Volume 22 Issue 40
Originally issued as H6

Global Journal of human-social science: H Interdisciplinary
Volume 22 Issue 6 Version 1.0 Year 2022
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460x & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Parliamentary Ethnography: The Challenges to Research in the Senate of Argentina for a Member of Staff

By Laura Ferreño

Universidad Nacional de Avellaneda

Abstract- The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the advantages, obstacles, limitations and, mainly, the challenges to conduct research about an institution, in this case Senate of Argentina, that is the workplace of the scholar. As the researcher was a clerk at the Senate, which meant that carrying out an ethnography of parliamentary activities or of the senators was not straightforward, because could have genered suspicions among my colleagues. Parliamentary investigations require institutional approval, which is not always obtained. This investigation was carried out along 6 years without any formal authorization, despite the fact that the clerks, officials and authorities of the Senate were aware of it.

Ethnography in the Argentina Senate, i.e., observation, participant observation, interviews and text analysis of a vast range of materials including, among others, staff attendance sheets, decrees and internal regulations, all proved to be a very accurate methodology to study the daily life of a political institution and to think about the gap between two types of narratives: the written and the "oral-traditional" of the staff members and the authorities.

Keywords: *parliamentary ethnography; argentina senate; casa política; clerk-researcher.*

GJHSS-H Classification: *DDC Code: 305.800723 LCC Code: GN345*

PARLIAMENTARYETHNOGRAPHYTHECHALLENGESTORESEARCHINTHESENATEOFARGENTINAFORAMEMBEROFSTAFF

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

Open Association of Research Society, USA
Research | Diversity | Ethics

© 2022. Laura Ferreño. This research/review article is distributed under the terms of the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). You must give appropriate credit to authors and reference this article if parts of the article are reproduced in any manner. Applicable licensing terms are at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

Parliamentary Ethnography: The Challenges to Research in the Senate of Argentina for a Member of Staff

Laura Ferreño

Abstract- The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the advantages, obstacles, limitations and, mainly, the challenges to conduct research about an institution, in this case Senate of Argentina, that is the workplace of the scholar. As the researcher was a clerk at the Senate, which meant that carrying out an ethnography of parliamentary activities or of the senators was not straightforward, because could have genered suspicions among my colleagues. Parliamentary investigations require institutional approval, which is not always obtained. This investigation was carried out along 6 years without any formal authorization, despite the fact that the clerks, officials and authorities of the Senate were aware of it.

Ethnography in the Argentina Senate, i.e., observation, participant observation, interviews and text analysis of a vast range of materials including, among others, staff attendance sheets, decrees and internal regulations, all proved to be a very accurate methodology to study the daily life of a political institution and to think about the gap between two types of narratives: the written and the "oral-traditional" of the staff members and the authorities.

The characteristics of political institutions make parliamentary ethnography complex. This research focuses on the staff of the Argentina Senate, the informal ways of access to employment and to career progress of the clerks while opening an alternative way to understand the nature of the chamber that the actors call in their daily jargon the *casa política* (political house).

Keywords: parliamentary ethnography; argentina senate; casa política; clerk-researcher.

I. Introduction

The institutional System of the Argentine took shape slowly during the 19th century. In 1853, the National Constitution established the representative, republican and federal form of government[1]. The country has currently 24 provincial states represented in the two Chambers of the National Congress (NC): The Chamber of *Diputados* (Representatives), with 257 representatives of the people elected proportionally, according to the population of each province, with a 4 years' mandate) and the Senate, 72 legislators (three for each state) with 6 years' mandate. The Senate (HSN) is the federal Chamber where the senators represent the interests of the provinces and perform important tasks such as trying people accused by the Chamber of *Diputados* (impeachment trial), authorizing the President to declare the state of siege if there is a foreign attack; the distribution of the income result of taxes between the federal states and the laws promoting policies in favour of the growth of the Nation. The Chamber approves the nomination of the ministers of the Supreme Court of Justice proposed by the Executive (President), as well as those of the law magistrates, plenipotentiary ministers and top ranks of the Armed Forces.

Although the Argentine political system is presidential, the Senate is a sounding board for projects that affect territorial interests. The citizens are attentive to the vote of their senators, particularly in the most sparsely populated provinces where the ties to legislators are close because they need a positive public opinion in order to be able to sustain a political career.

The HSN is the most prestigious Chamber due to the low number of members: Former and future presidents and vice-presidents of the nation, governors, ministers and the most prominent politicians dispute their seats. The vice-president is also the president of the Senate; its provisional president is the second in the line of succession of the nation's authorities. The prestige extends also to the staff because, until about 20 years ago, its numbers were small.

The HSN became, during the past decades, a sounding board and the battlefield of the most important political and social issues, power struggles between the President and the Vice-president of the country, social mobilization during the legislative discussions of controversial laws such as taxing the agricultural sector or pregnancy termination. In 1999 and 2000, the president of the Senate revealed to the press two irregular illegal situations in the Senate: the first one about members of staff in the payroll who were receiving their wages but did not go to work and, the second, about senators receiving payments in exchange for passing laws. Due to these revelations, staff of the Senate were summoned to declare at the courts, their work was discredited, discrediting at the same time senators and the House. I started working in the Senate in 2003, in the midst of this convulsed institutional environment.

This article describes the underlying tension faced by a member of staff conducting doctoral

Author: Ph.D in Social Anthropology. Professor at the Universidad Nacional de Avellaneda - Observatorio de Ciudadanía Cultural, Argentina. e-mail: lferreno@undav.edu.ar

[1] In Argentina, provinces are the federal states that have their own executive, legislative and judiciary powers.

© 2022 Global Journals

research at the HSN: on one hand, there were scarce anthropological studies of the institution; on the other hand, the Senate was the workplace (2003-2018) of the scholar while conducting research (2010-2016). This text is a reflexion on the challenges of the dual condition, clerk, and researcher, and on the decisions made to be able to carry out the study.

During the exploratory phase, the researcher reflected about the early days working in the Senate in June 2003. It was then when the memory of the everyday usage of the word *casa*[2] (house) emerged: "Are you from the *casa*?" was the first question asked by the security officer the first working day when the researcher tried to gain access to the building of the Senate. The initial puzzlement was followed by wondering about the meaning of "being from the *casa*". Later, it became apparent that *casa* was the colloquial name to refer to the Chamber, but that, in turn, acquired a symbolic dimension: it was a metaphor, a work and institutional space, where the Senate was the father and the members of staff their children, who had to be protected from external dangers, but also had to be subordinates. This protection marked the difference between the "*inside*" staff who *belonged to* the *casa* (members of staff) and the "*outside*" staff that *were in* the casa (with fixed term contracts). The expression *casa* was the symbolic border between the actors, who had party, legislators or administrative procedures ties that masked that most powerful identity trait i.e., institutional belonging.

The actors syncretize the predominance of customs and practices over regulations in the Senate with the euphemism *casa política*, referring both to a way of "*doing politics*" in the *casa* and to the "political characteristics" assumed by its operation and administration.

The research took place within this microcosm.

II. Approach

The first challenge was to study a *casa* política while working there. The research proposal was, originally, an idea of the PhD professor but other lecturers and colleagues warned that taking distance from the object of study was difficult and that the clerk-researcher position underlined the partiality towards the observed Other and the difficulty, as anthropologist, to objectivize. The first hurdle was the fact that, from the academic field, the researcher was classified as *insider* or *native*. In the academic literature "insider" is the researcher who is doing investigation in an organization where, at the same time, they are employees or where they have an affiliation or they are sponsored by it; their position is a grey zone (Bruskin, 2018), because the lines between being an insider and an outsider to the organization become fuzzy. Kirin Narayan (1993) wondered "how 'native' is a native anthropologist?" (p.671). Narayan argued against dyads such as "native" and "non-native", outsider/insider or observer/observed anthropologists and proposed that at each historical moment "we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (p.671).

Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) characterized those people as herself and Narayan as halfies "people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage" (p.137). When the clerk in the Senate of the Argentine became researcher, she had the same problems of a halfie (although according to the definition of Abu-Lughod she was not), "dilemmas that strongly highlight the problems of the cultural anthropology's assumption of a fundamental distinction between self and other" (p. 137). Abu-Lughod asked "what happens when the 'other' studied by the anthropologist is simultaneously constructed as, at least partially, a self?" (p.140), and she answered with words that remind of Narayan "what we call the outsider is a position *within* a larger political-historical complex" (p.141). The supposed bias of the anthropologists halfies —unlike their non-native colleagues— confronted them with the actions and ethics of an Other to which they belonged, constructed from academic research, an Other modeled by the anthropologists from the place that the natives had positioned him in the field.

At the beginning of the research, the answers to these doubts remained blurred. The questions were relevant because they made reference to the methodology and because they expressed the role that the various senatorial actors were expected to play during the whole research.

In order to explore possible answers to these questions, it was necessary to start a survey of the literature on parliamentary studies in Latin America, with special focus in Argentina. This survey revealed, on the one hand, that the problem had been studied almost exclusively with quantitative approaches from the point of view of the Political Sciences and, on the other hand, that the Latin-American democratic System had a peculiarity, namely, the *plurality-led congress* (Calvo, 2014), or parliaments made of changing political coalitions. The extensive production and the diversity of topics studied from this perspective, focus mainly on two lines[3]. The first one, that makes reference to the

[2] It is important to note that the Spanish word for house, *casa*, means both house and home. In this paper the Spanish italicized word is used to identify the native *casa*.

[3] The references represent only a minimal part of the Parliamentary Studies. In Argentina, some organizations of the civil society such as Transparency International (http://poderciudadano.org/comunicados-reportes-y-articulos/), Directorio Legislativo (https://directoriolegislativo.org/publicaciones/), CIPPEC (https://www.cippec.org/programas/instituciones-politicas/) or Universo Ágora (http://universoagora.web

© 2022 Global Journals

mechanisms that build the legislative politics, studies mainly questions such as the impact of the political parties system and the electoral system on the recruitment of the legislators, (Cabrera, 1991; Jones, Saiegh, Spiller & Tommasi 2002; Kikuchi & Lodola 2014); the relations between parties and members of the executive and the legislative, both at national and subnational levels, (Calvo & Leiras, 2012; Mustapic, 2000; Gervasoni & Nazareno, 2017); the gender quota in the legislative representation (Archenti & Tula, 2014); and the public opinion on NC (Hortiguera, 2003; Calvo, 2007). The second line has its focus on the NC in itself, particularly on the Chamber of *Diputados* or representatives: its characterization and operation (Mustapic, Bonvecchi & Zelaznik, 2012; Gentile, 2008); the design of public policies, parliamentary control and legislative production (Bieda, 2015; Llanos & Mustapic, 2006); power delegation of the NC (Eaton, 2003); discussion of projects and /or specific topics (Calvo & Tow, 2009); the role of the legislators, parties and coalitions within the NC (Calvo, 2014); party discipline when voting (Jones, 2001); professions, rotation, political-legislative careers and political capital of the Senators (Canelo, 2011; Rossi & Tommasi, 2012; Gastron, 2004). But neither of the two lines focuses its gaze from the perspective of the parliamentary bureaucracy.

Parliaments have been studied from the Anthropology point of view also. Even though in Latin America this point of view was less developed tan the Political Science one, it offered the opportunity to study almost unexplored aspects. Ethnography proposed an approach and a method. The approach focused in the perspective of the "natives", favouring new findings through linking theory and research. The method favoured was the fieldwork, and the researcher was supposed to perform activities such non deeply led interviews of key informants, observation and participative observation that form the evidence foundation the results of the research. Finally, it resulted in a "product", i.e. the textual description (written or audio-visual) of the behaviour of the actors involved. The majority of the parliament ethnographies analysed the legislative dynamics, Marc Abélès in his studies on the European Parliament (1992) and the French Assembly (2001); Emma Crewe on the UK Parliament (2010, 2018); Marcos Bezerra (1999) Maria Cecília Solheid da Costa (1980), André Marenco Dos Santos (1997) and Carla Costa Teixeira (1998) on the National Congress of Brazil. These investigations concentrated on the "visible" parliamentary actors (deputies, senators, and parliamentary authorities) for society; therefore, also from the anthropological perspective, the focus on bureaucracies is infrequent. On the other hand, in Argentina Laura Colabella (2012) studied the personnel of Afro descent from the NC and Laura Ebenau (2012) the bureaucracy of the Parliament of Misiones (province of Northeast Argentina). Publications of both Chambers of the Argentinian Parliament contributed with Studies of the History of the parliament (*Cámara de Diputados de la Nación*, 1948) and approaches both academic and technical (Saettone, 2014; Battaleme et al., 2017; Pitt Villegas, 2006 and 2008; Thwaites Rey, 1991). With regards to the parliamentary actors, they made very heterogeneous contributions, ranging from testimonial analyses carried out by authorities (Álvarez & Morales Solá, 2002; Pontaquarto, 2005) or by the HSN staff (Columba, 1988); the doctoral thesis on parliamentary law of a senator with a completed mandate (Menem, 2012); union leadership studies (Nanni, 2013); even academic research (Creppy, 2011; Ferreño, 2012; Tow, 2016). The latter rightly highlighted that despite the various methodologies and problems, little attention had been paid to the "informal" practices and procedures that guide the ways of choosing and exercising parliamentary positions, both of authorities and senatorial officials (Saettone, 2015; Ferreño, 2016). These data were relevant because, to date, a detailed analysis of the NC describing the organization chart, operation, characterization of human resources and daily life in parliament, such as that carried out in the UK by Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters (2015), or comprehensive studies such as that of Marc Geddes (2016) who incorporates the role of the staff in his doctoral thesis, has not been carried out in Argentina.

These readings allowed to gradually delimit the object of study. The clerk-researcher noted that the central rules of the legislative process were informal and became central to understanding political practices. These behaviours –observed also by Susan Franceschet (2010) in the Chilean Congress– determined how the parties interacted and how the political actors behaved. Shirin Rai (2010) highlighted the specificity of legislative powers and the need to focus on the relationship between formal and informal power structures. Part of Parliament's power and influence came from these informal resources "invisible" to outsiders. The HSN research in Argentina found out that the routines crystallized in customs and habits tended to be more resistant to change because their informality made them less visible. It discovered as well that informal practices were reproduced in the relationships developed by the members of staff with those senatorial actors who favoured their access to the parliament and their parliamentary careers (authorities, senators, union leaders, who were sometimes also often linked by kinship or friendship relationships). Similar ties of consanguinity or instrumentality were also found in

factional.com/) developed links between political, Society and research institutions in order to carry out legislative Studies.

© 2022 Global Journals

the Peruvian Congress (Mujica, 2010), in the National Congress of Brazil[4] (da Costa, 1980) and in the Legislative Assembly and the Municipal Chamber (Legislative Power respectively of the state and of the city) from Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) by Karina Kuschnir (2000a, 2000b).

III. The Dilemmas of the Clerk-Researcher and their Key Informants

The fieldwork started in parallel with the bibliography review. The exploratory phase was started by contacting senators, and their advisors, who requested information about the investigation in order to grant an interview they did not intend to do; the dates were postponed once and again until the clerk-researcher understood that the interviews would never take place, and that, on the contrary, the purpose had been to be clear about the information the researcher had and how she intended to use it. From this point of view, the condition of clerk was not conducive. Luiz Abreu (1999) in his ethnography of the Brazilian National Congress admitted that he only obtained "useful" data in the interviews with deputies when he turned off the recorder and started conversations in "off". In the HSN, the mixed feelings aroused by the presence of a clerk investigating the *casa* were understandable. During this stage, the few informants provided "off" testimonies similar to those offered to the press about the parliamentary everyday gossip, data that did not amount to any particular finding for a clerk-researcher because it was information available to any member of staff from different "sources" by word of mouth in the corridor small talk.

The focus shifted then to the HSN "invisible" actors. The research focused on the administrative dynamics, routines and daily life of the staff of the Senate of Argentina, topic which had been scarcely investigated and that was made invisible in the parliamentary studies. The clerks, i.e. the only parliamentary permanent actors, were an institutional memory whose importance cannot be understated and, at the same time, for whom invisibility constitutes their greatest value, an objective so well achieved, that they were rarely object of study in academic research, unlike the staff of other state institutions.

However, the staff expressed fears, because they thought the publication of the results may have had an impact in their future careers. A frequent question was: "Do you think that changing my name ensures my anonymity when we have spent years working together?". Geddes (2016) mentioned the extreme caution exercised by the clerks and that in the conversations in "off", "the guarded or cautious culture in the House of Commons administration was striking from the beginning of fieldwork and noticeable throughout my studies" (p.144).

As a clerk herself, the researcher was well aware of these fears. Ana Creppy (2011), HR clerk at the Senate, who wrote her undergraduate dissertation about it, said that the proposed interviews had been approved by the public officers of the HSN only after an "infinite number" of revisions and that the people from the unions monitored "informally" the survey. These "surveillances" often determine the object (what) and the method (how) of study because the inquiry of areas that are close either from a work or an emotional point of view, make the clerk-researcher feel that their hybrid and dual position is an obstacle for the fieldwork.

At this stage of the research, she questioned what her category, as researcher, was. Was she a "native", considering the years she had been working in the Senate prior to her research, her knowledge of the organizational culture and the role of costumes and habits? Or was she an "insider", because during the research she was a clerk? Or was she even a "halfie" due to her hybrid and dual role as clerk-researcher? She was aware that hers was the "native" point of view, no matter the perception of her academic colleagues of her as native, insider or halfie. The self/other dissociation merged in her and she then realized that this position gave her a perspective that, although partial (she wondered whether anthropologists believe that they apprehend the whole of the multiple dimensions of a culture when they are not native or insiders?) was privileged since it offered the possibility of reflecting on daily practices that explained ways of conceiving the administrative career of the staff and of doing politics, in the Senate in particular, and in Argentina in general. Ethnography became the way to get out of the naturalized stereotypes of sociology and political science that linked party and union godfathering with public employment, but it also represented a challenge to the hegemonic construction of prevailing knowledge in Argentine parliamentary studies.

The investigation proved (as Creppy's did) that the questions about the career paths produced fear among the personnel. The life project of the majority of the staff was a job not based on meritocracy. The Statute of the Legislative Staff (*Estatuto del Personal Legislativo,* Law 24600) established the procedures for the work promotions. However, in practice, these were determined by the "requests" that each agent made to senators, authorities and trade unions leaders. In an environment where "merit" is based on the personal contacts and links developed by each worker, the members of staff became very careful about the information that they gave and whom they gave it to. The fear of future possible leakages of confidences given during the research could have an impact on their

[4] The reform of the Constitution in 1988 established job stability for the members of staff working in the National Congress, and the public competition for those who aspired in the future to become public servants of the federal powers: Executive, Judicial and Legislative.

© 2022 Global Journals

careers both in the chamber or whenever trying to help a relative accessing employment, and this became apparent during the research. The people in a position to "granting" stability, professional promotion or employment for their relatives or friends should trust them.

Another problematic issue for the staff was fear as a clerk would be identified as "leaking" information to the press. After the denunciation of the payment of bribes to approve the Labor Flexibility Law sanctioned in the year 2000 (Álvarez & Morales Solá, 2002; Pontaquarto, 2005) many employees were summoned to testify in court, since then all the precautions seemed insufficient it implied. The clerks feared the application of the subparagraph c) of article 43 of the Statute of Legislative Staff (Law 24600) stated "To keep secret the service matters that for their nature or legal provision so require, even after having ceased in office "[5]. The mere mention of the word "secrets" in the law created dilemmas. The first, non-explicit one, is the legal dimension and the question whether collaborating with the research would put the informant at risk of formal or informal sanctions. Geddes (2016) described staff as "'clerkliness' an overarching performance style, and it is made up of three aspects… being hidden, unparalleled service, and passionate impartiality" (p.144), and the first two are present in the HSN. This issue was sorted through a careful reading of the decrees. The public documents (decrees and decisions appointing or promoting personnel) constituted a methodological option that built the informants' trust in me, within an institutional context marked by a climate of tension in the Chamber during the first two years of the research (2010-2011). At the same time, the decrees and decisions were a choice that pointed the subsequent course of the investigation. Then, another dilemma, this time of moral order, emerged: were the informers and the researcher betraying the secrets of the institution? The fact that whoever requested the nomination (the authority or trade union leader) was mentioned in the decrees, meant that no "sensitive" information revealed. The mention of the requesting person highlighted the naturalization of an institutional practice that did not fully meet the normative: for instance, with reference to the qualifications needed, the staff selection mechanisms or the positions assigned to the new staff (Law 24600, article 5, paragraphs d, e and f), because even though the senators and the authorities were allowed to request the nomination of their own staff, this possibility was extended to the officers and trade unionists. The research focused in this trait of the Human Resources policy of the Senate. The reason for this decision was twofold: firstly, the gift giving person (in Mauss's sense)[6] was considered, in the senatorial jargon, godfather or godmother; secondly, these anomalies together with others found during the research, described the *casa política*, the colloquial denomination characterizing the institution.

The research focused on keeping the daily work links with the staff, allowing the clerks to become informants while avoiding the possibility of future questioning of informant co-workers, authorities and public officers of the HSN and the unions. The public access official documents available in the institutional webpage (https://www.senado.gov.ar/), as well as the presidential decrees, the resolutions of the Administrative Secretary and the joint resolutions of the Chambers offered the opportunity to investigate a little explored aspect: the staff nomination and the career progression of the senate staff. This delimitation of the research helped to reduce the peers' fears and, at the same time, allowed her to "take distance" from the object of study. The "papers" gave the novel employee-researcher a position in the field and offered the possibility of carrying out an ethnography less questioned by her colleagues in the academic field. The conversations with the senatorial co-workers—key informants were, at the beginning, the "skeleton" of the investigation. These dialogues took the form of talks during informal meetings, because they were reluctant to accept set interviews and to the use of the recorder (this kind of resistance is usual in this type of institutions where the recorder is an instrument that often provides scanty and inconsequential findings because it intimidates). It was gradually confirmed that the collaboration of the Senate staff would become essential throughout the process of fieldwork and analysis of the data collected. In the first place, because they questioned some topics while pointing out at some others and, little by little, they helped to delimit the scope of the study. Secondly, because they provided prior information about imminent news and gave clues to track information and documents; and thirdly, because they suggested possible thematic approaches. In most cases, they were interlocutors with whom, on the one hand, it was possible to analyse and confront their own ideas with their perceptions, and on the other, to reflect on the distance between institutional practices and the data provided by the documents.

At this stage of the quest, the researcher had doubts whether it was correct to use as an observer the same methods used in the capacity of clerk. Was the fact of focusing on everyday aspects, such as the forms

[5] It should be mentioned that in Argentina the concepts of privacy and confidentiality are much looser than in other areas of the world.

[6] Mauss identified three obligations associated with "gift" exchange: giving, the first step in building a social relationship; the second step, receiving, which signifies acceptance of the social relationship; and the third step, reciprocating, which demonstrates the recipient's integrity.

© 2022 Global Journals

assumed by the relations of domination in the Senate towards clerks, a betrayal of the "secrets" of the institution or was it a mechanism to make them visible? From where should the "natives" be interrogated if the researcher was a "native" or "insider" as well? The answers to each of these questions were gradual and involved a long process of theoretical analysis. The answer to the last question allowed to start the investigation from the certainty that the self a person knows, is partial and situated in all its facets (Haraway, 1988). The "dual and hybrid position", conjunction of the self and the other allowed to think about the partiality and the positioning of knowledge that was developing both from the researcher and the key informant's point of view. The "secrets" thus became an instrument in the influences traffic where the make believe was more important than the truth —for instance— making believe how much one knew about the union negotiations about promotions. The situated partial and changing positioning of the clerk-researcher and the senatorial others, constituted selves favouring the study of the human resources policies of the HSN, shedding light on the peculiarities of the historical institutional context of the investigation.

The narrative and daily practices of the Senate staff showed that their life projects and concerns revolved around their work in the Senate and that the analysis of their stories facilitated the understanding of the logics of the institution inscribed in the official speeches. The use of *casa* to name the institution, instead of Chamber or Senate, is an example of these feelings of belonging.

The findings allowed the clerk-researcher, to share data with the workers who officiated as informants and even analyze material restricted to the public (for instance there were no written records of the negotiations for the appointment of staff or for the promotions in the presidential decrees). This twofold perspective clerk-researcher on these issues allowed the staff to discuss these naturalized practices, of the senatorial operatives; the position meant that while as clerk brought and took information, was informant and researcher. This initial fieldwork phase highlighted that the clerks' everyday words and actions ceased to be "neutral" as soon as they waivered in their responses during interviews. The changing relationships between informants and researcher in this first stage evidenced the challenges of ethnographic "control" and the effects that the objectification of the parliamentary microcosm produced in the researcher. Signe Bruskin (2018) characterized these investigators immerse in a frontier insider-outsider changing, fluid and diffuse, but this description would seem self-referential, i.e., your case, because during the investigation he was sponsored and employed as a researcher in IT department although before he was working for five years in the bank's human resources department (p.162). Is this so throughout and in all fieldwork? Not necessarily: the universes of insider investigators are very wide and, in this case, the condition senatorial clerk-researcher led to the status of being member of staff situated early at the start of the study.

However, obtaining the trust of the co-workers was not easy. Some of the questions or statements that received as insider were: "Why are you asking me things that you already know?", "We think the same, my opinion about the union is not new for you". On the contrary, if the question posed was perceived as threatening for their interests such as questions about strategies and negotiations to get promotions or other scopes, the condition of member of staff, was perceived as potential competence and had outsiders' challenges. In the HSN, the greatest difficulty for the outsider is the mistrust and reluctance of the informants to provide information because it is an institution exposed to the leaking of sensitive information to the press. The exploratory proposal of trying to reflect on insights that arose during occasional conversations at work generated tensions because it unmasked naturalized practices. The colleagues understood the researcher's position in the field as that of a clerk and she was treated as such, she then explored together with them the convenience of making certain naturalized practices visible.

During the investigation, the clerk position allowed the questioning of the study of the State from the political spaces and identities only. This perspective "from above" had to be complemented, according to Marc Abélès (2005, 2012), with a view *of* and *from the point of view of* the experiential worlds of the actors due to the multiple meanings that they give to their experiences. It considered the ethnography of the HSN "from below", from the naturalized actions of the staff and from the narrative, both the written documents and that orality present in the daily actions of people. When looking "from below" it unveiled that for the actors (personnel, authorities, senators, unionists) the Senate was a *casa* whose main characteristic was that it was "political". It was the answer to *what* to study. The purpose of the research was to unveil that invisible world that enabled the "*casa* to function" but that remained always in the shadows, the world of the staff who are the blood and flesh of the institution, day in day out. The scope was to move from the representations built by the academics and the society to offer a *natural* portrait of the legislative staff. The centrality of the ways in which institutional practices arise, are reproduced and naturalized, emerged during long conversations. Another issue that become apparent is that these practices are related to the staff's perception of themselves, the microcosm where they work and the national context, that, in the period studied, was characterized by the exponential increase of the human resources in all the public bodies including the Senate.

© 2022 Global Journals

Colabella (2012) characterized the informal transmission built behind "closed doors" in the NC as a *tradition* present in both Chambers. From the point of view of this study, *casa* -that invisible face of Argentinian Senate- embodied that *tradition* sustained on the uses and customs that functioned as an umbrella that validated the actions that the actors could not justify in terms of the norms in force such as those for the appointment and promotion of the personnel.

The answer to the question how to conduct the investigation, that is, the approach or method, was gradual, and the conformation of the theoretical framework was gradual also. Donna Haraway (1988) questioned the paradigm of objectivity in the social sciences and proposed "not giving in to the tempting myths of vision" (p.582). This author argued that knowledge is situated and that this is supported both by the recognition of the impossibility of scientific neutrality and by the personal, political and ideological perspectives of the researchers themselves. Situated knowledge is based on a fragmented one, and focused on certain aspects of reality, which refutes the vision of a universal view. This perspective offered the possibility of reflecting on the object increasing the clerk side of the researcher. It confirmed that "only the partial perspective promises an objective view... The 'eyes' made available in modern technological sciences shatter any idea of passive vision; these prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building on translations and specific *ways* of seeing, that is, ways of life". (Haraway, 1988: 583, italics of the author). This partial look from below required new skills and points of view and no look is innocent, even those of the groups within the elites that become invisible. The partial knowledge approach focuses on certain aspects of reality in order to decode the perceptual systems, the translations and the specific ways on which the actors base their actions (Haraway, 1988). By deconstructing the notion of truth to demonstrate its historical specificity, Haraway unmasked the bias of science and corroborated that objectivity is situated, even if it does not seem so. Narayan (1993) for her part, positioned in the dilemmas of the insider anthropologist, described the hybridity of the knowledge generated by these investigators that belong "simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday life" (p. 672). The research of the HSN was situated in the double belonging to both worlds, i.e. the world of the daily life of the Senate staff and the world of the research for a doctoral Dissertation. This investigation involved both the analysis of the rules, decrees and parliamentary decisions and the links of the staff with senators, political and trade unions people through their union or political activity, or personal relationships.

These studies are complex because as David Mosse (2006) revealed "this kind of ethnography, where field/desk, self/other, subject/object, here/there distinctions do not apply in the same way" (p.938) that the traditional ethnography. Mosse rightly warned that access to closed institutions (as in this case parliaments), was facilitated because working "there" often reversed the challenges for these researchers, who unlike most ethnographers had easier access to the field and to privileged information and at the same time created problems to quit: how to "get out of the field" when this is the researcher's workplace?

The research in the HSN made it possible to relativize some observations by Bruskin and Mosse. In this case, the work/research boundaries could become blurred, but they did not disappear. When work and research do not imply the same interest, that is, when the researcher as an employee must fulfil the tasks assigned to receive his salary, she is not always doing field in her field's he had to first perform the job duties. However, it is true that so many days, months and years sharpen the "ethnographic" eye.

The situation to which Mosse (2006) alludes differed in some respects from the clerk-researcher's dilemmas, when he worked as anthropologist-consultant for the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) between 1990 and 2001. As all research has conditioning factors that make the knowledge of the object of study partial and, as Mosse recognized, the outcome was "a critical analysis of policy and administrative rationality and modes of expertise in aid and development — including those of social anthropology itself. It was based on the best available evidence, but was still an interested interpretation, a personal analytical account; an ethnography in which I was myself a key informant" (p.938). There is no doubt that the researcher also became a key informant of her research, but unlike Mosse, she had been working at the HSN for 7 years when she started her doctoral thesis, she continued performing her work in in the Senate while she studied it and after her PhD was over. Leaving the field was gradual because she was "caught" in the interstices of her research during the two years she continued working at the HSN after her thesis was completed. The naturalization of the clerk-researcher duality in which she was inserted became a continuous reception of comments and information from her colleagues, since there was a need in them to maintain her as an interlocutor of senatorial daily life. Even if they knew that the study had ended, the situation due to a question of camaraderie was very difficult to overcome; As a corollary, observation of daily routines was inescapable.

IV. Some Considerations about being a Clerk-Researcher

The choice to research the Senate and to use *casa política* as main category for the analysis faced the

© 2022 Global Journals

member of the parliamentary staff with several challenges. The first, the criticisms regarding the problems of distancing from the object of study raised by some professors and fellow doctoral students which were more difficult to overcome than the initial fears of the peers in the Senate. However, gradually, and thanks to the contributions of colleagues, it was possible to elaborate the theoretical framework that would make up the research, based on knowledge located from the perspective of a clerk who investigated the parliamentary work environment of which she was a part. During that journey, a finding that surprised her as a researcher was that in Argentina there were antecedents of investigations carried out by staff members in work contexts, but this situation was left aside (as in the mentioned work of the parliament of Misiones of Laura Ebenau), or just vaguely mentioned in ethnographies. The topic deserved a deep debate but, since these researchers did not clarify their contexts, their experiences remained invisible.

A second challenge was to preserve the identity of the fellow staff members who collaborated as key informants. Although this is a basic premise of all scientific research, in this case it became particularly relevant because some of these people they would continue to be part of her daily work world once the research was over, and the researcher remained "there". Parliaments are microcosms where staff interact permanently, and she did not want to affect the pleasant working environment where she worked daily.

There were three different presidential administrations while this research was conducted but, despite the fact that the three of them were aware of the investigation, none of them was interested in it, neither in its reach, nor in its findings, not even when it was concluded. This lack of interest constituted an advantage for the scholar, who did not have any trouble as clerk-researcher but, at the same time, confirmed that the reference to the *casa política*, that the actors assumed as a characteristic of the HSN, referred to a way the Chamber worked, beyond the parliamentary administrations of the various political parties. This organizational particularity prevented the study and its finding from becoming a joint work-dissertation experience, favouring the transfer of knowledge and a deepening of the findings from applied anthropology.

Despite the fact that during an initial phase the clerk was treated as an outsider, gradually the clerk condition started taking over. This position of clerk-researcher- revealed a new way to investigate the HSN and enhanced the possibility of conducting a critical analysis of the institutional processes.

References Références Referencias

1. Abélès, M. (2005), *Anthropologie de l'État*, Petit Bibliothèque Payot, Paris.
2. Abélès, M. (1992), *La vie quotidienne au Parlement Européen*, Hachette, Paris.
3. Abélès, M. (2001), *Un ethnologue à l'Assemblée*, Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris.
4. Abreu, L. E. de Lacerda (1999). "Os laberintos do Minotauro. Política, troca e linguagem". Teses de Doutorado no publicada. Programa de Pós-Graduação (Doutorado em Antropologia Social). UnB.
5. Abu-Lughod, L. (1991), "Writing against Culture", in Fox, R. *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present,* School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, Chapter 8, pp. 137-162.
6. Álvarez, C. Y Morales Solá, J. (2002), *Sin excusas*, Sudamericana-La Nación, Buenos Aires.
7. Archenti, N. and Tula, M. (coords.) (2014*), La representación imperfecta. Logros y desafíos de las mujeres políticas*, Eudeba, Buenos Aires.
8. Battaleme, J. et al., 2017 (2017), *El Congreso en foco: reflexiones sobre su representatividad y dinámica*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Buenos Aires available at: https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=0526f986-ff01-e01b-ce19-6cba8e26ac69&groupId=287460
9. Bezerra, M. (1999), *Em nome das « bases »: Política, favor e depêndencia* pessoal, Relume Dumará, Rio de Janeiro.
10. Bieda, T (2015), "El control parlamentario en Argentina", *Postdata*, 20(1):185-219.
11. Bourdieu, P. (2004), *El baile de los solteros*, Anagrama, Barcelona.
12. Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (2014), *Una invitación a la sociología reflexiva*, Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires.
13. Bruskin, S. (2018), "Insider or outsider? Exploring the fluidity of the roles through social identity theory", *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* 8(2):159-170, doi: https://doi.org/10.1108/JOE-09-2017-0039
14. Cabrera, E. (1991), "Proporcionalidad y desproporcionalidad, en la elección de diputados nacionales: La Ley Electoral y un análisis de las elecciones legislativas nacionales de 1983, 1985, 1987 y 1989". *Desarrollo Económico*, *(31)*122: 279-290.
15. Calvo, E. (2014), *Legislator Success in Fragmented Congresses: Plurality Cartels, Minority Presidents, and Lawmaking*, Nueva York, Cambridge University Press.
16. Calvo, E. (2007), "The Responsive Legislature: Public Opinion and Law Making in a Highly Disciplined Legislature", *British Journal of Political Science* (BJPS), 37(2): 263- 280, doi: 10.1017/S0007123407000130
17. Calvo, E. and Leiras, M. (2012), "The Nationalization of Legislative Collaboration: Territory, Partisanship and Policymaking in Argentina", *Revista*

© 2022 Global Journals

Iberoamericana de Estudos Legislativos 1(2): 2-19, doi: 10.12660/riel.v2.n1.2012.5843
18. Calvo, E. and Tow, A. (2009), "Cajoneando el debate: El papel de los presidentes de las comisiones en la productividad del Congreso argentino", *Desarrollo Económico* 49(195): 451-477.
19. Cámara de Diputados de la Nación (1948), *El Parlamento Argentino. 1854-1947,* Imprenta del Congreso de la Nación, Buenos Aires.
20. Canelo, P. (2011), "Acerca de la construcción de la carrera política en la Argentina. Los senadores nacionales en 1973, 1983 y 1989", *PolHis* N° 7: 140-153, available at: http://historiapolitica.com/datos/boletin/polhis7_canelo.pdf
21. Colabella, L. (2012), *Los negros del Congreso. Nombre, filiación y honor en el reclutamiento a la burocracia del Estado argentino*, Antropofagia, Buenos Aires.
22. Costa, M. (1980), "Os caminhos da Casa". Rio de Janeiro. Tesis de Maestria no publicada. PPGAS/ Museu Nacional/UFRJ (Dissertação de mestrado).
23. Columba, R. (1988), *El Congreso que yo he visto*, Editorial Columba, Buenos Aires.
24. Creppy, A. (2011), "Clima organizacional en el área administrativa del Senado de la Nación", Tesis de Licenciatura. Escuela de Sociología, Universidad del Salvador, Buenos Aires.
25. Crewe, E. (2010), "An Anthropology of the House of Lords: Socialisation, Relationships and Rituals", *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 16(3):313-324, doi: 10.1080/13572334.2010.498100
26. Crewe, E. (2018), "Ethnographies of parliament: culture and uncertainty in shallow democracies". *Journal of Organization Ethnography* 7(1): 16-30, doi: 10.1108/JOE-11-2017-0057
27. Eaton, K. (2003), "La lógica de la delegación de poderes legislativos. La reforma de la promoción regional en la Argentina", *Desarrollo Económico* 42(168): 499-518.
28. Ebenau, L. (2012) "Transacciones redistributivas y relaciones clientelares en la burocracia parlamentaria misionera", *Runa,* 33(1):33-51.
29. Ferreño, L. (2016), Los caminos de pertenencia a una *casa política*: Padrinazgo y poder en el Senado de la Nación Argentina, Tesis doctoral, UNSAM/ IDAES, doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.15471.07849
30. Ferreño, L. (2012), "'Yo soy de la casa'. El H. Senado de la Nación: Prácticas y discursos en una 'casa política'", *Idéias–Unicamp* 3(2):189-222, doi: 10.20396/ideias.v3i2.8649354
31. Franceschet, Susan (2010). "The Genered Dimensions of Rituals, Rules and Norms in the Chilean Congress". *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 16(3): 394-407, doi: 10.1080/13572334. 2010.498107
32. Gastron, A. (2004), "El perfil educativo de los legisladores y asesores parlamentarios en la Argentina", *Revista electrónica de Teoría y Práctica de la Elaboración de Normas Jurídicas*, Año I-Número I: 19-35, http://www.derecho.uba.ar/academica/posgrados/re_tpenj_001.pdf.
33. Geddes, M. (2016), "Interpreting Parliamentary Scrutiny. An enquiry concerning everyday practices of parliamentary actors in select committees of the House of Commons", Dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Politics-Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Sheffield, available at: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d416/7bc428fc0b7c5761ca724a0ff07098a128ab.pdf?_ga=2.178713764.1014550271.1580410911-824519035.1579814280
34. Gentile, J. (comp.) (2008). *El Poder Legislativo. Aportes para el conocimiento del Congreso de la Nación Argentina,* AADC/Konrad Adenauer, Montevideo.
35. Gervasoni, C. and Nazareno, M. (2017), "La relación entre gobernadores y legisladores nacionales: Repensando la "conexión subnacional" del federalismo político argentino", *Política y gobierno* XXIV (2): 9-44.
36. Haraway, D. (1988), "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575-599, available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066
37. Hortiguera, H. (2003), "El folletín delictuoso argentino: Discurso periodístico y géneros populares en los umbrales del nuevo milenio", *Delaware Review of Latin American Studies* 4(2), available at: http://udspace.udel.edu/handle/19716/19534
38. Kikuchi, H. and Lodola, G. (2014), "The Effects of Gubernatorial Influence and Political Careerism on Senatorial Voting Behavior: The Argentine Case", *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 6(2): 73–105, doi: 10.1177/1866802X1400600203
39. Kuschnir, K. (2000a). *Eleições e representação no Rio de Janeiro,* Relume Dumará, Coleção Antropologia da Política, Rio de Janeiro.
40. Kuschnir, K. (2000b). *O cotidiano da política,* Relume Dumará, Coleção Antropologia da Política, Rio de Janeiro.
41. Jones, M. (2001), "Carreras políticas y disciplinas partidarias en la Cámara de Diputados argentina", *PostData*, 7: 189-230.
42. Jones, M., Saiegh, S., Spiller, P.; Tommasi, M. (2002). "Amateur Legislators Professional Politicians: The Consequences of Party-Centered Electoral Rules in a Federal System". *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(3): 656-669, doi: 10.2307/3088406
43. Llanos, M. and Mustapic, A. (eds.) (2006), *El control parlamentario en Alemania, Argentina y Brazil*. Rosario: Homo Sapiens Ediciones, 2006.

© 2022 Global Journals

44. Menem, E. (2012), *Derecho Procesal Parlamentario*, La Ley, Buenos Aires.
45. Marenco Dos Santos, A. (1997), "Nas fronteiras do campo político. Raposas e outsiders no Congresso Nacional", in *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 12(33): 87-101, available at: http://anpocs.com/images/stories/RBCS/33/rbcs33_06.pdf
46. Mauss, M. (2009), *Ensayo sobre el don. Razón y forma del cambio en las sociedades arcaicas*, Katz Editores, Buenos Aires.
47. Mosse, D. (2006), "Anti-social anthropology? Objectivity, objection, and the ethnography of public policy and professional communities", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12(4):935 – 956, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9655.2006.00371.x
48. Mujica, J. (2010). "Hacia una etnografía del Parlamento peruano". Documento de Trabajo, Escuela de Gobierno y Políticas Públicas – PUCP, Doctorado en Ciencia Política y Gobierno, Lima, available at: http://escuela.pucp.edu.pe/gobierno/images/documentos/investigaciones/jarismujica.pdf
49. Mustapic, A. (2000), "Oficialistas y diputados': las relaciones Ejecutivo Legislativo en la Argentina", *Desarrollo Económico* 39 (156): 571-595.
50. Mustapic, A.; Bonvecchi, A.; Zelaznik, J. (comps.) (2012), *Los legisladores en el Congreso argentino. Prácticas y estrategias*, Buenos Aires, Instituto Torcuato Di Tella.
51. Nanni, E. (comp.) (2013), *30 años de democracia: la visión de los profesionales que se desempeñan en el Congreso de la Nación*, Comisión de Profesionales Asociación del Personal Legislativo, available at: http://www.apldigital.org.ar/new/images/comisiones/profesionales/dossier/dossier_apl.pdf
52. Narayan, K. (1993), How Native Is a "Native" Anthropologist? *American Anthropologist*, New Series l.95(3)671-686, available at: http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-7294%28199309%292%3A95%3A3%3C671%3AHNIA%22A%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Z
53. Pitt Villegas, J. (2008), *Aportes para una mejora en la calidad Institucional*, Senado de la Nación, Buenos Aires.
54. Pitt Villegas, J. (2006). *Reglamento de la Cámara de Senadores de la Nación Argentina: su articulado concordado con antecedentes historicos nacionales y ancestrales (años 1822-2006),* available at: http://www.senado.gov.ar/web/cecap/reglamento/index.htm
55. Pontaquarto, M. (2005), *El arrepentido. Cómo se hace política en Argentina*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires.
56. Rai, Shirin (2010). "Analysing Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament", *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 16(3): 284-297.
57. Rogers, R. and Walters, R. (2015), *How Parliament Works*, Routledge (Seventh Edition), London.
58. Rossi, M. and Tommasi, M. (2012), "Legislative Effort and Career Paths in the Argentine Congress", en IDBWorking Papers Series, Nº IDB-WP-378: 1-18, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Washington, DC, available at: https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/89071/1/IDB-WP-378.pdf
59. Saettone, F. (2015), "La elección del presidente y los vicepresidentes de la Cámara de Diputados en Argentina (1983-2014). Un estudio de caso", *Revista SAAP* 9(2): 343-374.
60. Saettone, F. (2014), "Los interbloques", Documento de Trabajo Nº 1, Secretaría Parlamentaria de la Honorable Cámara de Diputados de la Nación.
61. Spary, C. (2010). "Disrupting Rituals of Debate in the Indian Parliament", *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 16(3): 338-351, doi: 10.1080/13572334.2010.498102
62. Teixeira, C. (1998), *A honra da política,* Relume Dumará, Rio de Janeiro.
63. Thwaites Rey, M. (1991), "Apuntes para pensar la modernización del parlamento argentino". *Documentos y conclusiones del Primer Congreso Internacional de Modernizacion Parlamentaria*, Congreso de la Nación Argentina, Buenos Aires.

© 2022 Global Journals