of a gun and dynamite should not be allowed to hold public office and destroy us from there. We are used to being tolerant and that's why so many terrorists are back on the streets after serving time. It is our moral duty to avoid that they come to power. Let's remember that our country defeated the terrorists with law, but sadly for some time now they are winning the country back. Where? In the judiciary system. They are winning this war. Are we going to allow them to also win the political war? I think not. We cannot forget of the thousands of Peruvians murdered by these sanguinary terrorists. We cannot forget how many police officers, military men, were shot by the terrorists".

Indira Huilca, MOC from Nuevo Peru, said that not only terrorists from the Internal Conflict should not be able to run for public office, but also people charged with drug trafficking, sexual violence against women or children. Marisa Glave (Nuevo Peru), Maria Isabel Foronda (Frente Amplio) and Mario Canzio (Nuevo Peru) seconded the motion.

Becerril replied to them "That is what I expected! How do they call it? 'Internal Conflict'; the classical way of slyly defending terrorism, because they don't even have the courage of doing it head-on. This is cowardice. They say it is against the Constitution to do this and they make it worse when they suggest that this bill should be reviewed by the Constitution Commission before being discussed here and add some other charges to the civil death bill. This is the only way they have to stop this bill because they are too coward to admit they disagree. Today, looking at each other in the eye, we are going to measure what we are made of. Now we know who has a 'terrorist ideology in this parliament".

What followed was a very long and painful discussion between MOCs from Fuerza Popular and MOCs from Nuevo Peru and Frente Amplio (that used to be one party, but as it always goes with left wing parties, they split up). They were opening very deep wounds in Peruvian society by discussing what happened in the Internal war during the 1980s and 1990s in a decadent media show. Despite their ideological differences, both discourses had something in common: they were accusing each other of the same: of being corrupt and transgressing the law.

Funnily enough, no one talking was really entitled to talk. Those talking were not the ones affected by the violence and the crimes they described. The Internal war is a discourse that right and left both use from their golden thrones: Fuerza Popular, the right, uses terrorism as an ever present menace to justify very radical authoritarian practices (What Massumi calls

"ontopolitics"), while the left uses the "memory" discourse against fujimorism, but it is a discourse very patronizing towards the victims: let us remember what happened, but let's talk about it from a very academic and intellectually inaccessible point of view. The people who are actually entitled to talk about this topic, who actually experienced the violence, have no access to political spheres.

After some interventions coming and going accusing each other of being or not being authorized to talk about this topic, Marisa sends a WhatsApp message to her team asking for the names of people who participated in left wing parties and who were also killed by terrorist group Sendero Luminoso. After a while, she asks for the names of cities where massacres perpetrated by the military occurred. When Richard Acuña's time to talk comes, he gives an interruption to Marisa (to let her talk without having to queue). Marisa stands up and says that she will not forget the names of (reading the names of the people) and the massacres of (reading the names of the cities). "We won't forget", she says, while her voice starts to break. "We are not defending terrorist criminals in any way, but we won't forget that human rights were also violated by the military forces. That is what we are saying". She sits down and Indira hands her a tissue to wipe her tears.

After this, Richard Acuña (Nuevo Perú) and some members from Alianza Para el Progreso (APP) and Peruanos Por el Cambio (PPK), centre parties that were not really involved in the debate until now, started supporting the proposition of the left wing parties. Some members from Peruanos Por el Cambio supported Fuerza Popular's position.

Fuerza Popular continued with the same attacks, given by the same MOCs, when suddenly, Daniel Salaverry, the spokesperson of the party, said in a very casual way –like he had just entered the room and had no idea of what was happening–, “nowadays terrorism is mixed with drug trafficking, and we do not want to give the wrong message, leaving outside of the bill charges for drug trafficking, rape and corruption. I think the president of the commission (Úrsula Letona) will have no problem in accepting a recess for adding these modifications and creating consensus". After two hours and a half of a very offensive, heated discussion, Úrsula Letona takes the floor and says she has no problem in doing so.

I wondered what had happened. It was such an abrupt change. When the meeting ended, I asked Marisa how come did Fuerza Popular change their opinion. She told me that after she finished speaking, when she started crying out of exhaustion of everything that had happened that day, Úrsula Letona sent her a text saying "relax, we are going to change the bill". I asked Marisa about this again in an interview some weeks after. This is what she said:

**Vera:** I was very curious about the text message that Úrsula Letona sent to you saying to relax, that they would change the bill during the civil death debate. How did that happen?

**Marisa:** Well, she has some appreciation for me, if one can put it in that way. As you have seen, we can try to kill each other sometimes, right? But she has respect for me; she can look at me in the eye. She is a weird member of Fuerza Popular. She bluffs a lot when she talks, pretending to be a radical right wing politician, but she is seen as

the rest of the party as an annex brought by Keiko Fujimori. She comes from the Echeopar Studio, which is a very strong law firm. She is friends with Samuel Abad [a very highly ranked constitutionalist lawyer from Marisa's university]. (...) She comes from the Echeopar Studio, she is a professional, she is a very good lawyer, ultra conservative but she is a very intelligent woman, and she is quite fed up with her fellow party members; she looks down on them; she is tired. And I feel I am a character she can have a conversation with, let's say. And it is very difficult to have a conversation, so I also appreciate being able to talk with her, because we have so much shit around us that, to be honest, it is great to be able to talk to a sensible person. And we are all human, right? So there is a moment where you see the other as a human and she has become very good friends with Miki (Miguel Torres, MOC from Fuerza Popular who went to the same high school as Marisa) and since Miki is my friend (...) And, besides, I am willing to listen to people and people are not 100% bad, 100% corrupt... she has some interesting initiatives and I have helped her with them and she is happy about it. (...) When Miki was president of the Constitution Commission, because he is someone I know and also my friend, I helped him a lot. (...) If you look at the records of the Constitution Commission, we approved a lot of the bills by unanimity, and for several of them I put myself in the line, which means staying for the debate. The rest of the Commission would say "If she is staying, then we should stay as well, to see what happens" because they appreciate me. So Úrsula also appreciates this and if she sees me desperate, because she also knows I am a very transparent person, she sends me a text saying "I am going to change the bill, relax", get it?

**Vera:** But why did they do it like that? Because some members of Fuerza Popular were completely against changing this bill.

**Marisa:** That is the tension between the ones that do not want something and are "beasts" and the ones that are capable of reflecting on the situation.

I asked her if she was friends with "Miki" during high school. She told me they were not; he was older but she knew who he was. They actually became "friends" while in Congress. This friendship, as many others, is the product of the existing informal networks between parties, built on social status and class, resulting from a mixture between race, money and education.

In that same interview, unrelated to the civil death bill but related to this informal networks, Marisa said "People sometimes approach me. They are subpoenaed and have to go to the Congress anyways, so they make the most of it. For example, the other day, you were there, the General Superintendent went to Congress, I don't know her, but Lima... because this is Lima, even if we think this is the whole country; this is Lima. And Lima is small<sup>7</sup> and in reality we are a very elitist society, so people know who is who. So, for example, the General Superintendent knows that Marisa Glave would sit with her to talk. And how did she start the conversation? By saying 'I know your mom'".

In a later interview with Eduardo Ballón, an anthropologist and researcher, we discussed this.

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<sup>7</sup> In Spanish: Lima es un pañuelo. Literally translated, "Lima is as big as a handkerchief".

**Vera:** When I started [with fieldwork], Marisa sometimes would explain to me who was who, telling me what she thought of MOCs. And she would also complain a lot about Alberto de Belaúnde [MOC from PPK] because, for her, he was not being strong enough in his positions and not fighting the battles he should.

**Eduardo:** And why was she complaining about him? She should complain about the MOCs from her own party; not about a MOC from PPK.

**Vera:** Well, alliances in the Congress are not really built on party lines, right?

**Eduardo:** Yes, they are based on the colour of your skin.

Marisa, in a later interview, referring to her fellow party members when she worked in the Municipal Council, said to me "Well, my party's group in the council was relatively weak... mmm... regarding programs, let's say. I mean, I had very valuable companions; social leaders, many teachers, but yeah, you started a discussion in the council and they would all remain silent..."<sup>8</sup>.

I found two types of hierarchies in the Congress: the first, the difference between the Congress Members and the rest (the waiters, the security personnel, the citizens) and, the second, the difference between party members, because they are not all worth the same. In the end, class prevails over the weak political ideologies that are supposed to tie parties together. Marisa, even if she is a member from Nuevo Peru, talks to some people from other parties more than with some of her fellow party members. Why? Because they went to the same high school, the same university, they have friends in common or, as she put it, "she can have a conversation with them".

## 2.5. Reflections around the cases

The stories in this chapter show how the Congress as an institution shapes political representatives not to represent. They are enclosed in an environment that shields them from the country's social reality, living a fake prosperity at the expenses of the rest. The Congress creates cynical subjects, members who take distance from what they are supposed to be doing and that, at the same time, enjoy this distance, the attention and the privileges. Because of this, they maintain the fiction of representation alive; for their own sakes.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, when I talked to Marisa for the first time and I told her I wanted to do research on the pitfalls of representation, she admitted that the disconnection was real, even for her. Members of Congress may be ready to admit that representation is not possible, and yet they are the ones that believe in it more than anyone else; they participate in it and avail it. It is a fiction, but one that structures the representatives' reality. This is where their respect for institutionalism comes from: not for the citizen's sake, but for their own.

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<sup>8</sup> In original Spanish: "pero mi bancada era relativamente débil eeee programáticamente hablando digamos, no? o sea, tenía compañeros muy valiosos, dirigentes sociales, tenía muchos profesossss, pero claro, entrabas a discutir... otros temas y los compañeros se quedaban callados, no?"

It is clear that there is no debate in the plenary meetings at the Congress: decisions are made behind closed doors or inside chat windows. The debate in the plenary meetings is just a performance in order to attract the cameras in the hope of getting a front page in the newspaper of the next day and, hopefully, get re-elected in the future.

The performance, however, makes visible important tensions that characterize Peruvian society: the frequent use of violence, of authoritarian practices, the existing economic and social disparity, the racism, the cultural heterogeneity, the lack of solidarity, etcetera.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, the tutelary and authoritarian structures, i.e. the politics in the Congress, avoid the enactment of the political, i.e. a debate where true disagreement can be expressed. At the Congress, no issues concerning the common good are debated, nor clear-cut antagonistic positions are shown.

The opposition between "we" and "them" is very present in the MOCs discourse and shows how some people in power feel that they are entitled to decide for the rest, because they know better than them. The people in power do not seem interested in democratising the decision-making and continue to resist the construction of a collectivity away from hierarchies.

The "we's" and "them's" are not defined with political categories but, as Mouffe notes, they are now established in moral terms. The struggle is not between two different political projects, but between right or wrong (Mouffe, 2005, p. 5). What Becerril said, "today everyone is going to show their true colours", was not referring to the MOCs showing their true political positions, but their wrongs: the support of terrorism, violence and murder. And this, again, was just a tool for them to decide for the rest.

## CHAPTER III

### DEMOCRACY'S IMPOSSIBLE KERNEL: EQUALITY

"Equality is the word that I hear the most. Equality, equality, equality..."  
- Óscar, Marisa's Chauffeur

#### 3.1. Introduction

In this second ethnographic chapter, I want to show how one of the concepts previously mentioned, the concept of equality, is addressed by members of the Congress in two different social situations. I understand "equality", following Rancière, not as a result of a political process (where hierarchy is already in place), nor as a common measure between individuals, but as "a capacity through which individuals act as the holders of a common power, a power belonging to anyone. This capacity itself is not a given whose possession can be checked. It must be presupposed as a principle of action but it is only verified by action itself" (Rancière, 2017). Considering this, for this section, I selected two situations where a "nobody" would enact equality, breaking the hierarchy in place.

The first situation is the story of a woman looking for justice after being raped and extorted by her former boss, the mayor of a town called Urubamba, in Cusco, Peru. Her struggle was used to divert attention from a very different kind of wrongdoing from the President of the Women's Commission of the Congress, Maritza Garcia, and as a political tool in the fight between two political parties. This woman's fight for justice and equality was put in the spotlight only to be trivialized and turned into a shameful show, that was forgotten as soon as the next scandal surfaced the media.

The second story is the story of a female volunteer for the national population census of Peru that was raped while conducting a survey in a marginal neighbourhood, where she also lives. This woman's story was used as part of a series of arguments to force the resignation of the person responsible for the census' organization. She was portrayed by the members of Congress and the media as a "young girl", even though she was 37 years old, showing the "infantilization" of citizens by Peruvian authorities. In this story, we see again how this particular struggle was used as a political tool, without giving any real attention to the issue behind it or taking the victim and her accusation seriously.

Even though both cases address the issue of violence against women, a very present topic in today's Peruvian society, this is not what the discussion is really about. What I intend to show is how these struggles, these fights for equality where a citizen's voice succeeds in breaking the hierarchy and reaching the attention of Congress representatives and the media, are trivialized and disregarded for what they really are: a fight for equality.

This is what Victor Vich calls "Pedagogical Authoritarianism", where we find a "strongly monological enunciation that cannot conceive the country as a space for intersubjective construction but, simply, as the cannibalization of whoever is different and, because of that, needs to be rejected (and also destroyed)" (Vich, 2002, p. 96)<sup>9</sup>.

These voices are used as a political tool for the representatives to do a performance in order to reach their own objectives. The spectacularization of politics is yet another way of denying what interests us: the emergence of the political.

### **3.2. Maybelline Otazu**

It is 10 in the morning. I walk from the Economy Commission's meeting to the meeting of the Women and Family Commission.

The Congress of the Republic of Peru has 24 permanent commissions and the Women and Family Commission is one of them. Commissions are supposed to be specialized on a certain topic and they review, modify and approve bills of law related to these topics before they are discussed in the plenary meetings of the Congress.

This Commission, as stated in its name, addresses topics related to women and family as an institution. In its website, you can only access information from the legislative year they are in. Even though the Congress changes every five years, the commission's members change once every year, making continuity and the supposedly desired specialization even more difficult.

The room where the meeting is going to happen is completely packed; I manage to get in and find a seat. I look around me and notice that the press section is even fuller than the rest of the room. A girl sitting on the other side asks me what is going to happen in this meeting on behalf of the congresswoman she works for. This MOC wants to know if any Minister is coming because, in that case, she will show up.

I explain to her that the President of this Commission, Maritza Garcia, a MOC from Fuerza Popular, is being pushed to resign to the presidency of the commission. Why? Because two weeks earlier, in the midst of a sexual abuse scandal in the news, she declared that women should prevent men from showing violent behaviour to them by measuring their words and not provoking them.

She literally said, "Why does femicide occur? We need to acknowledge what the great psychologist and teacher [a man she invited to a conference] just said about women: sometimes without a reason or unintentionally, a woman gives a man a chance to commit some kind of abuse... Because many times the aggressor might be a completely sound person and then, all of the sudden, in just a moment, a woman takes him out of context by saying 'I

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<sup>9</sup> In original Spanish: "una enunciación fuertemente monológica que no concibe al país como un espacio de construcción intersubjetiva sino, simplemente, como la canibalización de quien es diferente y por eso hay que rechazarlo (y destruirlo también)"

will leave' or 'I am betraying you'. These words never need to be said by a woman because they can cause, unintentionally motivate or exacerbate the spirits of a normal person"<sup>10</sup>.

I ask her who is the congresswoman she works for. She tells me it is Alejandra Aramayo, member of Fuerza Popular, the same as Maritza Garcia. The girl texts Aramayo, but apparently she decides not to come.

After some minutes, Maritza Garcia starts the meeting. She starts by reading the agenda for the day and then tries to show a promotional video about her work as President of this commission, but half of the MOCs participating in the meeting are talking over the audio of the video, standing up, demanding that she resigns right away. After some minutes of trying to continue the meeting as usual, she starts reading the Congress' regulation handbook. I almost cannot hear what she is saying, but I hear a lot of legal terms, concluding with a "this does not concern me". Many other members of the commission are raising their hands and, after some resistance, she eventually lets them talk. Now comes one speech after the other, all demanding her resignation and asserting the importance of women's rights. By the third speech, the person controlling the computer strategically removes the picture and the words "Maritza Garcia, President of the Commission" from the screen in the room. After this, he deletes the folders from the computer and even empties the recycling bin. He is anticipating her resignation and deleting any trace Garcia and her team could have left.

While all this is happening, I see that at the entrance of the room, a woman tries to enter without a security pass. The security guard does not let her in. Then, one of Maritza Garcia's advisors goes to the door and says to the guard "she is a guest of the President of the Commission" (referring to Maritza Garcia). The woman walks in, looking nervous and confused, while Garcia is giving out her resignation speech. "No woman deserves to be a victim of abuse. No woman in the country. No woman at all. I was not justifying the aggressions of any men, because I am also a mother. I have not justified any abuse. I think there has been a misunderstanding and I can understand this; that's why I said I was very sorry for the way my words were taken. Someone who is in charge of the Women's Commission can never take sides with men and even less to incentivise that men abuse women"<sup>11</sup>.

She continued by saying that the previous day she received the visit of a woman who tried to contact the Commission before, during the previous legislative year, when Fuerza Popular was not in charge of the presidency, but Frente Amplio's Indira Huilca. Back then, the woman, whose name was not mentioned in this speech, tried to speak to Huilca but she did not receive her. Frente Amplio (now also Nuevo Peru) are the main parties contesting Garcia's gender unfriendly statements.

Garcia continues to say that this woman, whom she did receive, is a woman from Urubamba that says that she was raped by the mayor of that town while she worked for him at the Municipality. Huilca, who is present at the meeting, asks to be allowed to speak because she was mentioned, but the President of the Commission does not let her speak. I can see the flashes of the cameras everywhere. After some insistence, Huilca gets to talk and says that it is not okay for her (García) to try and remove any responsibility for her antifeminist statements

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<sup>10</sup> Video footage available in Spanish: <https://peru21.pe/politica/maritza-garcia-cuestionadas-frases-provocaron-renuncia-presidir-comision-mujer-380665>

<sup>11</sup> Video footage available in Spanish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0itnraqP8s>

from the previous weeks by attacking her. García replies that when she attended the case, the lady had been trying to be heard by the Commission for nine months. After this, she said that despite everything that has happened, she is going to keep working for women's rights and subsequently offers her resignation, leaving the chair to the secretary of the Commission. The interim president, in a stammering manner, asks for a vote to end the session. They vote and it is unanimously agreed to finalize the session. All the members start to get up and leave the room.

Maritza Garcia tried to divert attention from her wrongdoing by accusing Indira Huilca, the previous person holding the presidency of this Commission, of another wrongdoing. She used the rape accusations politically to vindicate herself in front of "feminists" (or, at least, the people there claiming to defend women's rights). However, at the same time, she was talking to what is, ultimately, a chauvinist audience that defends women's rights in a very macho way: women are children; women need to be taken care of and guarded.

At that precise moment, the unidentified lady, who had been sitting nervously since she entered the room, stands up and tries to talk to the advisor of Garcia that let her in. When the advisor disregards her, she just starts talking, to the cameras, to whomever wants to listen, yelling about what happened to her. She cries while she talks, the impotence in her breaking voice is manifest. She says that no one listens to her, that the only Congress person that has supported her is Marisa Glave and Edgar Ochoa (both MOCs from Nuevo Peru). Marisa, who was present but distracted, putting away her things so she could leave, raises her head and acknowledges the woman's presence. The woman continues saying that she is speaking for all the women in Urubamba, that her mom was shot yesterday and she cries and cries while the cameras feed on her suffering. "How are we going to find justice if we do not have your support?!", she says, while some MOCs start comforting her, holding her arm, softly suggesting her to stop what she is doing, while showing their best angles to the cameras.

After they "contain" her, the interim president grabs her by the arm and guides her outside of the room, while Maritza García, the former president, says very loudly "Take her, take her, because we need to tend to this people. We do not only make projects; we tend to the human being!"<sup>12</sup>. Marisa, who is walking behind them, turns to García and replies "Maritza, as the girl just said, my office is taking care of her"<sup>13</sup>.

Marisa takes the woman whose name we still don't know to her office, joined by Indira Huilca (Nuevo Peru), Tania Pariona (Nuevo Peru), Edgar Ochoa (Nuevo Peru) and the interim president of the women's commission, Betty Ananculí (from Fuerza Popular).

The following scene was recorded by the press assistant from Marisa's team<sup>14</sup>. The video starts with the lady explaining her case, while Huilca, Pariona, Ochoa and Ananculí listen to her and Marisa talks on the phone. After she hangs up, the conversation goes like this:

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<sup>12</sup> In original Spanish: "Llevala ve, llevala, atiendela, porque a esa gente se le atiende. No solo se hacen proyectos, se atiende al ser humano".

<sup>13</sup> In original Spanish: "Maritza, como acaba de decir, mi despacho la está atendiendo"

<sup>14</sup> I was not present at this meeting, but luckily the press assistant was there and recording. I was able to get the footage later.

**Marisa:** I think there probably was some kind of misunderstanding [when the woman tried to approach the commission under Huilca's lead]. The topic that worries me now is that someone tries to use this information to say that the presidency of the women's commission was not working well while it was under the responsibility of our political party (Nuevo Peru). As you can see, congressman Ochoa is from our political party, I am also from Nuevo Peru, Indira also and we do a 'collective work'; hence we are also the ones that have been working on this.

**Unidentified woman:** Yes, yes, yes (while Marisa talks)

**Marisa:** I am happy that Betty [Ananculí] is also here so we can make this something where we [both political parties] can support you, and not make it an issue that belongs to one political party or the other, and in this way see how we can support you.

What I understood, what Mariela [her advisor on gender rights] told me is that we pushed the prosecutor so you could formally do your declarations here [in an audience in Lima]. What happens today is that there finally is an audience so the prosecutor can present his accusation, right?"

**Unidentified woman:** No, the prosecutor already presented the accusation. Today is the hearing for presenting the evidence to the prosecutor. So today the situation is that we have a lawyer, Dr. Salaverry, who is helping us for free. And like we told Mrs. Maritza [García, from Fuerza Popular]; we don't support a political party, we don't have political interests, we are just looking for justice, for justice for us, women. That is why yesterday when Mr. Salaverry offered his help, I think he is from APRA, but we just said "thank you". If he wants to help, he is welcome! That is what we want to achieve. We are tired of organizing protest after protest and never find justice. What we want to find now is justice. Right now the lady is there [at the audience], I am also in Lima, we are feeling bad, they shot my mom yesterday evening, I have the pictures here, I am not lying. It is very suspicious this happened just before the hearing today".

After half an hour, some of them go with the unidentified lady to the prosecutor's office, some blocks away from the Congress.

Marisa writes at the office's WhatsApp group during the hearing. She says that the lawyer of the mayor of Urubamba (accused of raping the woman) is a very expensive one and the woman's lawyer is "a joke".

Marisa's press manager asks in the same group what are we going to do about that girls' case. She suggests to do a press statement as a party. They later try to get her a slot at Milagros Leiva's News show in ATV (Open-signal TV channel) at 21:00 hours. They do not manage to do it because apparently she already got a slot in that show yesterday (following her meeting with Maritza García). All MOCs appear in TV news shows quite often and have easy access to them.

I ask Vladimir, Marisa's main advisor, about this girl's case. He tells me it is a complicated case, that she, a woman named Maybelline Otazu, was hired by the Municipality of Urubamba and then, the same day she got the job, was asked to take a plane to Lima to join the mayor for a meeting. After she arrived, she realized that there was no meeting, and later, during dinner at the hotel where they were staying, she lost consciousness and woke up half naked with the mayor lying naked next to her. I could feel in his voice that he thought it was her fault; she was

so naive! I hear in the office that this girl is "a little crazy". He also mentioned that the mayor of Urubamba is from Frente Amplio, Marisa's (and Huilca's, Pariona's and Ochoa's) former political party.

The next day, in the plenary meeting in the Congress, I see the 'unidentified woman' accompanied with another woman. I text Marisa, I say "Marisa, Maybelline Otazu is here in the galleries. Be prepared if she starts yelling in the middle of the meeting". She says "Poor thing! We need to go talk to the press".

That same day, the criminal court of Lima decreed six months of preventive prison for the mayor of Urubamba; 14 months after the original accusation made in Cusco, the region that should have jurisdiction over this case. Maybelline had to go all the way to the capital, interrupt in the middle of a meeting, accuse the mayor in front of cameras and surrounded by members of Congress to get some progress in her case.

I never heard from this case or this woman again. Back in The Netherlands, from where I write this, I googled her name and the first piece of news I found was a clip from a news program from ATV from February 2018<sup>15</sup>. The heading said that on the 19th of December of 2017 the preventive prison order for the mayor of Urubamba was revoked, the same day that he would have lost his position as the mayor for being a fugitive of the law. The court gave no explanations for this. I started watching the show, the news presenter said that the mayor was accused, then he was fugitive and then "something magical occurred and he could go back to his office and continue to lead the district, even though he never did prison and now he enjoys of an impunity that is frankly disturbing". I saw Maybelline Otazu appear on the screen; she looked completely different from the woman I had seen in the Congress. I searched for more videos until I finally found one where she appeared together with the woman I had seen: the woman I saw at the Congress was Rosalinda Quiroga, from the Cusquenian Defense Front for Womens Rights (Frente de Defensa de los DDHH de las Mujeres de Cusco), organization that supported Maybelline with her accusation.

I found it weird that no one ever mentioned that the lady talking was not Maybelline Otazu. I asked Mariela, Marisa's advisor in women's rights. She said "that is her [Maybelline Otazu's] crazy lawyer, a journalist. Her name is Rosalinda Quiroga". I asked about the revocation of the preventive prison, and she said "They released him. He appealed to the preventive prison order and there is no other accusation". And that was that. Justice was temporarily 'staged' and then, when the cameras were looking the other way, business continued as usual: the impunity, the injustice, the painful 'sensible' of Peruvian society returned.

In the end, this story remained inconclusive. I do not have, even if I tried asking Marisa's team about it, enough information to paint a full picture. They also don't have enough information. They did what they thought was their part: throw a victim in front of the cameras, look as if they collaborated with her case, even if they did so just for a second.

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<sup>15</sup> Video footage available in Spanish: <http://www.atv.pe/actualidad/abusa-de-mujeres-y-sigue-siendo-alcalde-de-urubamba-346992>

In the end, sexual abuse is presented as 'the normal' thing in a corrupt country, where the failure of a legal process is also presented as a curiosity in a variety TV show.

I think about how one of the first impressions I got of Marisa's team was how everyone was always running around, like headless chickens. They were always trying to do so many things at the same time, without really following up on any of them. What is the aim of all this in the end? I guess what is really important is showing that Marisa is doing the things her slogans stand for: gender equality, same sex marriage, defence of public spaces, etcetera. But the spectacularization of politics she participates in leads to the banalization and depoliticization of all these causes and, with them, of all the personal battles fought by the people that manage to break through the hierarchies; the people that manage to have, even for one second, a voice.

### **3.3. Jennifer Villena**

On Sunday 22 October we had a national population census in Peru. The census takers were all volunteers, who were promised 50 soles as a compensation (12.5 euros approximately) for a day's work. In the afternoon, around the time the census was supposed to end, the news surfaced that a girl volunteer in Villa El Salvador, the poorest district of Lima, was raped while visiting a house for the census. News starting flying around, with headings such as "young census worker/young lady was raped". The brother of the victim was giving declarations on national television, and every TV journalist was demanding the resignation of Anibal Sanchez, the Director of the National Statistical System, in charge of the census. The Minister of Women and Vulnerable Populations went to visit the victim that night at the police station.

The next day, at Marisa's office, everyone was talking about the census and about the raped girl. One of Marisa's advisors, a man around 40 years old, was telling someone how he and his wife were concerned about their 12 year-old daughter, about how they did not know if they should let her go out unsupervised.

On the 24th of October, Anibal Sanchez, the Director of the National Statistical System, resigned, only two days after the census because of the political and media fallout following the census. Media in general was filled with people talking about what would they have done if this happened to their daughters.

As a consequence of the frequent presence of sexual abuse in the news, Marisa Glave and Indira Huilca (from Nuevo Peru) started using the hashtag "#PeruPaisdeVioladores" (Peru, Country of Rapists) on Twitter and Facebook. This caused indignation among the more conservative members of society, in and outside the Congress. On the 26th of October, Marisa went to a TV show where they mentioned the issue regarding the hashtag, and the TV presenter said that "every man should second this complaint to the fullest, in the name of their daughters, sisters and every underage female of their family".

Before Sanchez's resignation, he was summoned by the Auditing Committee of the Congress for the 3rd of November of 2017. He, having left the position, and the new President of the National Statistical System went to the meeting. Some of the MOCs included the raping in their complaints about the census.

Lourdes Alcorta, from Fuerza Popular, after mentioning the rape, added "How can it be possible that you had volunteers who were underage? One of my advisors received an interviewer who was 16 years old, and what would have happened if she would have rung the bell of a miserable man willing to rape her?"<sup>16</sup>

Humberto Morales, from Frente Amplio, said "There has been a public accusation of a young man whose sister was sexually abused. The young man has said it. Of course, because the molested girl cannot go on TV. The brother has made the public accusation"<sup>17</sup>.

A couple of days after the raping occurred, the discussion in the Congress went in two different directions: first, it started revolving around the Congress' Ethics commission censoring and suspending Marisa Glave and Indira Huilca because of their offensive hashtag and, second, it went where it goes every time there is a sexual violence scandal in the news: to the ever returning discussion about the death penalty. Marisa, who I could see on a closer range than the other MOCs, set on contesting the censorship they were trying to submit her to; it became a fight for her freedom of speech, even though she, as every Member of Congress, has parliamentary immunity and the worst thing that could happen was a 40 day leave of absence. In the Congress, no one mentioned the woman or what happened to her again. No one discussed the current legislation for sexual assault.

At first, the rape victim remained anonymous. However, in the following months the rape victim appeared in several TV variety shows. Bathed by the flash of lights and smothered in makeup, Jennifer Villena, the rape victim, said "I plucked up the courage, I was afraid, I still am, but I don't want things to stay the same, because I put myself in the situation of every mother, every woman who cannot go out to the streets, to declare and accuse the person who did this to them"<sup>18</sup>.

She said that when the Minister of Women and Vulnerable Populations went to visit her the night of the raping: "She offered me help, she cried with me, she made me feel I had her

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<sup>16</sup> In original Spanish: "Cómo pueden haber tenido voluntarios menores de edad? A mi asesora le tocó una voluntaria de 16 años; qué pasaba si le tocaba en la casa de un miserable que la podía haber violado?" Video footage available in Spanish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2vAIK--CsU> (27:38)

<sup>17</sup> In original Spanish: "Ha habido una denuncia pública de un joven cuya hermana ha sido violentada sexualmente. Y lo ha dicho el joven. Claro, porque no puede salir la chica violentada. No va a salir, en televisión, pues. Ha salido el hermano a hacer una denuncia pública". Video footage available in Spanish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxwA6Mhd4Uo&t=2s> (13:00)

<sup>18</sup> In original Spanish: "Tomé valentía, tuve bastante miedo, vergüenza, todavía la tengo, pero no quiero que esto se quede allí, porque yo me pongo en el lugar de todas las madres, todas esas mujeres que no pueden salir, declarar y acusar a la persona que le pudo haber hecho esto".

support, that she understood what I was going through. I thought she would truly support me, but it was not like that. It was just that moment"<sup>19</sup>.

She declared that at the time of the rape, a representative from the National Statistical System offered her 1000 soles (250 euros approximately) in exchange for her silence. He did not want her to file a police report, but she turned down his "offer" and filed the complaint. Some days after she filed the complaint, the Minister of Women and Vulnerable Populations (who is also a Member of Congress temporarily on leave) announced that the Ministry would assume the defence of the victim, asking for preventive detention and for a sentence of 25 years of jail for the perpetrator of the rape. However, according to the article 173 from the Penal Code, the offender can only receive this penalty if the victim is underage. Imparting this penalty would constitute an anomaly given the situation. Why? Because the raped woman was in fact 37 years old. For a victim over 18, the penalty is only between 6 and 8 years of prison.

In the TV show, several months after the happening, she stated that the Minister offered her a job starting at an Emergency Centre for Women from December 2017. "After the 18th of January, I went to work and they told me my contract had expired, that it was only for 20 days". After she complained about losing her job, the Minister offered to give her a grocery store so she could support herself. She was asked for her address to deliver the goods but, at the time of the interview, two months afterwards, she had not heard back from them.

Regarding the legal actions against the perpetrator of the rape, he has been in preventive prison for almost 6 months, which is the maximum time you can keep someone in jail without a court sentence. Many hearings were cancelled and the ruling is taking very long.

This is the last piece of information I found about this case, from February 13th 2018. In the end, Marisa and Indira were never summoned to the Ethics Committee because of their hashtag. Luckily, the death penalty is still illegal in Peru, but the topic continues to come up every two months or so, usually following a raping scandal.

What I want to show with this example is the very hierarchical way in which the representation of the Peruvian population is assumed, and how they end up being considered a kind of "underage" population, unable to choose for themselves and having to be taken care of in a very paternalistic way. How can we talk about women's rights if we do so from a very male and chauvinistic standpoint, where only underage women are "really raped" and men (such as the Director of the National Statistical System and the victim's brother) are responsible for women's wellbeing and safety?

The woman in this situation does not want money, does not want to remain in the shadows, does not want a grocery store, but wants to denounce what happened to her. And in the same way as in the previous case, the discussion is still not about women's rights, but about political struggles: convincing a victim of not filing a complaint, making the Director of the National

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<sup>19</sup> In original Spanish: "Me ofreció ayuda, lloró conmigo, me hizo sentir que estaba conmigo que, entendía por lo que estaba pasando, sentí que en verdad me iba a apoyar, pero no fue así. Solo fue el momento".

Statistical System resign—even if the problem is much bigger than him— or censoring members of the Congress so they are out of the game for a couple of months. Building on the ideas of Vich, the statements of the politicians assemble an idea of an 'other' who is external, different and who supposedly causes the 'wrong' (Vich, 2002, p. 15). It is not us; it is them. It is a moral judgement and not an ethical one. This perverse dynamic diverts attention from addressing the real issue: violence in *our* society.

### 3.4. Reflections around the cases: the ethical substance behind the institution

“Equality is not given, it is processual. It is a constellation of moments — some days, some weeks, some years which create specific temporal dynamics, endowed with more or less intensity and duration. The past left us no lessons, only moments that we must extend and prolong as far as we can”  
- Jacques Rancière, 2017

As we can see in the two previous stories, the discussion is not about women's rights, it is not about gender equality or about the citizens behind the complaint. It is about power struggles inside of government "democratic" institutions and about upholding a deeply conservative moral framework.

In the previous chapter I examined the ontics of politics (in this case, the Congress as an institution) to raise, in this chapter, ontological questions about equality, which is the underlying assumption behind democracy.

As stated by Swyngedouw, "the 'political difference' between the ontological foundation of the political as absent ground on the one hand and the everyday ontic practices of politics is irreducible, yet there is a tendency for the latter to colonize, suture, and ultimately disavow the former" (2011, p. 373).

I think we can see in the previous example how the formal structure of democracy is very much in place, and it is very much left unquestioned by citizens, while its substance becomes more and more forgotten, to the point where it cannot 'break through' the institution. The ethics of equality, the equality of citizens before the law (in terms of age, class, race, etcetera) is subsumed here to a moral speculation of what 'really' happened and of who we can use as a scapegoat to avoid the enactment of equality and, ultimately, justice.

I want to bring the classical example of Rosa Parks to the discussion. She is the example par excellence of performatively staging equality by refusing to give her seat on a bus to a white man in Alabama in 1955. With her act, she broke the existing order of things—what Rancière calls 'the sensible'— and made visible the 'wrong' of the given situation. The Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. used this case to represent their fight to stop racial segregation. Of course, she was not the first person to resist bus segregation. Others had gone down the same path, including Rustin in 1942, Morgan in 1946, Bradford in 1951, Keys in 1952 and Colvin, Browder, McDonald, and Smith in 1956, who were arrested in Montgomery for not giving up their bus seats months before Parks. Claudette Colvin did exactly the same that Rosa Parks did nine months earlier, also in Alabama, but was sixteen years old and pregnant. Rosa Parks was

42 years old, a professional and an officer in the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and as well as African, she had native American, Scottish and Irish ancestry.

I bring up this example because I think it is really important to consider how willing is a society to let the 'sensible' be broken. In the attempts to enact equality that concern us in this chapter, the fight of these two women for equality and justice is turned by society into a shameful show that reveals widespread practices of abuse, corruption and paternalism. The issue that these women are denouncing is, in the end, depoliticized and the moralistic, conservative arguments prevail. Even from the well intentioned, there is a very strong tendency in Peruvian society to speak for the underprivileged instead of letting them have their own voice. These tutelary and authoritarian structures inhibit the constitution of subjectivities and collective life in general.

## CHAPTER IV

### REPRESENTATION?

"We will recover democracy on the streets and we will defend it"

-Marisa Glave

#### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, my aim is to show the role of the Congress in the political crisis that the country lived from December 2017 until March 2018. Unlike most impeachment processes, the impeachment and subsequent resignation of the president of Peru, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, was caused (at least that was the discourse) not by something he was doing or had done while leading the Peruvian Government but by something he did 16 years before, as a Minister of Economy. Furthermore, this discovery did not come from the Peruvian Prosecution or the Peruvian judiciary system, but from the declarations that Marcelo Odebrecht, CEO of Odebrecht, gave to the Brazilian prosecution. Marcelo Odebrecht got a 'rewarded collaboration' deal after it was discovered that Odebrecht, a Brazilian conglomerate with worldwide presence, had as its modus operandi the bribing of high government officials in order to secure public biddings on civil works.

This scandal has had repercussions all over Latin America: Dilma Rousseff, Brazil's former president, was impeached due to it in 2016, in addition to the prosecution of many other Brazilian politicians involved in this scandal. Fonseca More, Panama's former president, was also dismissed due to his implications with Odebrecht. Many other politicians in countries such as Argentina and Mexico are currently being investigated under corruption charges linked to Odebrecht.

The international commotion around this scandal, added to Fuerza Popular's constant monitoring of Kuczynski's every movement, caused Odebrecht's tip to be taken by the local prosecution and to advance at giant steps. It is worth to mention that even if Odebrecht mentioned not only Kuczynski but also Keiko Fujimori, Alan García (former president of Peru) and many others, the investigations that followed revolved mainly around Kuczynski, even if, from these names, he was the only one with Presidential immunity. For most of the others, until this day, there is only impunity.

The impeachment motion, Kuczynski's negotiation of Fujimori's pardon, the subsequent protests and the resignation of the President were caused not by social mobilizations or by a country-wide crisis; they were the result of a battle between politicians, trying to blame each other for something that is everyone's fault.

Our national economy fell, the pending infrastructure works stopped, all caused by political whims. I am not trying to defend Kuczynski in any way, but I think it is important to consider the very irregular way in which things developed. In Peru, justice does not arrive as an end in itself; it comes only for some and always as a means to achieve something else. The rest of the politicians get to enjoy impunity while the citizens suffer the consequences of the political instability. This political crisis resulted in a country-wide crisis and not the other way around. This is not only the fault of politicians, but also of a very tolerant and resigned citizenship.

In this chapter, I want to go back to the ontics of democracy, but this time keeping in mind its ontological basis. As I argued in the first chapter, with the disappearance of a power that was embodied in the prince and tied to a transcendental authority, a new kind of institution was inaugurated, based in the principle of equality. In democracy, power is 'an empty place'; something that can be earned and kept only temporarily, because it is always open for contestation. In democracy there is no God guaranteeing our power; there is no ultimate legitimation for our actions.

With the following stories, I want to show how representation tries to cover the unbridgeable gap between power and legitimacy through the following question: How is the fiction of representation played in the Peruvian Congress?

The way the resistance to Fuerza Popular's authoritarian practices was carried out by the left shows a deepening of the closure of the political: both left and right are ensuring that the political model that underlies it will not be disturbed and continue in place, immobilized. For this, I will use the concept of "crowd", as used by Jodi Dean, to explain the material base that the Peruvian left is lacking. Against the presumption that the individual is the fundamental unit of politics, Dean focuses on the crowd as the fundamental unit where the struggle begins, forcing the possibility of the intrusion of regular people into politics. Crowds come together for the sake of an absolute equality, breaking the sensible, and providing a material ground for the party. "The party is the body that should carry the egalitarian discharge after the crowds disperse, channelling its divisive promise of justice into organized political struggle" (Dean, 2016, p. 10). However, in Peru's case, the public manifestations do not really break the sensible: the uprisings are an aggregation of individuals, separated by their class, that cannot really form a temporary but true collective being; nor there is a party to structure the crowd's weak discharge: the party continues to push citizenship towards individual rights, because we cannot conceive ourselves as one.

After all the events that will be narrated here, Kuczynski left the government but, in reality, nothing changed. The crowd is still unable to find its voice, the Congress' dynamics will remain the same and representation will continue to be a perverse fiction shielding us from imagining alternative political trajectories.

## 4.2. Impeachment, pardon and political crisis

In Peru, the Odebrecht scandal involves not only our current president, but also Ollanta Humala, Alan García and Alejandro Toledo –the previous three presidents–, Keiko Fujimori and some regional governors. Even if Jorge Barata, CEO of Odebrecht in Peru, and Marcelo Odebrecht mentioned all these people, most investigations in the Congress were centred around Ollanta Humala, who after political pressure was ordered preventive prison, and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.

Apart from this, from the start of the new government in 2016, it was clear that Fuerza Popular was determined to closely monitor the actions of the executive power with the help of the majority they hold in the Congress. In November 2016, the Congress created a temporary investigative commission called "Lava Jato" ('Car Wash', the Brazilian denomination of the corruption scandal there) in order to investigate corruption issues related to Odebrecht. These investigative commissions have no penal consequences but they push the Peruvian Public Prosecutor to move faster with the investigation because of the media stir they cause.

Corruption has always been highly tolerated in Peru. During election times and across the country, it is very common to hear people giving validation to a candidate by saying "he steals but he does public works" [roba pero hace obra]. When in 2016 the DEA gave information to the Peruvian Prosecution to open an investigation for money laundering on Joaquín Ramírez, the Secretary-General of Fuerza Popular, the investigation was archived a year afterwards. When Odebrecht mentioned Alan García, President of APRA and twice-president of the country, he was subpoenaed to appear at the Lava Jato Commission in the Congress. I was there during the interrogation, and it was like a walk in the park for him. He completely guided the conversation, giving a one-hour monologue and then asking for the meeting to be suspended because he was hungry and it was already lunchtime. The Commission allowed it. However, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski's was a different story. He first rejected the subpoena from the Commission because of his presidential immunity. He was entitled to do so, but the political gesture was not appreciated and intensified the inquiries around his involvement in the scandal.

The accusations for the impeachment of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski had to do with USD782,000 in payments made to Kuczynski's private consulting firm while he was a Minister of Economy in Alejandro Toledo's government, back in 2001. At first, Kuczynski denied having any political or business ties with Odebrecht. On the 13th of December, when the Lava Jato Commission released "new" evidence (again, from things that happened 16 years ago) and he was caught in his lie, Fuerza Popular held a press conference at the Congress where they said that if the President did not resign by the 14th of December, they would start with the impeachment process because of the President being "morally incompetent".

The Peruvian Constitution states the following regarding the removal from office of a President:

"A President can be removed from office in the following cases:

- By death of the President

- By permanent moral or physical incapability, declared by the Congress
- By the Congress accepting the resignation of the President
- By leaving national territory without the permission of the Congress
- When the President is displaced because of treason, avoiding elections, dissolving the Congress and impeding the functioning of electoral organisms."<sup>20</sup>

Of all of these, "permanent moral incapability" is the most subjective one. As Eduardo Ballón, an anthropologist and researcher from Desco (an autonomous research institute in Lima), told me during an interview: "If, for starters, you have a Constitution and a regulation of the Congress that allows the removal from office of the highest position of the country for something so blurry as 'moral incapability' and allows it to be done so fast, I get the impression that the fantasy of liberal, classical democracy blew away a long time ago! It is true they did it in the fastest way possible, but the constitution says that it takes between 3 and 10 days and there is no need of proof. If the majority of the Congress says that he is a liar, that's it!"

This is a flaw in the Peruvian Constitution. But the point I want to make is that this was a purely political struggle and that the grounds for impeachment were quite tenuous, particularly given the long history of tolerance to presidential corruption in Peru.

This whimsical use of justice reveals what I think is an ever-growing gap in our legal systems, that is turning more and more clear globally. The Peruvian Congress is in a permanent witch hunt, and usually for crimes that many MOCs themselves are guilty of. In an interview, Marisa Glave told me that she considered she dedicated 10% of her time to producing or reviewing legislation and 90% of her time on the inspection of both Fuerza Popular and the executive government.

All the investigations and trials that start in the Congress are much more political than juridical. I think this constant inspection has morphed into a culturally solidified lynch-mob habit, as Margaret Atwood put it while discussing the #MeToo movement, where the available mode of justice is thrown out the window, and extra-legal power structures are put into place and maintained (Atwood, 2018).

In Kuczynski's case, the impeachment was an ever-present shadow since the start of his government. Because of his team being conformed by technicians more than politicians, he did not know how to deal with the strong opposition he had from Congress. This resulted in an executive power that was completely blocked and the consequent exacerbation of social conflicts in the country. It was, in a way, bound to happen; Fuerza Popular just needed to find a good enough reason first.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Peruvian Constitution, 1993.

### 4.3. A (Merry) Christmas

On the same day that Fuerza Popular gave the press conference threatening the President to start an impeachment if he did not resign, the President gave a short statement saying that he would go to the Lava Jato Commission to answer all the questions they had.

The next day, December 14th 2017, the plenary meeting at the Congress was supposed to start at 11:00 but, at that time, Luis Galarreta, MOC from Fuerza Popular and President of the Congress, announced that the plenary meeting was cancelled and, instead, they would carry out a permanent commission meeting "in case something happens". They said the plenary meeting would be held the next day at 11:00, again, "unless something happens". The Permanent Commission is supposed to be a commission that operates only when there is an impediment to carry out the normal plenary meeting (such as public holidays or the suspension of ordinary sessions) but, in this case, they were just waiting for Kuczynski to say something about the accusations.

That day, Frente Amplio, half of the leftist opposition in the Congress, started the impeachment process by writing the motion and collecting signatures. This gave some legitimacy to what Fuerza Popular was doing. No one was pleased with the way the President was handling the accusations, but the speed with which the impeachment process was carried out was outstanding.

After that, every political group started talking about the impeachment as a very present possibility. No one was working; they were just waiting to see what happened; waiting for Kuczynski to speak.

In all the conversations I heard that day, no one was defending the President or at least giving him the benefit of the doubt; nor were they thinking about how these constant accusations have turned into the modus operandi of the Congress.

While having lunch with some of Marisa's staff, we had this conversation:

**Sayuri:** We spent all our lives saying this guy was a lobbyist now, finally, we have proof.

**Vera:** Ok, but which President has not been a lobbyist?

**Catherine:** But as bad as PPK? I think not.

**Richard [Advisor of Nuevo Peru]:** The thing is that he is very [politically] dumb.

**Vera:** (to Catherine) Do you think he is worse than, let's say, Alan García?

**Sayuri:** No way

**Catherine:** He is the lobbyist par excellence. Meaning, he was the one signing for the companies.

**Sayuri:** But Vera, reasoning like that no one is free of charge...

Indeed, no one was free of charge. My worry at the time was that, even if Kuczynski left, nothing would change, because Kuczynski was on trial for something that everyone in high

government positions does. And he was only being denounced for it because he ran out of friends in the Congress due to his pleasing attitude towards Fujimorism's attacks.

The Lava Jato Commission subpoenaed the President for the 22nd of December. Vladimir, Marisa's main advisor, told me that there was no way we could go for that long without answers, that the President needed to prove that he did not lie now.

**Vladimir:** He said he is coming to Lava Jato on the 22nd... In the meantime he will be killed! He will be removed from office.

**Vera:** Shouldn't they [the Congress] let him [the President] defend himself first?

**Vladimir:** Do you think we will have [political] conditions for that if he is waiting until the 22nd???

**Vera:** It is only one week from now

**Vladimir:** No! It is too long. I think he will be impeached tomorrow. They only need 25 signatures to accept the motion. Frente Amplio already has 10. If the President does not speak today, tomorrow Fuerza Popular will sign the motion. After the motion is accepted it will be debated and he [the President] will survive until Monday at the most. The impeachment for moral incapability has an established process, so if it is approved tomorrow [Friday], he will be subpoenaed for Monday.

**Vera:** What do you think Kuczynski will do?

**Vladimir:** Considering his lack of political aptitude... nothing, just wait for this to pass. He should go out today to say something but he will not do it.

**Catherine:** But we [Nuevo Peru] will sign the impeachment?

**Vladimir:** No

During those days, it was very unclear what was going to be Nuevo Peru's vote. At first, Vladimir and other advisors were very much in favour of the impeachment; then, when Fuerza Popular pushed too hard, the antifujimorism, which is the true identity of the Peruvian left, won over Kuczynski's wrongdoing and they started doubting what to do regarding the impeachment vote.

The next day, during the plenary meeting, the impeachment motion was received by the Congress, with the signatures of MOCs from Frente Amplio and Fuerza Popular. Galarreta, the President of the Congress, announced that the agenda of the day would be dropped in order to address the new order of business: the impeachment. The meeting went on for 5 minutes and then was suspended. This was done in order to be able to discuss and accept the impeachment motion the same day it is presented instead of waiting one day more. After the impeachment was accepted, it was established that Kuczynski had to present himself in front of the Congress on the next plenary meeting on 21st of December 2017.

During that day, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski was not at the government palace but at his house in San Isidro, the most expensive neighbourhood in Lima, receiving members of his political party, some ministers from his cabinet and some advisors. Mercedes Araoz, the Prime Minister, was there for the whole day. Around midnight, he gave a public statement,

surrounded by members of his party and cabinet, were he denied all the accusations and said, again, that he was not going to resign.



The days before the 21st of December were a blur. Marisa was rarely at the office, always arriving just to leave again, mainly to meetings or for interviews on TV. Nuevo Peru was also trying to figure out how they would vote as a block. Every day the 'score' changed. On the 19th, Vladimir told me five members of Nuevo Peru were voting against the impeachment, three in favour and two did not know. The next morning, one day before the plenary meeting, Anthony, an advisor from the party, told me that two were voting in favour, two against it (including Marisa) and the rest was uncertain.

Most of the MOCs were announcing their votes on national television. It was evident that the decision to vote in favour or against the impeachment has nothing to do with the defence Kuczynski was going to present the next day.

I asked Vladimir what they were going to vote for. He told me this:

**Vladimir:** It is too costly, politically, to vote against the impeachment. We already have the thing with Susana [Villarán, a former Mayor of Lima also investigated in the Odebrecht scandal. Marisa was at that time part of the City Council]

**Vera:** You were in favour of the impeachment and now you are backing out. Why?

**Vladimir:** Because we needed to create a space for Kuczynski to respond to the accusations.

**Vera:** But he [Kuczynski] had already agreed to go to the Lava Jato Commission before starting the impeachment process.

**Vladimir:** Yeah... we did not think it through.

**Jhon:** What is the agenda for this week? The political juncture and nothing else, right?

**Vladimir:** Yes

**Vladimir:** Rationally we should vote against the impeachment, but we cannot do it. If we do, we would have to carry that cross.

That night, there was a very small mobilization against corruption and in defence of democracy organized by collectives against fujimorism. Other than that, everyone in the country was minding their own business.

The next day, the 21st of December, the Congress was gathering to discuss and vote to accept or reject the impeachment motion. The President is attending the meeting, so the security surrounding the Congress that day is much heavier. I try to access the Congress but everything is closed. Only MOCs are let in, not even their advisors. I go to the office to see the President's defence on TV. The president talks very calmly for 30 minutes and then gives the floor to his lawyer, Alberto Borea, who gives a beautiful speech quoting philosophers and great thinkers that no one knows.

While this was happening in the fore, Nicolas Lucar, a journalist, tweets a picture of a document stating that Alberto Fujimori asked on the 14 of December for a commutation of his penalty and, at the same time, the tweets a picture of a medical report recommending that he is pardoned.

Karina sends the picture of both tweets to Marisa's team WhatsApp chat and Marisa asks everyone to verify the information.

It is worth to mention that Fujimori's pardon was, the same as with Kuczynski's impeachment, an ever-present shadow in Peru for quite some time. During Kuczynski's electoral campaign, he said he would not pardon him. However, given his lack of resistance against Fuerza Popular's will during his government, it was bound to happen; everyone was just wondering when.

Karina called a contact of hers in the press office of the Ministry of Justice and they told her that the documents were real and the only thing missing for Fujimori's release from jail was Kuczynski's signature.

Rosa Maria Palacios, another journalist, said that the documents were fake and they were just being used to change Nuevo Peru's votes in order for them to support the impeachment.

Marisa told us in the chat group that she just called 'Meche' (Mercedes Araoz, the Prime Minister) and that she told her the documents were fake. After this, the Ministry of Justice published a statement saying that those documents had not been received by the Ministry. Karina said nothing more after this.

The TV news channel we were watching immediately changed from showing only PPK and Borea to splitting the screen in two in order to show Kenji Fujimori, the strongest advocate for his father's release. He was talking on the phone and



covering his mouth so no one could read his lips.

Marisa texts on the chat "they say the pardon is real. Letona [MOC from Fuerza Popular] told me that Bocangel [MOC from Fuerza Popular] told her". Marisa does not know how to vote anymore. Letona, who –as Marisa established– is a person 'she can talk to', is asking her to vote in favour of the impeachment so there is no pardon.

This uncertainty lasted for hours, while everyone in Marisa's team was going over different sources to see if the documents were true or not.

Close to 22:00, Marisa says in the WhatsApp chat that she talked to the Prime Minister again: "Meche [Mercedes Araoz] just called me and she says it's not real".

It was not clear what Nuevo Peru was going to vote. I thought they would abstain themselves by pressing the abstention button, but they did not even want to do that. In the end, they decided to leave the meeting just before the voting started. They went outside with posters asking for a new constitution. Of course, all the cameras and the media were still at the meeting, so no one was there to capture their political gesture.

The result of the voting was 78 votes in favour, 19 against and 21 abstentions. In order to remove the President from office, the impeachment needed 87 votes in favour. Kuczynski avoided being voted out of office only by a few votes and after a small faction of Fuerza Popular, 10 people led by Kenji Fujimori, abstained from voting.

This change of heart by a group of Fuerza Popular was quite suspicious. However, most people decided to see Kenji Fujimori as a defender of democracy. Everyone relaxed after this. People started thinking about Christmas presents, some people were celebrating the "triumph" of democracy. The weekend came and the holidays started. But it did not last for long.

At 18:00 hours on the 24th of December, Alberto Fujimori was taken from jail to the hospital supposedly because of a medical emergency. One hour later, the Presidency released a statement giving the humanitarian pardon to Alberto Fujimori; just like that.

Some people went to protest that same night, outside of the clinic where Fujimori was, outside of Kuczynski's house and at the main square of the city. Police officers closed a perimeter around the square. Some people from Marisa's team were at the main square and they complained in the WhatsApp group chat about the violence of some of the police officers there. Even after everything that had happened, Marisa called Mercedes Araoz, but now she did not refer to her as 'Meche' but as 'Araoz'. She said "I just called and shouted at Araoz. She is going to call the police [in order for them not to repress the protest]".

Some people tried to go to Kuczynski's house, but police established a perimeter two blocks around it. This perimeter lasted for more than a month after that night. Around 22:30 hours, the people started scattering around. In Peru, it is tradition to have dinner at midnight of Christmas' Eve. The conversation that day ended with Karina writing in the WhatsApp chat: "'Christmas'. They stole the 'merry' part".

The next morning, on Christmas Day, Marisa and Indira Huilca [MOC from Nuevo Peru] went really early to the DIROES, where Fujimori was kept, to check Alberto Fujimori's former cell, to see why, according to the medical report in the pardon, it was causing Fujimori's health deterioration. Marisa later told me in an interview that she thought that making the decision of going straight to check Fujimori's cell was the right way to go because "that way we showed we were not a part of this secret pact". Again, it was a political gesture to show that she was not implicated in the negotiations that led to the pardon.

Fujimori's cell was better than anyone else's in the country. He even had a payphone inside of his room. Later it was known that Alberto Fujimori himself was calling MOCs from Fuerza Popular to change their votes during the impeachment and probably that was the phone he used to call them during the voting. Maritza Garcia, a MOC from Fuerza Popular, declared a couple of days later on national television that she had received a call from Alberto Fujimori during the debate last Thursday where he asked her "to vote with her heart" [que hiciera un voto de conciencia].

That day, on Christmas Day, there was a protest, but only around 5000 people showed up.

That day Kuczynski also gave a Message to the Nation from his country house. He said that Fujimori committed "excesses and mistakes" instead of describing them for what they are: crimes. He had a colonial painting as a backing, with little angels around him. The TV channel had a "Happy holidays" sign in the corner of the screen. The whole



picture was ridiculous; the citizenship was being mocked once again. By now, it was too obvious that the pardon was negotiated in exchange for the votes Kenji Fujimori could get in favour of Kuczynski.

During the following days, some MOCs resigned to PPK's party and some Ministers did as well.



There was not much movement in the country. The Congress was empty; Marisa was in every TV news show and Alberto Fujimori was as well, asking for "political reconciliation" while lying in his hospital bed, with all the medical equipment around him turned off.

On the 27th of December there was a press conference organized by an association integrated by the families of the people murdered during the internal war. I was supposed to join Vladimir and Marisa there, but when I texted Vladimir to ask for the address, he told me "We

[Marisa and Vladimir] are not going. The families of the victims blame us for Fujimori's pardon".

Here it is noteworthy how even if Marisa has as one of her main lines of work the fight against fujimorism and the defence of the families of the victims of the internal war, she ended up pushing them away.

I later asked Marisa why she thought this happened. This is what she told me:

**Vera:** You told me you don't regret voting against the impeachment.

**Marisa:** We did not vote against. We stood up and left.

**Vera:** Yeah, you abstained.

**Marisa:** We did not abstain; we stood up and left.

**Vera:** Ok...but I remember that after this a sector of society interpreted this as if Nuevo Peru supported the pardon to Fujimori. Why do you think this happened?

**Marisa:** Because of what the Frente Amplio [the left wing coalition from which Nuevo Peru separated] did. Marco Arana said that by doing that [not voting], we facilitated the pardon.

I also asked Eduardo Ballón about this, him being an "unofficial" advisor for Nuevo Peru.

**Vera:** Some people interpreted Nuevo Peru's abstention in the impeachment as a support for Fujimori's pardon. How come?

**Eduardo:** I have the feeling that they [Nuevo Peru] made the mistake of thinking that people would be able to understand their leaving the forum before the voting. If I see things in a cold way, I think in Marisa's case, many of these organizations see her as being frivolous and sometimes blame her for decisions that they may have agreed with in the past but now, after seeing the cost they had, they do not.

**Vera:** But how does this result in Marisa being blamed for the pardon?

**Eduardo:** Well, people always need a scapegoat. They blame her because Arana [MOC from Frente Amplio] and some others in his group blame her. And Marisa exposes herself because of the relation she has with Alberto [De Belaúnde, MOC from PPK]. She has been accused of conspiring with him, and also the relationship she has with Mercedes Araoz raises suspicion. For us who know her, we think this is of no relevance whatsoever, it is just part of her frivolous style, which is no mortal sin. However, given the circumstances, it becomes a mortal sin. The situation would be completely different if Nuevo Peru would have made clear that they were not going to be a part of the circus; but they were. Also because they are permanently worried about beating Frente Amplio [the party they used to be part of].

On 28th of December, the third protest against the pardon took place; this time I joined. I saw so many familiar faces, I met a lot of people I had not seen since my junior year at the university. A lot of the people I see around are actually from 'La Católica', the university that both Marisa and I went to. We walked down a route designated by the police in downtown Lima. The area is a very old working-class neighbourhood and, while we walked with our banners, I could see the people in the streets, working, shopping, going about their business, looking at us out of the corner of the eyes, amused, as if we were a curious group performing

some kind of avant-garde dance but at the same time not willing to see us straight in the eye, even less to join us, for we belong to a different class, a class that can protest.

After this, the weekend and the holidays come again. I coincidentally saw Marisa at New Year's Eve, at a seaside town. I am swimming at the public beach; she is sitting in a beach chair inside of a private club. She did not see me.

On the 6th of January, the President makes his first public appearance after giving the pardon to Fujimori. He goes to the inauguration of the Dakar Rally in San Isidro, a long distance off-road race with the participation of more foreigners than locals. At this point, the country has been without the heads of three ministries for three weeks.

#### **4.4. "It is not time for representation, but time for citizenship"**

On the 7th of January, Marisa writes an article in "La República", a centre-left wing newspaper of broad distribution in Lima, asking the citizens to go to the next protest, to be held on January 11th, where she says the following:

"Kuczynski has shown that he is a coward willing to sell anything in order to benefit himself, including justice, memory and the pain of the victims. His betrayal is not to us who are part of the institutions of this very precarious democracy against Fujimori's because we have memory. His betrayal is to the justice achieved in the victim's fight and supported by the citizenship from the streets".

She continues, "what is clear from this situation is that the solution to this mess won't come from the instituted political powers. It is not time for representation, but time for citizenship (...) The instituted power is not absolute; it always has cracks. There were cracks during Fujimori's regime, and there are cracks now. The exit will come from the power of organized people defending their future for their love of this country. It is time that we [authorities] put ourselves to their service to avoid impunity" (Glave, 2018).

"It is not time for representation, but time for citizenship"... I wondered what she meant with that. The political crisis the country was going through was clearly not caused by the citizenship, but by the government: by the executive, the legislative and the judiciary powers all. And now that everything turned out the way it did, she, a representative, is admitting that representation does not work and asking the citizenship, a citizenship that is not used to exercising their rights, to solve all the problems they caused. I struggle to see Marisa before leaving the country, she cancels three or four interviews with me, but in the end I manage to interview her in bits and pieces while she is at a meeting in the Congress.

When I asked her about that phrase, she told me this: "I think that the latest developments have shown how little we can actually do from the Congress, in terms of contestation, checks and balances, in trying that this precarious democracy we have, because it is very precarious, reaches a certain balance of powers, right? So, anything that is done from the standpoint of

representation, considering how flawed the constituted powers are today, especially the executive and legislative, makes no sense. The lesser evil can still be a horrible wrongdoing and my feeling is that we shouldn't do anything other than supporting what the families of the victims and the civil society wants. (...) He [Kuczynski] needs to go. What comes afterwards? It does not matter; he just needs to leave. And, whatever it takes, we should hold new elections. I think that is the only possible political scenario. For example, when Fujimori left [resigned the presidency], it was not an agreement with the army, no. Everything that was going on was so shameless, the streets were so hot and it was so clear for the public opinion that Fujimori needed to leave that he resigned via fax. The Congress did not have anything to do with it; they did not solve the situation. I think the Congress is not going to solve what is happening today. These people are not going to solve it, Fuerza Popular is not going to solve it, they are the majority so we cannot solve it without them. The only way they will vote for an impeachment will be if the streets explode. So the only option is social mobilization".

I also asked her about Kuczynski's appearance at the inauguration of the Dakar Rally. She said "Well, in the end, he is a businessman, right? So he has no clue. This gentleman has not lived in Peru for quite some time and he still does not live in Peru; his head is elsewhere. And he is like an old colonial landholder [Gamonal] and he only considers the illustrated elites or the people with a minimum of instruction as people he can talk to; that's why he can eventually even chat with Congress people like us, but he despises the Peruvian, meaning, the most popular segments of society, their needs, their daily realities. That is why he despises the pain of the victims".

The social mobilizations started fading away with time, as everyone expected them to. The lack of social mobilizations in Peru has, as we saw in the first chapter, very old roots but, during the 90s, as argued by Vergara, the weak peripheral elites we had succumbed to a central State that, after the internal war and the deployment of the military across the country's territory, eroded the political life of the country. "The State that was erected was not necessarily strong but was a State that managed not to be challenged by its society, which has no political projects to use as a stand for opposition" (Vergara, 2015, pp. 235-6).

Eduardo Ballón described the attitude of the Peruvian society as follows: "The Congress is supposed to represent the citizens. For this, we presuppose we have citizens... and that is the true issue. Here we have a citizenship that is willing to rise up only for football and for the Pope. Informality and the "criollada" [being savvy, playing with legal loopholes] is very much embedded in our society. And I would say that this style is not Peruvian but from Lima, where everyone is neither fine nor bad, but just there, hanging [ahí, pasándola]. I think it is also related to the weather: it is never sunny; it is never raining, so we are used of just living 'in-between'".

Around February, Nuevo Peru started a new impeachment motion in the Congress because, of course, the citizenship did not solve the issue that the political powers had created. The new impeachment motion was supported exactly by the same arguments as the previous one, and officially it was not related to Kuczynski's pardon to Alberto Fujimori.

Contrary to everyone's expectations, the fight between Keiko Fujimori and Kenji Fujimori turned out to be real (at least, for the time being). Kenji left Fuerza Popular, together with the ten people who abstained themselves from voting for the impeachment and two more that came afterwards. He started climbing up in the polls.

One day before the new impeachment discussion and voting took place, Fuerza Popular released some videos where Kenji was seen trying to buy votes from Humberto Mamani, a MOC from Fuerza Popular, in order to avoid the new impeachment motion. This modus operandi was already known from the first impeachment motion, but this time it was different because it was on record.

On the 21st of March of 2018, it was these videos that caused the President to resign; not the public mobilizations, not the families of the victims of the internal war, not decency or a wish for change in our country.

Of course, this apparent change in the government was not motivated by a desire to fight corruption: this was motivated by a fight between two siblings, trying to compete against each other. The president resigned due to a political scandal involving two opposition members and not because it had become clear that the release from jail of Fujimori had been a deal between him and the opposition. This is an apparent, spectacularized, democracy in which politics is determined by games behind the curtains, dirty tricks and the use of the media bypassing democratically elected institutions.

What will come is not a new start; it is more of the same. What happened was not Marisa's fault, it was not Arana's fault, it was not Fuerza Popular's fault: it was everyone's fault, because of the way not only the Congress but our society works: its structure, its dynamics, its political elites and the passivity of the citizenship. The politicians, with the resignation of Kuczynski, managed to release the political tension and continue their business as usual, still unable to conceive the country as a space for intersubjective construction but, simply, ignoring and rejecting all the indicators that make evident the radical difference that the majority of the country lives in. In this way, the closure of the political was covered once again by both left and right, ensuring that the political model and the status quo will continue in place.

#### **4.5. Reflection on what remains**

"The choreographing of resistance is not any longer concerned with transgressing the boundaries of the possible, acceptable, and representable, but rather a symptom of the deepening closure of the space of the political. The problem with such tactics is not only that they leave the symbolic order intact and at best 'tickle' the police; they are an active part of the process of post-democratization"

- Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 377

From what we have seen, I think we can say that both left and right are immersed in the fiction of representation. Even when someone recognizes that representation is not working (as Marisa did in my last interview with her), they cannot admit the democratic principle of the indeterminacy of power. The idea of equality is too far removed from our collective imaginaries and we cannot conceive the idea that the seat of power is one that should only be occupied temporarily. At the end of this story, the seat of power was emptied, but only to be filled with more of the same: the power is still held by the same, old, 'white' (by class, not by race) elites, that ensure that whoever is not part of this group remains passive and useless from a political point of view.

On the right, Fuerza Popular was at first busy with crushing the government and then with crushing Kenji Fujimori as a future political adversary. On the left, Nuevo Peru was very much occupied with positioning themselves in front of their old party, Frente Amplio, and with trying to show that what was happening was not their fault. This is the representation we have: an aggregation of personal wills that adapt to the issue of the day and simulate 'new starts' only to continue holding the power that they have.

It is Lasch's figure of the executive: the bureaucratic "gamesman" that replaces the figure of craftsmanship with social skills that involve seducing, humiliating and manipulating other. The gamesman doesn't interiorize rules as socially valid norms; he experiences both work and personal relations as power struggles. Bureaucratic emphases on rules and cooperation couple with personal exceptionalism –rules don't apply to me (Dean, 2016, p. 29). This "game" achieves conclusions that result from the will of everyone but represent the will of no one; it is no one's fault that everything remains the same.

Our representation system is built too much on animosities for the parties to be able to constitute themselves as political adversaries. Regarding our incipient social mobilizations, there is no political organisation capable of picking up were the crowd left. The contestation of the hegemonic power should come from the left, but Peruvian left wing parties lack of political projects and the only identity they have is the fight against fujimorism. Their existence is mostly limited to what they do in the Congress; the party has not much more life other than that. There is no will to tackle the issue at the source: the reality of our eroded political life and the lack of cracks through which the citizenship can express itself.

With Marisa's statement, "It is not time for representation, but time for citizenship", she suggests that we can have the benefits of collectivity without its effects: the relativization of class, the discipline and responsibility that citizenship entails. A crowd is not something that one can summon when everything else fails; it is not a last resort for desperate politicians to use. As noted by Jodi Dean, this is not the way in which collective power works. Collective power needs to work back on those who generate it in order "to cut through the self-interest of individual needs and produce enduring bonds of solidarity. Collective activities always have effects in excess of their immediate goals. Rather than fearing these effects, rather than remaining stuck in the fantasy that an individual can change the world, and rather than remaining so gripped by fears of power that we fantasize a politics that can abolish it, we should confront the force of collectivity directly and take responsibility for generating it and using it" (Dean, 2016, p. 154).

Marisa, in that last interview, said that Kuczynski had to go and that it did not matter what came next. But the truth is that it very much does. What is the point of everything that happened if everything is going to remain the same?

Marisa also said that Kuczynski acts as if he does not live in Peru, but they all do. Representatives take part in a very privileged sphere that does not let them see what is going out outside their little world of intrigues. This privileged sphere is also very much inserted in Lima's social reality, which is different than that of the rest of the country. It is not a neutral territory; it is a despotic and elitist territory.

The question is, with this crisis, have we finally reached a legitimacy crisis for our government system or, will we, Peruvians, continue to put up with the longstanding discrimination, inequality and corruption in our society? We all avoid talking about class; we avoid recognizing our privileges. I think it is time for that to change.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LEFT WE ARE LEFT WITH

In this final section, I want to discuss some of the theory previously considered to then go back to the main, general, question of this research: What does the Congress of the Republic of Peru actually do, even behind the backs of political representatives?

#### 5.1. Parties and crowds?

Throughout this work, I used some ideas from Jodi Dean's *Crowds and Party*. There, Dean heavily criticizes the left for not being able to stand against neoliberalism, for not being able to build a collective and for the challenges it has organizing itself to articulate and follow up on the demands of the crowd.

For Dean, the crowd is the fundamental unit where the struggle begins, forcing the possibility of the intrusion of regular people into politics. In her conception of them, crowds come together for the sake of an absolute equality, breaking the sensible, and providing a material ground for the party, which is the body that should carry the egalitarian discharge after the crowds disperse.

In my analysis of the Congress, I saw that political parties in Peru have little life outside of the Congress and, inside that arena, Congress' members do not act as party members, but as some other kind of collective, in a way, similar to a crowd, but doing the exact opposite: maintaining the sensible instead of breaking it.

The Congress' particular political dynamics resemble crowds in the way that members affect or imitate each other, exceeding their conscious will as individuals and becoming creatures of instinct; acting spontaneously, violently, intensely, getting involved in a performance where they feed on each other's emotion. However, their deepest emotions, the ones that are easily shared, are based on class sensibilities rather than political projects. They constitute a "we", but a very limited one, revolving around a shared class background that renders impossible the expression of divisions in the wider society.

They are, as Taine describes crowd members, "improvised politicians, no one knows who is speaking; nobody is responsible for what he says. Each is there as in the theatre, unknown among the unknown, requiring sensational impressions and transports, a prey to the contagion of passions around him, borne along in the whirl of sounding phrases, of ready-made news, growing rumours, and other exaggerations by which fanatics keep outdoing each other" (1878, p. 31). I read this and think about Marisa crying in the forum, while Becerril

accuses her of defending terrorism, both immersed in an absurd situation, discussing a ridiculous claim, playing out their roles so intensely, in a play that aims to maintain everything as it is. The tension between left and right representatives is finally released in a failed cathartic moment that allows the audience to experience the emotions of the characters without suffering any consequences themselves: the "wound" of the internal war is apparently opened, but in reality it forecloses the real issue even more: the staging of this conflict allows for some of the tension to be released, but it has no impact beyond Congress; it does not build up to mobilize the citizenship and does not have consequences for the ways we construct our political subjectivities.

For members of Congress, the dramatic staging that results from their lack of political commitment constitutes a way of enjoyment, by filling a lack with excess. By enjoying the drive, "one does not have to reach the goal to enjoy. The activities one undertakes to achieve a goal become satisfying on their own. Because they provide a little kick of enjoyment, they come themselves to take the place of the goal. Attaching to the process, enjoyment captures the subject" (Dean, 2011, p. 14). MOCs fill the void with a dramatic performance that is the failure of their supposed goal.

Without functioning parties, there is no body capable of remembering, learning and responding. Without parties, the people talking in fora like the Congress will continue to be people talking about things they are not really entitled to talk about, thus banalizing the suffering of those who are. This is the representation that we have: an aggregation of personal wills that adapt to the issue of the day and simulate 'new starts', only to continue holding the power that they have. This state of oblivion is something that political representatives come to enjoy: they may be ready to admit that representation is not possible, and yet they believe in it more than anyone else. For an outsider as me, this was clearly a fiction, but for them it is the fiction that structures their reality; it is their ideology. As Žižek phrases it, ideology is "a formation whose very consistency implies a certain non-knowledge on the part of the subject" (1989, p. 16). Congress members can recognize the problem, but nonetheless they proceed as if they did not, because of ideology. They will continue to 'enjoy their symptom', as long as they escape its logic. If they would correctly interpret the problem, ideology would dissolve.

What I want to say with this is that the real issue is not the impossibility of representation, even if left-wing representatives want to think it is. The real issue the left has is its difficulty in creating movements and parties built on egalitarian ideas to fight the strong divisions that Peruvian society has built on class and race. Our current parties are fragmented inside, because class always prevails.

During my interviews with Marisa I noticed many signs of this: how she would talk about her fellow party members working at the municipal council of Lima: "I had very valuable companions; social leaders, many teachers, but yeah, you started a discussion in the council and they would all remain silent...". Her constant references to the people 'she could talk to' and her conversations with Úrsula Letona and Miguel Torres from Fuerza Popular, her relation with Alberto De Belaúnde from PPK and with Richard Acuña from APP; her calls with 'Meche' Araoz, the Prime Minister. During my time there, I saw them fight and make up a thousand

times, but the relationship, good or bad, would always remain close, because they share something, something incredibly strong and powerful in Peruvian society: being 'white'. Being white in Peru, as discussed in the first chapter, is not mainly about colour, but about social position, money and privileges.

In the left, white intellectuals coexist with union workers, teachers and social leaders but, as it happens with maids, they 'cannot seat at their table'. Putting these groups together in a party without addressing class struggles first will not result in cohesion but the opposite: the left will continue to break in smaller and smaller fractions, conformed only by people 'they can talk to'. Without stronger parties, built outside of already established and distorted institutions, Congress' members will continue to build inter-party links rather than intra-party ones. Change is not going to come through representation or through the government, and we need to start thinking outside of it.

If the left truly desires to build a collectivity, we need to start thinking about a bigger 'we'; a 'we' conformed of different, conflicting, divided people, but who are all worth exactly the same. We also need to stop being afraid of thinking about or discussing communism, in the sense that Dean refers to it: not as a type of government but as the construction of a common whereby egalitarianism is the shared practice that brings us together. As Dean puts it, "if communism means anything at all, it means collective action, determination and will" (2011, p. 28).

Because representatives are blinded by their ideology, they will seek to continue in their privileged positions. MOCs desire to desire, and they will only talk about equality in a way in which it will remain completely unreachable. We need to think about political institutions such as parties or other spaces where we could discuss egalitarianism and the redistribution of power. And this should be the programme of the left.

## **5.2. Representation and the represented: the role of the citizenship**

An important issue is the role of citizenship in all of this. Peruvians complain plenty about their political class but at the same time we are very benevolent with them: we feel that we are stuck with what we have, we 'deserve' them because we voted for them. I think we can see in the previous chapters how the formal structure of democracy is very much in place, and it is very much left unquestioned by citizens, while its substance becomes more and more forgotten, to the point where it cannot 'break through' the institution. By delegating their powers to representatives, the people relinquish their power. Politicians are not accountable to party structures and we Peruvians allow it to be like that.

Left sympathizers continue to look optimistically at democracy, expecting that socialism will arise out of electoral politics, even with all the evidence we have against this. We want change without the struggle, which is something that will never happen. The citizens, or at least those with a voice –the people who are authorized to protest, to complain, to talk– do not want to renounce their privileges. They have become specialists in turning the political situation into

amusing content for public consumption; the will for change has become another product for consumption, with a beat that "follows the notes according to which poor rich folks play the blues" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 426).

Even from the well intentioned, there is a very strong tendency in Peruvian society to speak for the underprivileged instead of letting them have their own voice. These tutelary and authoritarian structures inhibit the constitution of subjectivities and collective life in general. Because of this, it is fundamental that we confront our class differences. It is good that we are talking about individual liberties, but it is not good if we do so at the expense of the neglected majority of the country.

The elites' socialism is suturing the political and getting us further away from emancipatory politics. At the same time, the cultivation of fear, in Peru's case the portrayal of communism as always linked to terrorism, prevents us from imagining any alternative and emancipatory trajectories.

We need to stop focusing on the 'liberal' part of 'liberal democracy' so we can go back to its other part: the element of popular sovereignty. To do so, we need to stop wallowing on guilt and self-pity, because nothing good is going to come out of that.

Democracy, as posed by Dean (2012), will never be the rule by the many. We should stop pretending that representation is the problem. What we need to think about is the capacity to invent new forms of collective enactment of equality. This is a question that, sadly, I cannot answer. And, I think, it is also not my place to answer it. I think the solution does not have to do with changing whoever occupies the seat of power. Left or right wing governments will continue to do the same: negate the difference, keep the ones who cannot talk silent. We need to get to know each other, to let the others speak for themselves, even if this process will be painful and reveal things that are not pleasant to see or hear. It is, after all, the reality of our country, the result of the deep wounds that we keep accumulating: The Spanish conquest and colony, the unfulfilled republican promise, the internal war.

At the same time, and as discussed in chapter III, maybe we are not ready for it. Maybe the sensible<sup>21</sup> is not ready to be broken regarding class struggles, maybe it will continue to trivialize any kind of possible disturbance of our very hierarchical social structure.

Two hundred years after our independence from the Spanish, we have still to address fundamental issues as a society. In a way, I feel, Peruvians are more worried about keeping up with the western world: we worry so much about having a veneer of modernity and liberal rights, to try and look "equal" to the civilized first world. We are on the internet, we comment on international politics, we are carried away by global movements and very up to date with the trendiest social hashtags but, as Ballón said to me, "inside of the homosexual movement, a high class homosexual will be called 'gay'; a poor homosexual will be called a 'fucking

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<sup>21</sup> The existing order of things, as used by Rancière and described in Chapter I.

faggot"<sup>22</sup>. I know this is not something exclusive to Peruvian society, but this does not make it less terrible.

The situation makes me think about when I was sixteen and I used to go to slums in Lima to collect data for a NGO's housing project. The houses I visited usually had no running water, no floors and sometimes you would see a baby crawling around, on the dirt, next to a flat screen TV with satellite cable. In the same way, Peru's modernity is a veneer floating over the deep wounds of our society and the lack of political projects for our country.

### 5.3. Conclusions

Going back to the main question, I think that what the Congress does is concealing the true problem of our society. Peruvians are so disgusted with politicians, especially with Congress' representatives, that they focus on the fact that representation does not work.

Most members of Congress know very well that what they do is a very shallow game of horse-trading that goes against the democratic principle of popular sovereignty, and yet they do it, because of their ideology. They do not only take part of this game, but they enjoy it, as well as the power, the attention and all the privileges that come with it, and that they receive to the detriment of the rest of the country.

Their performance, however, makes visible important tensions that characterize Peruvian society: the frequent use of violence, of authoritarian practices, the existing economic and social disparity, the racism, the cultural heterogeneity, etcetera.

Discrimination continues to be a central problem in the country and is, according to Manrique (2002), part of a model where only some people possess the truth, while the rest needs to be taken care of or destroyed.

Even if the Republic of Peru is independent and has had democratic institutions such as the Congress for almost two hundred years now, we are not a Republic. For historical reasons, such as Peru being the centre of Spanish empire in South America and the trauma of the internal war, the imaginary of egalitarianism has had difficulties in being translated into militant political movements or parties in Peru.

This leads to what Dean calls a 'leftist melancholia', which is the feeling from the left that the battle has already been lost, that the population is not ready for egalitarianism, that solidarities will always be structured according to class and racial divisions. This, aggravated by contemporary society's distractions and compulsions, makes the majority of us feel like something is wrong, something is missing, something is deeply unfair. "Then one might complicate this idea, or contextualize it, or forget about it and check email. Or one might try to make a difference –signing petitions, blogging, voting, doing one's own part as an individual. And here is the problem: one continues to think and act individualistically (Dean, 2011, p. 30). This is also a fiction; a fiction that gives us the comfort of feeling we are doing something to

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<sup>22</sup> In Spanish: "Un homosexual pituco es gay, un homosexual pobre es un maricón de mierda, pero eso se reproduce dentro del propio movimiento gay".

create change. But in reality, the fact is that both these things are not good enough reasons for the left to give up: it is just another way of concealment of the alternative imaginaries that can and do exist in our country.

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