

Lumpen Politics? A Day in “El Hueco”

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TURBAMULTA

“El Hueco” was born with the death of another market.

It all began with a mob of people running down Huallaga Street screaming. At first it looked like yet another fire had broken out in the chaotic and obstructed street. But it soon became clear that the mob was actually on the attack. Men brandished steel rods and wooden sticks as they bellowed pro-Fujimori slogans. No one knew who they really were: Perhaps they were street vendors defending their stalls against eviction? Hired thugs looking to fight off the forces of order and wreak havoc? Some witnesses saw members of the National Police mingling in with the attackers, and word was that higher-ups had ordered them to join in the revolt. Street vendors, thugs, policemen—all chips off the same block (see Narro 1997; *La República* 2012a).

This was in the pre-dawn hours of a mid-May morning in 1997. Five years after his self-coup d'état, President Alberto Fujimori's power over state bureaucracy and the armed forces was at this point nearly total. A few blocks south of the Presidential Palace, roughly five thousand vendors were entrenched in the streets; they had partitioned the sidewalks and pavement around the Central Market to build two dense rows of rickety but permanent stands that choked the market building like a tight belt. It was unclear why the president opposed the eviction, except that it was Mayor Alberto Andrade's idea, and Fujimori hated the mayor.¹ The tensions erupted into outright

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¹ Although Andrade (a two-term mayor between 1996 and 2002) had fully embraced the policies of Fujimori's undemocratic government and understood his own vision for Lima to be aligned with those policies, Fujimori antagonized the mayor from day one. *Caretas* magazine, whose headquarters are located in the city's main square, across from the Presidential Palace and Lima's municipal building, chronicled Fujimori's hostilities and the two men's growing estrangement. *Caretas*

fighters on Huallaga Street, where a few weeks earlier a rabble of angry vendors—a *turbamulta*, as the weekly *Caretas* called it and described as two thousand strong—had stormed toward the outnumbered and unarmed municipal guards the mayor had charged with carrying out the eviction. Molotov cocktails had rained on the group of terrified sentries, forcing them to retreat, burned and bloody (*Caretas* 1997a). It all seemed spontaneous and volatile, but the buzz everywhere was that Fujimori had a hand in it.

The urban clean up and reordering project that Andrade had launched in 1996 came in the wake of a period of runaway inflation, car bomb attacks, and anti-terrorist measures that had left downtown Lima in shambles. Starting in the mid-1980s, traffic into downtown had slowed to a trickle because of blocked streets around state offices, private banks, and media companies, which were favored targets of the Shining Path. The area of downtown around the main square looked like a war zone—eerily quiet, windowpanes everywhere intersected with duct tape to prevent the glass from shattering, the streets peppered with tanks and armed soldiers but otherwise left to deteriorate and collect garbage. The blocks around the Central Market south of Abancay Avenue were equally neglected, but they already bustled with the energy and ingenuity of a street economy that, amid the financial and political crisis, flourished after four decades of steady Andean migration to the city. Andrade thus cast his urban revitalization initiative as the “recuperation” of the city’s center from, all at once, terrorist destruction, governmental neglect, bourgeois oblivion, and migrant “invasion” (see Gandolfo 2009).

The morning after the botched market eviction attempt, it was business as usual on Huallaga Street. The sidewalk stalls reopened to sell electronics, clothes, shoes, produce, and recycled and stolen goods—so-called *productos de bajada*—to the sixty thousand shoppers (Narro 1997) who trolled the street market each day, moving, like a trickle, through an artery traversing the stalls. Photographs of the Central Market published in these years—often taken from above to emphasize crowdedness and dilapidation—are meant to appall, to provoke outrage. But if they do appall, they also spark the imagination.

From a bird’s eye view, it is a sea of makeshift rooftops: scraps of metal or wood, tarps, and cardboard sheets held down with stones and bricks. “Refuse, offal, and sickening filth,” they seem to denounce in the same way Friedrich Engels did as he walked the slums of early industrial Manchester (2009 [1845]: 72). In the poverty and dirt, Engels thought he saw signs of promiscuity and crime, betraying, in his indignation, his bourgeois sensibility and moralism.

backed Andrade effusively, adopting his perspective and highlighting his democratic credentials and efforts of (neoliberal) modernization. *Caretas*, then as today, catered to a middle-class and upper middle-class readership.



FIGURE 1 The intersection of Andahuaylas and Huallaga Streets. Credit: Courtesy of *Revista Caretas*.

Looking at these pictures of Huallaga Street one is meant to also see signs of *mal vivir*, to picture the dens of lowlifes the market was said to harbor: burglars, purse-snatchers, glue sniffers, and vagabonds—the riff raff of downtown indistinguishable from the morass of stalls (Caretas 1997a; Narro 1997). Was this true? Who knows? That the street market offended is understood from the photographs, but it is also understood that it attracted people like a magnet, more than the Central Market proper.

With no explanation, Fujimori reconsidered, and a few weeks later he allowed the removal of the vendors to proceed. This time the National Police assisted with the eviction. Some said this was because the president’s complicity with the violent mobs threatened to turn into a scandal, others because the vendors themselves wanted to relocate to a definitive place and leave the precariousness of the streets. It might have been that the mayor’s will to beautify the city center was unstoppable. I could have tried to get to the bottom of it, but I suspect there was no bottom. The media reported that some of the vendors had bought or registered to acquire property outside the center to eventually resettle on (Narro 1997) and thus did not need or want the president to intervene. If that were true, it would have been a strange hiatus in the political love affair between Fujimori and what, since the 1986 publication of Hernando de Soto’s *El otro sendero: La revolución informal*, we Peruvians had been calling “the informal sector.”

Once the bulldozers were done leveling the stalls, another dimension, the “parasitic” dimension of the street market became visible in hundreds of

improvised electric connections that had been pilfering power from public cabling. It had been obvious that this was how vendors kept the market lit up at night, but it was still shocking to see the pirate hookups in the light of day. Once the stalls were gone the streets had to be cleared of rats and 150 tons of garbage (*Caretas* 1997b). As with Engels's moralism, the attention put on the waste and vermin in media accounts betrayed racial and class prejudice, and indicated that, like many other street markets in the city, this had been first and foremost a “*cholo*” space. In 1980s and 1990s Lima, the term “*cholo*” derived much of its virulence from its connotations not just of dirt and disorder but also of a polluting quality imputed to the bodies and spaces of Andean migrants that had the power to deform the city's culture from within. Remarking on the association of “*cholo*” and “*chola*” with dirt, and of urban dirt with “*cholo*” spaces, Guillermo Nugent notes that grievances that the streets of Lima were clean in “the past” and “now” they are dirty, grievances that were central to Andrade's project to recuperate the city, are based not on “a temporal distinction but on a social one” (1992: 52–53) and index a nostalgia for maximum social distance from migrants.²

After the eviction from the streets around the Central Market, about a third of the vendors moved to Argentina Avenue. Hopes were high that they would settle there and go legit, but a 2003 news report informed that the new market had turned into one of Lima's most popular *cachinas*, a hub for the sale and resale of stolen cell phones, computers, digital cameras, and other *productos de bajada* at very low prices (Mairata 2003; Agurto 2003). Another third moved onto a property they had acquired outside the city center. Emotions there ran high and rivalries intensified. Some said their leader had embezzled the money vendors had collected for the relocation while others said she had been falsely accused by a rival vying for her position—again, no bottom. The leader was eventually murdered.³

The last group of vendors, 1,500 in total, moved just a few blocks down from the Central Market to an empty corner lot that had been dug out in the 1950s for the foundations of a state building that was never built. But Señora Emilia, one of the original vendors in this new market, told me that the lot had been cursed. It was part of a tract of land that had been expropriated from the old convent of Santa Teresa to expand Abancay Avenue, and the nuns angry about the loss of their property had put a spell on it. The heavy machinery vendors brought in to level the ground inside the pit had broken down on contact, and there was perpetual discord among vendors. Señora

² While in the scholarly literature the perceived “cholification” of urban spaces associated with twentieth-century migration to Lima is a focal point of analysis, I should note that in my research since 2009 the term “*cholo*” has not been used by city officials, vendors, or any other interlocutor. For more on “cholification,” see Quijano 1980; Degregori et al. 1986; and Montoya Uriarte 2002.

³ I first learned about this murder in 2006 from an NGO organizer who helped these vendors resettle in a location in Caquetá, Lima.

Emilia said that the property had to be exorcised and a supreme sovereign, the Lord of Miracles, put in charge and regularly feasted for the whole thing to work.

This was the birth of “El Hueco”—or “The Pit”—the market in downtown Lima where I have spent many days since the spring of 2009, including the one depicted in this article. My experiences and interactions with vendors that day reopened for me old questions about the social character and political potential of the urban underclass. These could no longer be understood only in relation to economic development, urban planning, or citizenship models, with their teleology of growth, rationalization, and enfranchisement. In its two decades of existence, what has El Hueco managed to be and do? What values have vendors affirmed? What modes of action have they favored? As I contemplated these questions, new terms for a class critique emerged that challenge the conventions of class analysis. The year is 2012, when a new city government offensive against markets like El Hueco threw light on what really is at stake in their eradication. The day is June 7th, pledge of allegiance day.

FLAG DAY

I was there right at 9:00 in the morning, and the ceremony had already begun. A few rows of white plastic chairs had been arranged to face a tall flagpole, from which a red and white flag fluttered in the overcast sky. Vendors sat or stood along a glassed-in altar to the Lord of Miracles as they listened to the vice-president of the vendors cooperative talk into a microphone about the fated Battle of Arica during the Pacific War (1879–1883), commemorated every year nationally on this *Día de la bandera*. His amplified voice bounced off the market walls as he reminisced about the battle’s hero, Alfonso Ugarte, who rode his horse off a cliff, Peruvian flag in hand to save it from Chilean desecration. He addressed his audience as “*señores*” and spoke with fervor.

Together with the hoisted flag, the vice-president’s nods to official history imbued the space of the market with an air of solemnity; his words momentarily lifted it above its reputation as a lowly, seedy place. Flag up, national hero evoked, you would never know that down the underground corridors, behind the toys, clothes, and electronics, you find stockpiles of pirated DVDs, medicines of dubious origin, forged-brand goods, and, in its darkest, deepest recesses, homemade pornographic videos.

The vice-president’s homage to the nation suddenly shifted into a message of alarm. His speech now conveyed a sense of urgency, a sense that their market was under siege. Since its inception, municipal authorities and the police have periodically shut down and conducted raids and seizures at El Hueco because of unlicensed vending, building code violations, infringements of copyright law, and illegal merchandizing. But the threat the vice-president cited that day was not Peru’s state bureaucracy. He riffed on his earlier remarks:

You know, *señores*, that in Peru, in these current moments, there no longer is a bellicose war. Today, the war is in the economic front, *señores*.... Chile has practically taken over 35 percent of our economy [by building] commercial centers that are a competition to us all.... But as Peruvians we know, *señores*, that our country, like Antonio Raimondi said, ... is a beggar sitting in a throne of gold. I hope that with perseverance, our team, our members, who we respect and who we value, get to work and make *our* commercial center a reality, *señores*. Thank you for your attention, *señores*, and ¡Viva el Perú, *señores!*

Trays with cookies and plastic cups of Inca Kola circulated in the crowd. The fluorescent-yellow drink looked oddly festive against the gray, dull winter air. The whole mood in the market was odd, ambiguous. It was festive but also tense, celebratory but gloomy. The vice-president's optimistic portrayal of Peru as a beggar sitting on gold, the loud applause he elicited from vendors, and the chatty banter and cheery jingles from the TV sets for sale at the nearest stalls all aligned with the reality of a bustling, prosperous market. But the pleading tone of his speech and the stern, disengaged expressions of other vendors standing on the sidelines told a different story, one of a market mired in conflict, at cross-purposes with its own vision for growth, and unable or unwilling to coalesce around a plan that would bring to fruition their ever-deferred project to construct a modern, permanent structure with which to be formally incorporated into the economy. "With what language," I remember thinking to myself, "can I convey the atmosphere of this place, the puzzling contradictions that help sustain it, the mockery of categories of classification on which it thrives?"

Located in the vicinity of the Congressional Palace, the Central Reserve Bank, and the Judiciary—some of the buildings most representative of state power in Lima—El Hueco exudes an anti-state force. For almost two decades the market has operated in a hazardous, underground structure against the building regulations for Lima's Historic Districts, just as it has nevertheless grown to be a formidable and untouchable bulwark of political and economic influence. Its maze-like and crowded conditions disqualify it for a safety certificate, yet the individual stalls are coveted as prime commercial real estate. The market is a point of confluence for some of the most creative and enterprising energies in Lima's economic landscape even as its extralegal status welcomes and even spawns criminal or morally questionable pursuits. And while vendors are organized into a socially conscious cooperative, daily life at the market is engulfed in a dog-eat-dog atmosphere. The values of cooperation and equality that allow vendors to act like a solid block before state authorities are also the basis for vendors' mutual suspicion and recrimination when it comes to their collective growth and expansion plans.

As the ceremony came to a close and the spectators dispersed, I saw Señora Emilia still sitting, talking with other women. Her wool handmade cardigan was buttoned up to her chin against the cold. The president of the cooperative, Roberto Arispe, had made a late appearance; he wore a leather aviator

jacket and stood to one side, cross-armed and bearing a serious, attentive expression. Framing the view down the ramp toward the vending stalls, a bright-red billboard on the tin roofs showcased a digital rendering of the multi-story structure that, more than a year before, vendors had agreed to build. In the corridors below, market life was already in full swing.

LUMPEN

The main entrance to El Hueco is a short walk from the corner of Abancay and Nicolás de Piérola avenues, past a shoe rubberizing stand and several ambulant vendors of peeled fruit stationed on the sidewalk. On that busy stretch of street, the sweetly pungent smell of rotting fruit peels rises from the ground, lingers in the air, and follows you right onto the cement ramp that leads into the market's depths.

Walking down into El Hueco is a thrilling experience. Your eyes pop out in this direction and that toward colorful, masterful displays of all sorts of stuff crammed within the four walls of each stall. It is a spectacle of luster that lures you into the narrow, dim corridors with some sort of promise that is difficult to define. The excitement intensifies in knowing that you enter the market at your own peril. A sign by the main entrance displaying the market's floor plan is dizzying rather than instructive. No TV report or news article about El Hueco spares you the details of all the disasters sure soon to befall the place: the massive fires, the massive earthquakes, the ticking bomb that is El Hueco.

Some find the market to be too frightening or too repellent, like my friend Octavio, who used to work as a sales representative for a pharmaceutical company and once was able to trace some tampered medical samples to El Hueco. Before going down into the market, his boss, a woman, said to him: “Wait for me here.” A few minutes later, she came back out pallid with fear. Vendors had seen her come in, nicely dressed in her pantsuit, and somehow knew what she had come for. They rolled the fronts of their stalls down and looked at her menacingly. She turned on her heels and ran back out without the medicines. When Octavio learned that I was doing research at El Hueco he grimaced in revulsion: “That place is sordid!” Later I asked him to explain: “The atmosphere ... super *chunga*” (ugly), “base, lowly, marginal,” he said, searching for the right word to convey El Hueco's underworld aura. “Yes, *lumpenesco*” (“lumpen-ish”), he said, apparently settled, “is the word I couldn't find.”

From a certain perspective, El Hueco is just a market, a workplace like countless others. But what Octavio's comments intimated is that it is also one that demands that we contend with what, from the perspective of capitalist rationality, seem to be excesses, like the unnecessary risks vendors are willing to take, their transgressions of the law, their flirting with the forbidden, and the rivalries that have on occasion turned deadly. These excesses, which betray a nothing-to-lose attitude, few theories of the so-called “informal economy”

can account for or assimilate into their logic. De Soto's early assessment of Lima's poorly regulated businesses, for example, makes a distinction between "informality" as the use "of illegal means to satisfy essentially legal objectives" and forms of "illegality with antisocial aims," which, he argues, are beyond the scope of his analysis (*ibid.*: 12). In fact, it is the touchstone of his book's argument that capitalist rationality encompasses violations of the law insofar as they are committed as a means to ultimately lawful goals. His main concern is that skirting the law in this way makes such businesses inefficient as capitalist enterprises. Evaders of regulations usually incur enormous costs through the paying of bribes, losses from confiscations, and the dispersal and evasion tactics they must depend on to avoid detection (1986: 195–99). While places like El Hueco instantly make it clear that de Soto's distinction does not hold water in reality, they crystallize for us the critical and urgent question his argument incites, whether legal transgressions like medicine tampering and brand forging really outstrip the market logic, whether they are in excess of a capitalist rationality and endeavor rather to challenge the system and its norms. If so, to what other logic do these forms of "illegality with antisocial aims" correspond?

Ugly, base, lumpen-ish. Marx and Engels jump again to mind because of their lifelong efforts to demarcate their field of analysis—political economy, the proletariat, the revolution—precisely by expelling these excesses and the social elements associated with them, which they termed "lumpenproletariat" (meaning: ragged or rogue proletariat). In 1972, Hal Draper traced these efforts in a fascinating article that shows how crucial—and rhetorically laborious—it was for Marx and Engels to purify the term "proletariat" to refer exclusively to the sector of class-conscious, wage-earning laborers by eliminating from it all the lumpen qualities—the "declassed," "parasitic," "volatile," "criminal," "knave," "itinerant," "demoralized," and of course "ragged" and "rogue" elements that, Draper says, Marx and Engels viewed "as excrescences (not functionally integral to the social system)" (1972: 2306). This is why when these "elements" brought Louis Bonaparte to power in 1852—just like it has been argued it was the rogue "informal" vote that brought Fujimori to power in 1990 (Grompone 1990; Degregori and Grompone 1991)—Marx thought it nothing short of a scandal, the highest and the lowest touching, in Jeffrey Mehlman's words, "a strange irruption of something lower than the low ... at the top" (1977: 13).⁴

⁴ Fujimori's election in 1990 capped a meteoric rise and successful campaign that cast him as "*un presidente como tú*"—"a president like you"—to establish a contrast with his upper middle-class, light-skinned rival Mario Vargas Llosa and accentuate his small-business, immigrant background. Fujimori led Peru's turn to neoliberalism beginning in 1990, and from 1992 under a corrupt dictatorship until his ousting from office in 2000.

For much of the nineteenth century, the terms proletariat and lumpenproletariat were used interchangeably to refer both to the working classes and to the poor and destitute, pretty much until Marx and Engels. Their contribution was to go beyond mere physical appearances and habits and separate the terms by drawing a line between production and nonproduction: between the socially functional, “producing elements” (proletariat), which are central to capitalism, and the “non-producing, purely parasitic elements” (lumpenproletariat), capitalism’s “waste-products” (Draper 1972: 2287, 2297). Thus the lumpen is characterized by being “exuded, extruded, excreted from the class structure and onto the scrapheap [*sic*]” (ibid.: 2308). Summing up Marx’s and Engels’s view of the lumpenproletariat, Draper writes that it “is the catch-all for those who fall out, or drop out, of the existing social structure.... To survive ... in the interstices of the same society, they must adopt a parasitic mode of existence.... [They] are rather moved by cynical self-interest on the vulgarest level, however rationalized; hence venal, available to the highest bidder” (ibid.: 2309).

Draper sounds quite definitive here, but his own text demonstrates that Marx and Engels actually struggled to repress or fully separate the lumpen element in the proletariat with ever-subtler and narrower categories of classification. The “reserve army of labor,” that part of the proletariat that suffers from (or is threatened with) recurrent unemployment, posed a particular challenge for them. On one hand, this “reserve army” was critical for capitalism to work since its existence furnished capital with an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labor power (ibid.: 2302). Yet this same “reserve army” seemed to be the proletariat’s undoing since its very endurance could not but create a “stagnant” layer that brought its members dangerously close to the “vagabonds, criminals, and prostitutes” that made up the “lumpenproletariat proper.” Recurrently precluded from wage-earning labor and eventually unable or unwilling to work at all, this “stagnant” layer was populated, in Marx’s words, by “the demoralized and ragged ... that part of the working class which has forfeited ... the sale of labor power ... and vegetates upon public alms” (in ibid.: 2303). This rock-bottom category of the proletariat surely was, if not already part of the lumpenproletariat, then a source of recruitment for it. Draper acknowledges that much: “Continuous unemployment and consequent demoralization,” he writes, pushes these “individuals out of the working class altogether and onto the skid-rows or into the underworld. This is ... a form of declassment, a precipitation out of the proletariat” (ibid.: 2304).

It is as if Marx and Engels understood that the lumpen was uncontainable, an excess impossible to fully discard or assimilate into capitalism’s productive structures. As they parsed the proletariat and its reserve army of labor into ever lower and more wretched subcategories, this excess kept creeping back in and, to their exasperation, deforming the class structure—the class-conscious

proletariat in its fateful dialectic with the bourgeoisie—on which their hopes of revolution depended.

TIGER CUBS

I met Señora Emilia down in her stall after the pledge of allegiance to the flag ended. The stall is at the crossroads of two corridors that roughly divide the market into four sections. It is dark and cramped this far down into the pit. Only a few faint rays of natural light and a chilly draft slip through openings in the arched, tin ceilings. Her stall, about 2 meters square, was fully draped in her merchandize: rows of socks in plastic wrappers, terrycloth bathrobes, and towels with bright prints of animals, soccer team insignias, curvaceous, big-breasted women, and superheroes. My eyes were drawn instantly to a towel with two tiger cubs, the cutest thing, which I was sure my three-year-old son would love. On a countertop more towels were neatly folded and sorted into piles.

Señora Emilia sat on a stool waiting for customers, occasionally rising to refold a towel or rearrange a pile. If she had young children, like many of her neighbors did, they would have been hanging about on the floor near her feet, playing or sleeping. This is also where she takes all her meals. Throughout the day, itinerant food vendors walk by with full-course meals. This aspect of Lima's markets drive city functionaries to despair: kids rolling and sleeping on the ground, and food prepared and consumed under who knows what kind of sanitary standards. I am never too concerned about such things, but I do worry for the children, so naïve and carefree, playing a stone's throw from the market's shadier stalls lurking just around the corner. Once, as I walked around the market to get acquainted, I found myself in a crowd of men all focused on a screen inside a DVD vending booth before I noticed the X-rated content of the images. These films apparently sell like hotcakes at El Hueco. Realizing I was the only woman in the vicinity, I scuttled away, my heart galloping with fear. The anxiety and contempt that officials and the media feel toward El Hueco are surely about the public health hazards this market represents (fires, earthquakes), but I am certain they are also about the open disregard for conventional, middle-class mores and tastes it exhibits (see Gandolfo 2013).

Pulling a spare stool out from under the countertop for me to sit on, Señora Emilia spoke about El Hueco's early days: "I began on the fifth block of Hual-laga [Street]," she said, referring to the very block where the *turbamulta* had waged a bloody battle with the municipal guards that 1997 autumn morning. In 1983, a young city official named Luis Castañeda Lossio (who went on to serve three terms, including the current one, as mayor of Lima) persuaded Señora Emilia and three thousand other street vendors around the Central Market to organize into cooperatives. Señora Emilia became one of the original members of the Cooperativa de Servicios Especiales Mercado Central



FIGURE 2 Entrance to El Hueco. Credit: Courtesy of *El Comercio*.

Limitada, or COOPSE. When she and the other vendors were finally evicted from the streets they moved into a temporary, prefabricated, one-story structure inside the hollow corner lot which still houses the market today. This type of provisional structure, known as “*campo ferial*”—part roofed bazaar, part outdoor fairground—had been banned inside Lima’s Historic Districts since at least the 1994 municipal Ordenanza 062. To offset the blatant violation of city regulations, the vendors committed to pool their resources and build a permanent, law-compliant structure without delay. COOPSE’s market soon grew in popularity and became known as “El Hueco,” a moniker whose pejorative intimations (pit, hole, ditch, crack, hollow, depression, dump) vendors embraced with full irony and emblazoned on the frieze atop the main entrance.

As one of the original members, Señora Emilia knew the workings of the cooperative inside and out, having served in its administration in several capacities. The cooperative is run by an Administrative Council and by a hundred delegates elected (by thirds) every year by majority vote. “With regards to property,” Señora Emilia explained, “there is a single right. No one can own more than one stand,” a structure that clearly curbs accumulation within the market and limits individual power through the rule of “one stand, one vote.” Serving as a delegate herself, she said her relationship with vendors was one of mutual cooperation: “The relationship between associates [stall

owners] and delegates is one of reciprocity. We share a communal agreement,” she said in her Quechua-inflected Spanish. I was impressed.

In this reciprocal system, however, agreements can be brittle and non-committal. A delegate’s duty is to share information, to orient or persuade, and to assuage concerns. It is also to represent constituents, but, as Señora Emilia explained, delegates and associates can freely change their position on issues and withdraw their commitments to one another. Even after a binding vote takes place at the delegates’ general assembly, “cliques and factions form,” she said. Divisiveness and suspicion often shake the foundations of the cooperative’s structure to the point that decisions made in assembly can quickly dissolve and lead to de facto overturned rulings and truncated projects, like the commercial center construction scheme, which has been voted on favorably a few times but remains in limbo.

I was fastidiously probing with my questions to obtain the clearest idea possible of how this representation system worked and why it broke down so often when Señora Emilia abruptly stopped talking, lifting her gaze to greet a man, a former COOPSE member who had sold his vending stall at El Hueco to buy three at a smaller, newer *campo ferial*.

“*Buenas!*” the man said to both of us as he handed Señora Emilia a color-printed announcement for a mass he was organizing for San Juan Bautista, the patron saint of his Lima-based immigrant organization, Centro Unión Malvas. Señora Emilia and the man both hailed from Ancash, a region north of Lima. She had promised him that she would intercede with a popular priest she knew well to come and celebrate this mass for his Centro in a few weeks. “I will ask him and get back to you,” she said, folding the announcement and putting it away in her pocket.

Having witnessed many times a day vendors approach Señora Emilia with requests for help—to break large bills, to watch their vending stalls while they ran errands or went to the bathroom, even to make sales in their absence or display their wares for a commission—I asked her to tell me more about these forms of collaboration. I knew that social and economic worlds like El Hueco were largely shaped by such networks of support, information, and cooperation among vendors, formed variously on the bases of kinship, place of origin, type of trade, or business location. The relatively inconsequential interruption by her fellow countryman, the fleeting personal interaction, and Señora Emilia’s vow to help made momentarily visible what Carlos Iván Degregori and Romeo Grompone have argued are complex social networks that since the mid-twentieth century have overhauled not just Peru’s national economy but also its national politics. This change was made most obvious in the 1990 presidential elections that brought Fujimori to power, when, they explained, the “style of work” prevalent among new residents in the city after decades of Andean migration—evading regulation, occupying land,

finding affinities with “*cholo*” culture (1991: 45)—also brought about a new way of doing business and thinking about politics:

in which personal interaction is more meaningful and holds more weight than institutional arrangements conceived in terms of mid- and long-term strategy.... These new actors tend to utilize networks ... [in order] to adapt to the changing conditions of competition and [to] become freer and more creative in their decisions.... Informality is shaped as a world of multiple personal agreements, some lasting, others that ... unravel in a brief period of time, sustained in family and neighborhood networks.... On occasion, it is not easy for the actors involved to discern the limit that separates independent work from subordination and relations of exploitation from ties of collaboration and mutual aid (ibid.: 47–48).

Degregori and Grompone argue that this “style of work” found a political expression in Fujimori’s “extreme pragmatism” and “populist commitment” (ibid.: 42, 46).

I wanted to know what role Señora Emilia thought these networks played in the functioning of her market and cooperative, for example in the formation or dissolution of allegiances that may determine voting outcomes or the viability of long-term decisions, such as to construct their commercial center. “No, we have no networks,” she retorted assuredly and definitively, which surprised me given what I had just observed.⁵ She was eager to instead pick up where we had left off when we were interrupted.

“The issue about the construction of our commercial center is distressing,” she said. COOPSE’s general assembly had approved and financed at least three projects, but none of them had as yet materialized. Each time, vendors had backtracked en masse at the last minute, turning the idea of building a permanent structure itself into a sort of hole that swallows whatever gets close to it: thousands of dollars in contributions, architects’ fees, building permits, and blueprints, and bank loan promises, hundreds of meeting hours, votes and decisions, and city authorizations. As a result, the city government periodically shuts El Hueco down, resulting in enormous losses for vendors. The precise reasons for refusing to build depend entirely on whom you talk to and when you ask. Faced with the inevitable reality that the new building will have to be multistory to accommodate all the vendors, storage space, and a garage, Señora Emilia said that one problem is that no vendor would ever agree to relocate to the upper floors, far from the streets that saw their businesses flourish. The vertical distribution of new locales was rejected due to the hierarchies it would inevitably insert into the stanchly egalitarian ethos of the cooperative. This egalitarianism is thus both a bane and a boon; it is lodged at the heart of the cooperative’s ideals of justice and fairness but also arouses

⁵ Lisette Aliaga-Linares (2002) writes about vendor associations, cooperatives, and social networks in Lima, and notes that their efficacy as social capital depends on closeness of relationships and levels of trust. For a discussion of vendor organizations in La Cancha in Cochabamba, Bolivia, see Goldstein 2016.

insurmountable misgivings any time the market's plans for growth threaten to introduce difference. Another reason for backtracking on the building plans has been suspicions of corruption since cooperative members believe that the members charged with steering the project are always looking to enrich themselves from the process via kickbacks and other shady deals.

Señora Emilia made it clear that she was among those who wished to defer construction. She said this was because she and others did not want or could not afford to pay rent elsewhere to keep their businesses open while they build. The billboard at the market entrance showing a model of the would-be building, a slick, modernist, glass-enveloped structure—an anti-Hueco, if you will—said the groundbreaking would take place in June 2010. That date had long come and gone. Rusty and ramshackle, El Hueco's structure still stood impassive, at once ghostly and real, almost flaunting its presence and defiant attitude toward the law.

“STREET-FOLK”

It was precisely the challenge that so-called lumpen elements posed to bourgeois politics and mores and to capitalism's class structure that led some of Marx's contemporaries, as well as later political theorists, to identify them as the true revolutionaries. If Marx and Engels failed to abolish all nonproductive, base elements from the lowest categories of the proletariat for the purposes of revolution, Mikhail Bakunin, Georges Bataille, and Franz Fanon, among others, seized upon this failure. In his 1933 article “The Notion of Expenditure,” Bataille argued that, as bourgeois individualism consolidated as the norm in liberal democracies like 1930s France, it was imperative to reimagine the engine of revolutionary power by turning to the “agonistic” and “antisocial” efforts of the lowest classes, “those who push the consequences of current rationalist conceptions as far as they will go” (1985a: 125). He had in mind the great and free forms of nonproductive and collective social expenditure, such as had been observed in festivals and potlatch economies in earlier times. With “the general atrophy of the ancient sumptuary processes that characterizes the modern era,” he wrote, we are left with the possibilities opened up by class struggle, “the grandest form of social expenditure” that will challenge the very existence of the bourgeoisie (ibid.: 126).⁶

For Bakunin, the lumpenproletariat's capacity to incite class-based disruptions of the system while itself lacking any class-based interests in the outcome put it at the center of revolutionary struggle. He wrote that only the outcasts of

⁶ Ongoing battles within the U.S. government over whether to tighten or relax regulations display how bitterly contested the definition of “capitalist rationality” is even today. Given the crises of capitalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, some argue that runaway expenditure in fact characterizes capitalism, particularly in its advanced or postmodern stages (e.g., Goux 1998). However large the losses generated by these crises, one might say that they lacked the “generosity and nobility” connected to losses in potlatch economies (Bataille 1985a: 124).

society, “those millions of the uncultivated, the disinherited, the miserable, the illiterates ... that ‘rabble’ almost unpolluted by bourgeois civilization,” could bring about revolutionary change (2002 [1872]: 294). Fanon, for his part, argued that the lumpen was the only true anti-status quo force in anti-colonial struggles in the African continent since it was the only sector of society that did not stand to benefit either from colonialism or from independence. The lumpen, in Fanon’s words, were like rats gnawing at the roots of a tree as they prepared to invade the colonialist city “by the most underground channels,” threatening its security like a “gangrene eating into the heart of colonial domination” (1963: 81).

The idea of class struggle spearheaded by those extruded from the class structure was an outrage to the “idealism” of the bourgeois revolutionaries, said Bataille (1985b). Later in the twentieth century it would also outrage Latin American Marxists and marginality theorists like José Nun and Aníbal Quijano as they reexamined Latin America’s class structure and revolutionary prospects in light of the fast de-peasantization and urban explosion underway in the region. These had resulted in an unprecedented growth of the non-wage-earning sectors of the labor market, which they characterized as a “marginal mass” (Nun 1969; 2000) or “marginal labor force” (Quijano 1988 [1973]; 2014 [1970]). Generated (as with the “reserve army of labor”) by capitalism itself, this marginal mass nevertheless had no internal function to play within capitalism (as with the lumpenproletariat) (Nun 1969; 2000). Arising through the same process as the lumpen, the marginal mass turned into a distinct “strata” in Latin America because of its sheer volume and the amplifying effect of its concentration in cities where “marginals” were identified on account of their “capacity for organization and violence” and their potential for massive mobilization (see Quijano 1988 [1973]: 340–41). Nun predicted that conflicts likely to flare up would be localized and largely of a defensive nature, and would happen alongside “perverse forms of social integration ... in the shape of clientelism, criminality, illegal trade, proliferation of ghettos and marginal populations, persistence of brutal forms of exploitation, and so on” (2000: 25). Like Marx regarding the lumpenproletariat, Quijano remarked on the political fickleness of this new marginal social strata and on the evidence of its easy cooptation by conservative causes (1988 [1973]: 354). In a 1980 article on “*lo cholo*” in Peru, he further associated “*cholificación*” to marginality and, again, to fickleness. No longer indigenous and not ever quite creole, he wrote, “*lo cholo*” fluctuates “between various normative worlds” and finds “refuge in its marginal condition ... from where it draws a remarkably ample margin of freedom in attitude and conduct” (ibid.: 77). *Cholo* attitudes and conduct typically include disrespect of established institutions and a taste for scandal, Quijano explains, and “the *cholo* mocks” the outrage this produces. As a *révolté*, the *cholo* is “one of the most active entrepreneurs of change in our society” (ibid.). For Urpi Montoya Uriarte, the anxieties aroused by the

sudden predominance of *cholo* spaces in the city sprang precisely from the *cholos'* capacity to appropriate, pollute, and deform *limeño* culture. In analyzing what she terms “*la actuación chola*”—“the *cholo* act” or “performance”—(2002: 99), Montoya Uriarte discusses the innovative ways in which Andean and *limeño* dress, language, and food are often combined, like the novelty of putting “on the same plate *cebiche* and noodles (the famous ‘*combinado*’).” This dish is typically served in street and other markets and disrupts the way both foods are traditionally (separately) served in middle-class environments, where the *combinado* is often derided with disgust.

Given the conceptual and spatial propinquity of this marginal mass and the lumpenproletariat (see also Laclau 2005: 148), revolution by a protagonist occupying such an uneasy and volatile position outside the class and labor structure could never be the redemptive leap that would make workers rise above all other classes; it would rather have to emulate the dirty, subterranean work of an “old mole,” as Bataille would have it (1985b). The figure of an “old mole” as representative of the revolutionary upsurge of the masses was Marx’s own. Bataille reconfigures it to examine the implications of an “old-mole revolution” led by a “form of intellectual activity . . . linked by the force of things to the uprising of the lower classes” (ibid.: 32). This revolution could only detonate “in the bowels of the earth, as in the materialist bowels of the [lumpen]proletarians,” and would shatter the ideals of bourgeois rationality and decorum. Against the bankrupt, dilapidated edifice of bourgeois culture and ethics, the old-mole revolution “hollows out chambers in a decomposed soil repugnant to the delicate nose of the [bourgeois] utopians” (ibid.: 35). Rosalind Krauss characterizes this as Bataille’s “politics of the *Lumpen*” (1996: 99).

It is obviously too simple to say that El Hueco’s vendors are lumpen in the Marxian sense of the term. Vendors, after all, do produce and even accumulate. Yet, they do so not strictly like proletarian workers, conscious of their interests as a class. They do so, rather, by embracing the rules of capitalist rationality and driving them to their limits, as when they put everything on the line for a short-term gain or to maintain a competitive edge, or when they exploit others, including family members, crossing from the realm of extralegality into that of illegality and crime;⁷ or when they now uphold, now scorn bourgeois reasonableness and respectability by investing their surpluses in forms of sociality that seem irrational, wasteful, or reprehensible from conventional economic and moral perspectives (see Martínez 2010; Gandolfo 2013).

⁷ As I write this in late June 2017, facts continue to emerge about a deadly fire at Las Malvinas, the market on Argentina Avenue where one-third of the Huallaga Street vendors relocated in 1997. In a terrible illustration of aspects of my argument here, media sources reveal that the dead were men working inside locked containers illegally attached to a rooftop where they forged a well-known brand name on some products. The ILO has stated that these men were victims of a “modern form of slavery” (Crespo 2017).

In this, they more closely evoke Henry Mayhew’s London “street-folk,” who Gertrude Himmelfarb describes as “all those street-buyers and street-sellers who were neither bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, nor proletariat, and who displayed a peculiar, not always licit passion for private enterprise” (1984: 391). Like the lumpenproletariat for Marx and Engels, this street folk was a “non-class,” a motley group of people brought together only by an opportunistic, unrestrained zeal for trading. They were thought to be “irredeemably anti-social” in their readiness to break the rules, and in this respect they were, Himmelfarb says, mere “parodies of bourgeois man” (ibid.).

Marx and Engels wrote about such non-classes with a special rhetorical intensity. Marx, says Himmelfarb, “despised the lumpenproletariat as he did not despise the bourgeoisie” (ibid.: 392). The bourgeoisie at least played a historically necessary role in the class struggle. The lumpenproletariat, by contrast, was in Marx’s and Engels’s texts a repository of unruly, defiant elements that contaminated and imperiled the revolutionary dialectic. In its corrupting effect, Marx and Engels described the lumpenproletariat variously as an “indefinite, disintegrated mass ... [the] scum, offal, refuse of all classes” (Marx 1972 [1852]: 75), or a “passively rotting mass” (Marx 1998 [1848]: 48), or a “scum of decayed elements ... with headquarters in the big cities ... absolutely venal and absolutely brazen ... gutter-proletarians” (Engels 1996 [1870]: 8).

As with my friend Octavio straining to describe El Hueco, a difficulty pinpointing and depicting conclusively such lowliness coexists, in Marx and Engels, with a frenzy of description (see Stallybrass 1990). This is why Robert Bussard argues that “lumpenproletariat” has never really worked as a category of analysis. More the product of irrepressible affect on the part of Marx and Engels, it has always indexed forms of sociality that exceeded clean categorization. For Bussard, the term points to social traits that offended Marx’s and Engels’s “overall mode of sensibility” and “middle-class Biedermeier (or Victorian) mentality” (1987: 676), eliciting condescension, fear, and aversion toward what they thought were society’s most disreputable categories of people. These sentiments compelled Marx and Engels to create in their own minds a distinction between the real, good, wage-earning proletariat and the false, bad, unthinking lumpenproletariat. The term lumpenproletariat was thus “a reaction to those elements in the proletariat who did not behave as [Marx and Engels] expected or hoped” (ibid.: 687).

The vendors of El Hueco do not behave either as government officials, the organized left, or the media expect or hope. If it is too simplistic to say that they are lumpen in the Marxian sense, they surely know how to mobilize the power of lumpen *as a resource*, as a kind of base-materialist politics. Refusing assimilation into the state’s bureaucratic apparatus, they blur the line between extralegality and illegality and often embrace their reputation as “irredeemably anti-social.” Their sustained presence in this corner of downtown, largely on their own terms, disrupts, deforms, and prevails over regulations and norms

as well as city planners' aesthetics of space. And they do so while enticing us over to their side, inviting us to descend into their corridors, and luring us to also transgress. Following Bataille and Krauss, can we describe this as a "politics of the lumpen"?

MISTRUST

In addition to the altar to the Lord of Miracles, upon entering El Hueco there is a stand-alone ATM cabin of GlobalNet that, I would soon be surprised to learn, gave me direct access to my bank account back in New York City. A private security guard decked in bright yellow vest and cap ambles about, watching over the flow of shoppers and the stairwell that leads up to the second-story office of Mr. Arispe, the cooperative president. He had invited me to visit him any time, and so right after lunch I ascended and announced myself to his secretary.

Señor Arispe's office is a tiny room with space only for his desk and two chairs for guests. A single window looks out over the market's rooftops, a patchwork of rusty corrugated metal planks. As he and I stood by this window, looking in the direction of the print and rubber-stamp shop he runs out of a stall facing the street, Señor Arispe gave me his assessment of El Hueco's most serious problem: "The low level of the people." I did a double take before writing it down, hesitantly, in my notebook. "The people here have very little education," he said. "El Hueco is a jumble of cultures: former teachers, retirees, policemen, taxi drivers, middle class, upper class, merchants at heart [*comerciantes netos*], and former street vendors." He said it was difficult to arrive at agreements among people with so many different ways of thinking. Now including himself in his appraisal of the market's vendors, he said, "We don't know about investing toward the future. We don't see the future, only the present."

Former teachers and taxi drivers? Middle class, upper class, and street vendors? I wondered to myself how all of these types of people, with nothing in common so much as a "style of work" (Degregori and Grompone 1991), ended up at El Hueco? Nun sees changes in the occupational structure during the twentieth century and the dearth of "stable and well-paid wage work" (2000: 13) as key to the formation of a "marginal mass" and of marginal urban spaces like El Hueco. De Soto also argues that it is the lack of formal jobs that fuels "informality." But more recently, Michael Denning has complicated this picture. He refers to Fanon's repurposing of Marxism's lumpenproletariat, rather than to concepts like "marginality" or "informality," as "the first great theoretical engagement" with the forms of wageless work that are prevalent in the global south (2010: 87). Fanon sought to address the reality and political potential of the urban underclasses, Denning says, by identifying the "specter of wageless life" as itself the norm and wagelessness, not wage labor, as the "starting point in understanding the free market" (*ibid.*: 81, 86). That the

lives of a teacher (prototypical salaried work), a taxi driver (self-employment), a street vendor (micro-business), and a member of the middle class (regardless of employment status) would converge at El Hueco is not an anomaly in places like Lima. It speaks to the precariousness of salaried work as a historical norm as well as to workers' ambivalence toward such jobs.⁸

As the president of the cooperative that year, Señor Arispe himself favored constructing the new building. To address “ignorance” among the vendors, the Education Committee had developed a project to “re-educate” them, and hired business professionals from Universidad Católica, no doubt at significant expense, to lead workshops on business planning, project administration, and finance. But, Arispe told me bitterly, vendors do not want to invest in skills and quality; they are spendthrifts. They say: “I spend all my week's earnings!” he exclaimed, emulating their supposed nonchalant, reckless attitude. “Vendors spend without thinking about risk,” he said. “They live in the moment. There is no prevention.”

I did not know what to make of his derisive comments, particularly since, from what I knew about him, he himself belonged to the group likely to be typed as the lowest kind of stall owner on his list: those who had started by vending on the streets. I took note of every term of (self)contempt as the depth of the rifts dividing vendors became increasingly clear. If what I am here calling lumpen-as-a-resource opens important spaces for action in a city like Lima, it also shuts them down; if it affirms, defies, and empowers, it also weakens, coerces, and tyrannizes. Señor Arispe had led the last building initiative, which vendors had approved and then rejected because of accusations of corruption among the leadership. Suddenly, the explanation for the market's delayed expansion was no longer simply vendors' ignorance, irrational spending habits, or inability to invest toward the future. The problem now seemed more straightforwardly rooted in vendors' perceptions of themselves and one another, in the character of their complicated, weary relationships that seemed dominated by feelings of disapproval and mistrust.

Leafing through the market's annual newsletter issued at the end of Señor Arispe's first year in office, one sees that accusations of corruption were flying in every direction. It was not just about the stalled construction project. In the newsletter, the Education Committee's president claimed that Señor Arispe had manipulated the selection of that committee's members while Arispe himself accused the prior Administrative Council, of which the Education Committee president was a part, of systematic embezzlement. The head of the ad hoc Building Committee shot back by casting doubts on Arispe's motivations for removing the team's original members on suspicion of kickback deals, and promising to fight the corruption allegations. Once again, there seemed to be

⁸ Adams and Valdivia offer personal narratives of small (informal) entrepreneurs in Lima who engage in salaried work only until they save enough to strike out on their own (1991).

no bottom. Newspaper coverage of El Hueco often echoes such corruption charges and even asserts that there are “mafias” working behind the scenes there (see, for example, *La República* 2001; Alvarado and Flores 2004; Flores 2004; Torres 2004; Andina 2008).

It may be impossible to determine the truth of these accusations, but this is because the very question of truthfulness or falsity is misguided. For is not the lumpen’s questionable reputation crucial to its power as a resource? This is suggested by Peter Worsley’s absorbing analysis of Fanon’s use of “lumpenproletariat.” He explains that Fanon’s use of the term was inspired by the way African intellectuals in France in the 1940s appropriated the term “*négritude*” (including its connotations of dirt, backwardness, and damnation) as a cry of revolt against the white and bourgeois world (1972: 194–97). Worsley writes that the uniquely disruptive potential of the lumpen resides in a mode of life that “deviates from the lifestyle of either bourgeoisie or working class.” Both find it “shocking” since that “mode of life” is associated with people who “survive by their wits, and by doing illegal things.... Amongst the urban underclass, there are plenty of not very ‘nice’ people, undesirable elements who want no part of respectable values or virtues” (ibid.: 213–14).

Worsley stops short of arguing that Fanon understood lumpen as a deforming influence that could be flaunted or directed at the system, but he does imply that Fanon thought it to be the source of a power and a politics—more than a fixed social condition. In an important sense, Marx and Engels understood it in this way, too, since they make lumpen available as such a resource across class lines. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx hurls lumpen imputations not only at Louis Bonaparte, whom Marx hails as the “*chief of the lumpenproletariat*,” but also at members of the bourgeoisie who, along with the “indefinite, disintegrated mass” (1972 [1852]: 75) of Paris’s lumpenproletariat, had joined Bonaparte’s movement. But if Marx and Engels understood the power of lumpen in this way, they also condemned it because of its capacity to upend the revolutionary impetus.

Señor Arispe is someone who always honestly speaks his mind, but on another day when I visited he said something to me that he had not said before and would not say again. He said that nothing in the city’s commercial regulations could protect El Hueco against definitive closure. The market’s existence is in every respect in violation of the law, in terms of zoning, building code, urban planning, civil defense, and copyrights. The reasons it is still open are political. But how long will this last? If vendors had cleverly embraced “El Hueco” as the market’s name, capitalizing on its denigrating energies by turning the insinuation of lax standards and by extension rock-bottom prices into points of attraction, in this moment of clarity Señor Arispe seemed keenly aware of the dangers of this double-edged maneuver: “We are, well, a pit!” he exclaimed, as if just now realizing the market’s secret truth. “*Somos, pues, un hueco!*”

“BROWN AND TUMULTUOUS CITY”

De Soto's *El otro sendero: La revolución informal* opens with a description of immigrants in Lima, the new majority of city residents, as nothing short of a *turbamulta*—a rabble. De Soto's crowd language, including its association with unpredictable behavior, is striking: He writes of immigrants' “millions of acts” transfiguring the city's established order and norms, of “multitudes” of tiny, unregulated manufacturing shops, of “legions” of carpenters and independent laborers, and of “armies” of ambulant street vendors having “sprung out of nowhere” and “invaded” city spaces that did not belong to them. De Soto makes it clear that the new face of the city is thoroughly “other” to its oldest residents. Lima's new personality, he writes, skirting the more explicitly racist “*cholo*,” is now “brown [*cobrizo*] and tumultuous” (1986: 3).

In 1997, around the time the media was reporting on thugs infiltrating street vendors' protests on Huallaga Street and of policemen joining in the attacks, one often heard accusations of lumpen behavior directed at the “anti-political” tactics employed by Fujimori, the National Police, and Lima's “informal sector,” particularly those tactics meant to hurt Mayor Andrade and his urban renewal initiatives. These included violence and vandalism (e.g., *Caretas* 1998; see also Gandolfo 2009). But, although Fujimori did play up his affinity with these groups, relying on the power of identification—“*un presidente como tú*”—these media reports also affirmed that street vendors, thugs, and policemen were the same, at least potentially. After all, they all came from the same stocks of people (de Soto's “brown and tumultuous” city) that had produced Fujimori and whose strategies made them inassimilable to creole society and the bourgeois state.

De Soto spoke of swarms of immigrants invading the city, yet he also spoke about them as individuals. “The city individualizes,” he wrote. Immigrants were citizens-in-the-making, and they by no means carried out their actions due to whim or instinct; rather they acted based on “fairly complex reasoning” and the “rational assessment of possibilities” offered by the city (1986: 10, 15). In this light, they were not a strange and tumultuous crowd, but instead an emergent and vigorous new “class” of people, and they were not wage earners but entrepreneurs. In an apparent jab at Marxism's notion of a “reserve army of labor,” de Soto calls these workers an “entrepreneurial reserve” (ibid.: 297) who, he argues, operate in the “shadow zone” (ibid.: 12) of extralegality only out of necessity and against their will. To claim this, de Soto had to, again, exclude from his analysis what he refers to as “anti-social” behaviors. Informality was to be, in fact, the “other path”—the rational alternative to the illegal or subversive behavior of criminals, drug traffickers, and terrorists. Like Marx and Engels did with the proletariat, de Soto had to distinguish among Lima's sub-proletariat between the good, productive, and prudent “informal” worker, who breaks the law only out of a desire for self-

improvement, and the bad, criminal, and destructive person whose behavior is disruptive, uncivil, and anti-systemic. This good/bad, productive/nonproductive distinction was as crucial for de Soto's "revolution" as it was for Marx's and Engels's.⁹

De Soto's book was published more than thirty years ago, and over time it has inspired many initiatives for legal reform aimed at the "formalization" of businesses in downtown Lima and elsewhere. Until January 2011, El Hueco itself was a target of one such initiative by the city administration (see Gandolfo 2013). But today, even a quick stroll around downtown Lima's poorly regulated markets reveals that simple noncompliance with laws and regulations fluidly meshes with contraband, piracy, brand tampering and forgery, bribery, and other extralegal and illegal activities. At El Hueco, the fluidity between legal, extralegal, and illegal commerce, compounded by the unavoidable building code violations, leads to periodical shutdowns, to which vendors respond with the same combination of aggression and savviness, hot blooded pugnacity and organization that have characterized their defense tactics since their Hualaga Street days. On 12 October 2012, about four months after my visit on pledge of allegiance day, municipal authorities locked the entrance to El Hueco and declared a thirty-day closure. Vendors mobbed and attacked the riot-gearred officers who were enforcing the shutdown, while their leaders vowed in front of the TV cameras to immediately correct the violations that building code inspectors had identified (24 Horas 2012). They mounted a soup kitchen on the sidewalk that I interpreted to be at once a genuine gesture of solidarity with vendors struggling with the lack of income and a protest occupation of the streets that emulated one of the forbidden and most derided modalities of outdoor commerce: food vending (Willax 2012). Vendors in leadership worked frantically on the repairs and simultaneously threatened revolt. "This situation is unbearable!" the cooperative's secretary exclaimed into a reporter's microphone a few days before the end of the thirty-day period that the municipal government had vowed to enforce. He asserted that all the inspectors' observations had been addressed and beseeched the authorities to let them reopen the market immediately. "We can be one day, two days without working, but this is a crime! What are they [the mayor, the municipal officials] waiting for? For us to riot like La Parada?" (ibid.).

This statement carried all the force of a real threat since days earlier the vendors of another infamous market, this time in La Victoria district south of downtown, had attacked mounted police units charged with evicting them.

⁹ In 1973 Keith Hart considered all types of activities aimed at securing an income, including illegitimate and illegal ones. If some activities were more legitimate than others, he argued, it is because legitimacy derives from "the system of bourgeois values enshrined in [Ghana's] code of laws" (1973: 74). In Lima, José Matos Mar also included the clandestine, illegal, and criminal in his analysis of Lima's new "anti-establishment" (*contestataria*) economy (1984).

According to the city government and major news outlets, the vendors hired thugs to front the violence (*El Comercio* 2012). It was clear, however, that amid the threat El Hueco’s vendors were making every effort to comply with the government’s demands. Acquiescing, the secretary listed the improvements they had completed, which included rewiring the market with electric cabling, installing a smoke detector system, replacing expired and insufficient extinguishers, reorienting an escape route blocked by a stairwell wall, and repairing a wobbly, rusty, second-story metal module that was coming off its base (Municipalidad 2012).

The strategy of El Hueco is thus not one of preemptive compliance but the more vulnerable one of gambling against the odds, a strategy perhaps more cost-effective in the short term but perilously reliant on luck, on bureaucratic ineptitude and arbitrariness, on populist leniency, or on the ability to, by turns, please, unnerve, and even physically attack state officials who happen to be enforcing the law at any given moment. It is precisely this attitude that has made it difficult for both the left and the right in Peru to fully harness the unruly, nonconformist energies of these sub-proletarian entrepreneurs as a sustainable political force. For the left, they are too politically fickle and opportunistic, and too profit oriented, reckless, and irreverent toward hard-won labor laws. For the right, they are too attached to populist strategies and collectivist ideals and too wasteful and invested in inefficient structures.

Vendors at El Hueco do not defy the law or the values of bourgeois legitimacy like a simple opposition, nor do they impose their own illegitimate principles as an alternative standard. Like Marx’s “old mole,” the material and economic force they wield works from inside the legal and institutional edifice, gnawing away at it, deforming while complying with it, repelling but also attracting as “an appeal,” to quote Bataille, “to all that is offensive, indestructible, and even despicable, to all that overthrows, perverts, and ridicules” (1985b: 32). (News reports from a few years ago [e.g., *La República* 2012b] inform that one could find at El Hueco child pornography, including depictions of rape [*El Comercio* 2014].)¹⁰ The market thus responds to the reductive, normative, homogenizing pressures of planners, lawmakers, and law enforcers with excesses devised and executed in the alluring, underground darkness of its corridors.

BOLETA

Back at Señora Emilia’s stall, she told me that she believed that “informals [*sic*] have done much for the country. What is my preference? Maybe at the beginning it is to be salaried because of the fixed income, a paycheck at the end of the month that an independent worker doesn’t have.” But, at the end of the day, she

¹⁰ During my last visit to El Hueco, in May 2017, stalls that had previously sold pornography were, at the moment, selling digital and print materials of Christian content.

said, “informality favors us.” “Yes, each person has made a necessity of [it]... With informality one can avoid paying taxes; one works in a disorderly manner, [but] you don’t like anyone to control you.”

Señora Emilia recently acquired with SUNAT, the national tax collection agency, a RUS tax ID number for her business. From what I understood, for stalls to have a RUS ID number was a requirement of major commercial banks to consider lending money to El Hueco for their construction project. The RUS (Régimen Único Simplificado) is one of the reforms Fujimori implemented under de Soto’s guidance. SUNAT describes it as a “flexible” regimen that agrees with the reality of small and micro-businesses. It frees them from bookkeeping and from having to be current on other taxes; it involves no paperwork since all transactions are made verbally with tellers at the bank.

“I pay my taxes,” Señora Emilia said, “20 soles of the RUS.” In her category she must sell no more than 7,000 soles a month. Her only obligation is to retain copies of her receipts for all sales and purchases of more than 5 soles. “So you give out a receipt when you sell something and demand a receipt for your purchases?” I asked. “Of course,” she replied, “SUNAT can come at any time and check on my receipts.... One has to be prepared.”

As the afternoon progressed at Señora Emilia’s stall, we began to feel the chill of crosscurrents traveling up and down the corridors. I offered to go get us a cup of hot tea. I inserted my bankcard into the GlobalNet ATM at the market entrance and giggled as, to my surprise, I got the cash I needed without even stepping outside of El Hueco.

I put everything into my pocket and headed to the food area to buy our tea. In the grand scheme of things, this was a negligible, inconsequential transaction, but as I walked back to Señora Emilia’s stall it dawned on me that this might be the whole point. For are not individual transactions like this one instances of de Soto’s “millions of acts” (1986: 3) that, in succession and in the aggregate, work to deform the ideal order from within? As with Bataille’s “politics of the Lumpen,” this individual transaction brought two opposite ends of a spectrum, my bank in New York City and El Hueco, “around to meet each other in a circle that short-circuits the system of rules and regulated oppositions” (Krauss 1996: 99). The implications of this politics at the local and national levels are enormous, and beyond El Hueco we see today more than traces of this type of politics in the national political scene. In the 2016 presidential campaign and in Pedro Pablo Kuczynski’s first year in office, the tactics employed by the *fujimorista* block have been notable in this regard, including, incidentally, the placing of so-called “*topos*” or “moles”—*fujimorista* infiltrators—inside minority party blocks in Congress, instructed to wait for a chance to strike. These “moles” act on command in what has been described as political “thuggery,” damaging the parties from within, showing the government

“who’s boss” (Gorriti 2016), and eroding the very system of which they are a part.¹¹

As the after-work crowd of shoppers began to trickle in, I decided to wrap up my visit with Señora Emilia. She looked tired. At sixty-nine years of age, she said, there are days in which she wakes up still feeling exhausted. I went up to one of the towel displays on the side of her stall and pointed to the one with the tiger cubs. I told Señora Emilia I wanted to buy it, and she pulled an identical one out from under a pile. I gave her the price of 13 soles (around US\$5) and bid her farewell.

I was walking away toward a small clearing at the end of the corridor and putting the towel in my bag when I realized that Señora Emilia had neglected to give me a receipt. For an instant, I thought of walking back and alerting her to the lapse. I would tell her that, for her own sake, she should not let me go without the slip of paper. But then I decided to let it go, to consent to the transaction and accept it as another of those “millions of acts” that are today the heart and soul of Lima’s economy. I would take the event of Señora Emilia’s omission and my decision to let it go as one of those trivial actions that compound into El Hueco’s formidable, deforming influence.

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¹¹ By all accounts, the *fujimorista* block employed this strategy to oust Jaime Saavedra, a former minister of education. Hailed as one of the “most prestigious ministers” in Kuczynski’s cabinet, he faced accusations of corruption, which were allegedly orchestrated by “the mafia behind the junk [i.e., for-profit, fraudulent] universities” (Gorriti 2016) created during Fujimori’s regime, which presumably Saavedra intended to regulate.

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Abstract: The market of El Hueco in downtown Lima sits inside a large pit dug out for the foundation of a state building that was never built. The below-ground corridors and crammed vending stalls in this poorly regulated market are usually flooded with shoppers, yet government officials and the media frequently condemn it as a vile and dangerous place. But how and why does El Hueco offend? Through an ethnographic account of a day's events, cast against a discussion of Marxism's "lumpenproletariat" and Hernando de Soto's "informality," I argue that implicit in El Hueco's challenge of state bureaucracy is a class critique that resists conventional class analysis and that affirms the "lumpen" as a politics in its own right. "Lumpen" here does not refer to categories of people but to a resource that can be appropriated and deployed freely. Linked to the anti-political tactics of President Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s, lumpen as a resource has changed the face of postwar Lima by defying and deforming from within the bourgeois ideals of urban development and bureaucratic form. It has also arguably changed the face of politics and played a role in the revival of *fujimorismo* during and since the 2016 presidential elections.

Key words: urban anthropology, economic anthropology, informal economy, lumpenproletariat, Marx, Engels, Lima