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DRINOT, Paulo, editor, 2017, *El Perú en teoría*, Lima, IEP. 331 pp.

*El Perú en teoría*, edited by Paulo Drinot and published in Spanish by the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, brings us back to the metaphorical image created by Jorge Basadre of Peru as a problem and a great possibility. Penned in 1931, the historian's phrase has not lost its potency in the national imagination. The historical context in which Basadre wrote that year was a time when the country was being rethought after the *Patria Nueva* of Leguía, marked by modernizing and indigenista visions of the state. But *El Perú en Teoría* tells us about another scenario, of a country that is profoundly divided and violated by what was, perhaps, the bloodiest conflict in our republican history, in whose aftermath it is not democracy that has been consolidated but rather an economic and political order with great importance in the cultural sphere: neoliberalism. Never before in our history has it been so important, for example, that social subjects have the capacity to act; never before has public space as well as the state itself, as a terrain, been in dispute. To Basadre's phrase, we should add Carlos Iván Degregori's idea of "maelstrom" (*vorágine*), to think of the country as a great roller coaster, as well as the imaginary of Castoriadis – an author that I miss in the collection of articles that make up this book.

Through an interdisciplinary dialogue that the authors establish with other theoreticians, *El Perú en teoría* provides a different and current perspective on contemporary Peru. I can imagine Paulo Drinot conversing with Michel Foucault, Jelke Boesten with Judith Butler, or Daniella Gandolfo with Georges Bataille. In *El Perú en teoría*, the authors theorize together with their conceptual interlocutors from an empirical standpoint, and this makes the book an important contribution to understanding the country as a complicated contemporary political scenario. While Alberto Vergara and Eduardo Dargent suggest thinking the state based on its political structure, José Carlos Orihuela invites us to reinterpret Basadre's idea of conceiving the state in technical terms, in the Weberian style, in a context in which what dominates is an "Empirical state" (p. 79). The author underlines that "the long history of ruptures and corruption has to be a structural cause for agents' weak loyalty to the state and to national political projects"<sup>1</sup> (p. 79).

The state is not only the terrain but also a key player in the conceptual, historical, and ethnographic mechanisms of this work. It emerges as an actor left behind in its monoculturality when it was asked to reaffirm the

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1 All translations in this book review are by *Apuntes*.

Law of Prior Consultation (*Ley de Consulta Previa*), in its misogyny when it was asked to respect gender equity, in its racism and inequality when it is supposed to respect the purported basis of its pride: diversity.

If we assume neoliberalism on the basis of its cultural mandates, we would understand the idea of hegemony and the way the ideas of citizenship, transgression, and performance are structured in the articles of María Balarin, Daniella Gandolfo, and Jelke Boesten, and those of governability and sovereignty in the contributions of Matthias vom Hau and Valeria Biffi.

For example, in the mid-1990s, amid the entrenchment of the new constitution and with it the sealing of the pact for the country's entry into neoliberalism, the then mayor of Lima (Alberto Andrade Carmona) sought to "cleanse" the city of its migrants and restore its colonial quality. And he did this through the image of a topless women that made history: the nakedness of the body of those who no longer necessarily serve the system. Or, as Boesten puts it – paraphrasing Agamben – "the null life," which is necessary for the system to perpetuate itself, but not in itself. The image of the women is converted into a battlefield, and this is the idea that I want to connect to Boesten's contributions. During the years of the conflict, violence expanded as never before; it was the "violence of the norm [...]" The norm produces violence when it impedes people from being what they want to be in the most fundamental aspects of their lives; thus, it is violence by restriction" (p. 296). This is the violence that traces the borders between being and not being, as Butler points out; it causes certain lives to be livable depending on where one is and according to the normative frameworks in which one acts. To this hierarchy, Boesten adds the way that race operates. Even when normative violence is the exercise of control and governing, race also operates there as a social marker of difference. That is, amid precariousness, one can always find oneself lower down.

The concept of performance, whether understood as gender, repertoire, or approach, has played a central role in efforts to go beyond the modern paradigm of sociological thought. For example, it has allowed stock to be taken of the ambiguity contained in every performance, also allows for normalizing and transgressory processes, helping us to discover the paradoxes within which communities reproduce themselves, power is disputed, and subjectivities are configured. On the other hand, performance has favored the contextualized understanding of social phenomenon, as well as the constitutive power of representations – as Butler highlights.

Nevertheless, performance has become a cultural mandate under neoliberalism. In order to be and to be in the world, acting and exhibiting oneself in the public space is required. Thus, as the idea of performance emerges

as a concept, the ideas of governability and sovereignty also appear as key concepts in this engrenage. For example, José Carlos Orihuela and Cecilia Perla demonstrate that there is currently an intrinsic relationship between social and territorial movements, while the articles by Drinot, and Biffi and Vom Hau attest to a delegitimation of power exercised through the state. Drinot goes further, suggesting that the sovereignty of the state is so precarious that it must have recourse to fear and the negation of a population group's existence in order to install its power.

While it is true that Foucault's idea of governability allows neoliberalism to be grasped as a social phenomenon, it is necessary to understand how this is deployed selectively in different areas, one of which is the idea of sovereignty and how it is achieved, with large projects intended to "improve" citizens' lives in what is, as Drinot notes, the "replacement of sovereignty with governability in a clear teleological progression" (p. 239). The other categories that are problematized are precisely those of the citizen or citizenship (who, how, with what models), and of participation. Racial grammar and its power is placed at the service of the necropower. This machinery is functional for the system as both Drinot and Biffi and Vom Hau demonstrate for the case of Alan García and his "perro del hortelano."<sup>2</sup> García's canine rhetoric configures a political project that leaves aside the majority of the Peruvian population – he classifies, regulates and de-represents it – but in doing so, he calls into question the sovereignty of the state itself; a state that is no longer called upon to defend its territory, but which will be confronted by its own populations.

*El Perú en teoría* leaves us with a taste of nostalgia as we look at ourselves through the lens of the recent past, which at times seems long gone and to which one would like to return. But the capacity to imagine the undeniable desire and the potential to think of ourselves – or at least imagine ourselves – differently remains open. We can suggest, following Castoriadis, that the imagination is an action and a social practice (a function) and its performance (to be able to do and to be) is the movement and its transformation. As in Gandolfo's case study of the sweeper or Boesten's analysis of the women who spoke out and assumed the role of citizens in looking for their disappeared family members or friends and denouncing human rights violations against them, make us think and recuperate the possibility of

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2 Originally one of Aesops' fables, referring to a dog lying in a manger on hay, who didn't need the hay but defended it anyway. Garcia applied it to native communities in Peruvian lowlands, who have resources on their territories, do not exploit them, but do not want to give others access. The article caused a scandal.

fracturing the mandates of neoliberalism, such as organizational efficiency, cultural efficiency, or the effectiveness of government.

María Eugenia Ulfe  
*Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima*  
mulfe@pucp.edu.pe