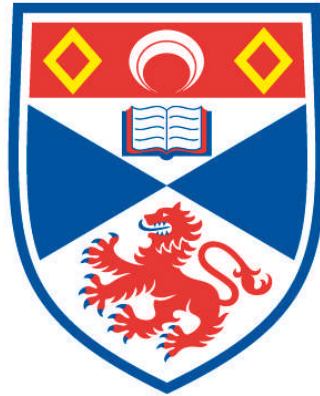


**LOCATIONS OF ENVY. AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF
AGUABUENA POTTERS**

Daniela Castellanos Montes

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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Locations of Envy. An Ethnography of Aguabuena Potters

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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October 2012

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I, Daniela Castellanos Montes, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 84,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an anthropological exploration of the envy of Aguabuena people, a small rural community of potters in the village of Ráquira, in the Boyacá region of Andean Colombia. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork among these potters, I propose an understanding of envy in Aguabuena as an existential experience, shaping relationships between the self and others in the world, crosscutting metaphysical and physical spheres, and balancing between corrosive and more empathetic ways of co-existence. Disclosing the multipresence of envy in Aguabuena's world, its effects on people (including the ethnographer), and the way envy is embodied, performed, reciprocated and circumvented by the potters, I locate envy in various contexts where it is said to be manifested. Furthermore, I discuss the complex spectrum of envy and its multivalent meanings, or oscillations, in the life of Aguabuena people. I also present interactions with people surrounding potters, such as Augustinian monks, crafts middlemen, and municipal authorities, all of whom recount the envy of potters. My research challenges previous anthropological interpretations on envy and provides an alternative reading of this phenomenon. Moving away from labelling and regulatory explanations of envy, performative models, or pathological interpretations of the subject, I analyse the lived experience of envy and how it encompasses different realms of experience as well as flows of social relations. While focusing on the tensions and entanglements that envy brings to potters, as it constrains social life but also activates and reinforces social bonds, I examine the channels through which envy circulates and how it is put into motion by potters. Additionally, my thesis intends to contribute to anthropological studies of rural pottery communities in Andean Colombia. I present my unfolding understanding of envy by using both the potters' concept and material detail, *punto*, location, referring to a spot from where Aguabuena people enter different vistas of the world, or denoting a precise time when things or materials change their physical qualities. Through this device, I disclose realms of envy, while seeking to immerse the reader in the lived experience of envy.

Key words: envy, potters, Aguabuena, *punto*/location, entanglements, craft

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Acknowledgements

My first and foremost gratitude is towards the people of Aguabuena, whose friendship, care, good humour, and also envy shaped my thesis and ethnographic research in many and varied ways. Traces of Marina, Clotilde, doña Teresa, Deolfina, Delfina, Manuel, Helí, Gloria, Josefa, Pureza, Yolanda and Darío, and Mono, among many others, and of our encounters, are scattered throughout the thesis.

The PhD writing seminars chaired by Peter Gow in 2010 and Nigel Rapport in 2011 were great scenarios for discussing earlier drafts of some chapters and getting insightful feedback. I want to thank all my PhD colleagues attending those seminars, and especially Moises Lino e Silva, Máire Ní Mhórdha, Karolina Kuberska and Philip Kao for their thorough reading.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Karolina Kuberska and Máire Ní Mhórdha who helped me to correct the English, and in this way helped me to enhance and make clearer my thoughts. Sonia Tell helped me with the translation of colonial and historical terms from Spanish to English.

My biggest thanks go to my supervisors, Paloma Gay y Blasco and Stephanie Bunn who have encouraged me and supported me throughout all these years of the PhD. Thanks to Stephanie, I embarked on a pottery-making apprenticeship among Aguabuena artisans, an exercise that gave me alternative avenues for engaging in the field. Paloma pushed me to achieve clarity and rigor in my interpretations and in my writing. I owe them both for helping to improve the structure and argument of the thesis.

I also want to thank the members of the staff of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews. During my time at St Andrews, I had stimulating intellectual exchanges with Nigel Rapport, Huon Wardle, Tristan Platt and Mark Harris. Stan Frankland gave me feedback on a video documentary that I made of Aguabuena potters. Paulo Alves, a visiting fellow to the CAS (Centre of Amerindian, Caribbean and Latin American Studies) in 2010-2011 also gave me valuable comments. Mhari and Lisa, the Departmental secretaries were very helpful and patient. The workshop “The riddle of the place” organized by the CAS in 2010 and my presentation at that meeting was the first time in which I started to crystallise some of the thoughts on envy that constitute main arguments of the thesis. In 2011, I also benefited from presenting an earlier version of one of the chapters at a CAS seminar.

The Institute of Colombian Anthropology and History (ICANH) granted me the scholarship “Pioneros de la Antropología Colombiana 2010” which supported me economically during the year of my fieldwork. At the Institute, I had the great input of Margarita Chaves who read pieces of my writing and gave me important feedback and bibliographic

recommendations. Elizabeth Navarro, the Institute's secretary was also very helpful with all administrative matters. The Universidad Externado de Colombia, and the Department of Estudios del Patrimonio Cultural where I was a lecturer before coming to St Andrews invited me to present my work in 2010 and 2011. I want to thank Roberto Lleras for making that possible. I also want to thank other funding bodies and institutions for their generous financial support at different stages of my research: Premio Iberoamericano de Artesanías Cabildo de Tenerife, Canary Islands, Department of Social Anthropology and the Centre for Amerindian Caribbean and Latin American Studies at the University of St Andrews, and Colfuturo. The final stage of my writing up was supported by the Radcliffe-Brown Trust Fund/Olivia Harris Fund from the Royal Anthropological Institute.

In St Andrews I want to give special thanks to Sylvia Donaldson, who has been a caring friend to me since my arrival in Scotland. John and Elizabeth Peacock have also helped me tremendously.

To my family Jan, Hernando, Florencia, Hernando José, Pachito, Magaly, Mireya, Normita, as well as my Czech family in Zitná, my gratitude. To Jan, my debt is beyond words.

Notes on the use of language

(1) Aguabuena craftsmen and craftswomen shape pots for cooking, in which case they are called *ollas*, or flower vessels, named *materas*. When referring to both type of objects, artisans call them indistinctively *loza* or *vasija(s)*. The use of the English word “pot” in the text does not stand for the Spanish *olla*, but instead refers to the latter use of the category, i.e. *loza* or *vasija*, as employed by potters themselves.

(2) In Spanish nouns are always gendered, they are either feminine or masculine but never neutral. *Olla*, pot and *vasija*, vessel are feminine nouns and they are preceded by the feminine article *la/las* or replaced by the pronoun *ella/ellas*. This gendered usage of language should be kept in mind in the passages including translation of potters’ narratives.

(3) Aguabuena potters have a local dialect shared among other rural people of the Boyacá region of Colombia. I preserve this local people’s usage of the language in the quotations of the potters across the thesis.

Opening: The Envy of Aguabuena's Potters

Envidia, envy, was one of the first and most common words I heard throughout my fieldwork. It was uttered every day of my stay among potters in Aguabuena, a small community related through kinship ties, in a rural area in the village of Ráquira (in the Boyacá region) located in the heart of the eastern range of the Colombian Andes (see Figures 1 and 2). For these potters, also known as *la gente del cerro*, the people of the hill, envy was an existential experience shaping relationships between the self and others in the world, crosscutting metaphysical and physical spheres, and oscillating between corrosive and more empathetic ways of co-existence.

Moreover, others who surrounded the potters and interacted with them also recounted the envy of Aguabuena people. Augustinian monks and Catholic priests (present in the area since colonial times), as well as middlemen responsible for commercial and social exchanges, state officials and municipal authorities, and other inhabitants of Ráquira referred to the envious character of potters. The notion that *hay mucha envidia en Aguabuena*, there is a lot of envy in Aguabuena, and that *la gente de Aguabuena es la más envidiosa de todas*, Aguabuena people are the most envious of all, was claimed and widely shared in different ways by a significant number of people both inside and outside Aguabuena. Furthermore, supernatural beings worshipped by potters, such as saints or the Virgin, as well as materials – including the clay they used to shape pots – and the objects they made, were considered to be envious too. Finally, the potters' envy was said to be contagious to the point of affecting an outsider or an anthropologist, like me, so that potters ascribed to me equally envious qualities.

Placing individuals existentially close to one another or, as potters say, *enriedándolos*, entangling them, envy was a means of relating, of establishing and reciprocating social bonds for Aguabuena potters, comparable to, and yet more effective in keeping people together than kinship or *compadrazgo*. Similarly, envy conflated sentiments and practices of belonging to a place and to a group, as well as entailing subjects' processes of self-fashioning, whilst always being an embodied experience.

Aguabuena potters lived envy in ways that did not fit previous anthropological interpretations but that nonetheless brought to the fore old discussions on the matter. Furthermore, potters' *envidia* did not parallel dictionary definitions of envy either in English or Spanish in every respect, although it overlapped with them. In many cases, I recorded stories of people's behaviours or attitudes that I thought revealed potters' lack of generosity or pride, but to my surprise, were taken by the locals as signs of envy. At other times I could more easily identify with the situations and meaning potters ascribed to the term (cf. Rosaldo 1980; Jackson 1989).

Approaching envidia

Conceptualising envy as a threatening behaviour and a destructive emotion endangering communal life, anthropological works have focused mainly on the ways different groups, both Western and non-Western, have fought against envy through symbolic means such as the fear of witchcraft or illness (cf. Shoeck 1970; Foster 1972b; Eves 2000; Overing et al. 2000). Contrary to this depiction, Aguabuena presented a different possibility, where *envidia* was not an isolated or infamous trait to be morally condemned and neutralised, but rather a shared infamy (and fame), acknowledged by all Aguabuena potters. In Aguabuena, potters embodied envy and, moreover, circumvented other potters' envy or reciprocated it, recognising both the risks envy brought to their lives (for example in the form of illness or death), but also how it activated communal life, while referring to it at times as smothering them, and at times as empowering them.

What is more, taking envy as a universal or pan-human feature, anthropologists have usually portrayed it as a monolithic concept (cf. Ariel de Vidas 2007; Foster 1965, 1972b) defined exclusively by its Latin etymology (*invidere* = "malicious look") which focuses on envy's oculo-centrism, and portraying envy as an emotion experienced in the same way by all groups. Thus, scholars have taken the definition of envy for granted in their contexts of study, including what it entails for their research communities, and how it works, describing instead how people avoid it or control it. My ethnography of Aguabuena potters allows us to challenge previous anthropological interpretations on envy. Far from being

monolithic or oculo-centric, in Aguabuena envy encompasses different realms of experience and existence (physical and metaphysical), establishing an intersubjective bridge between the self and others, as well as conjoining the body (with all the senses), the physical and local world and the supernatural.

Although anthropology and related fields have depicted envy as a cross-cultural phenomenon, and a key aspect of our humanity (cf. Shoeck 1970; Foster 1972b; Smith et al 2008), there is, however, a lack of understanding of how envy is enacted and articulated in different ethnographic settings. This thesis suggests one alternative reading based on more grounded ethnographical conceptualisations. Drawing on Aguabuena potters' envy, I aim to provide an ethnographic exploration of the ways envy is lived, affecting people by making them actors and simultaneously causing them to be acted upon (cf. Jackson 2002; 2005). I am interested in the tensions envy brings to potters, as it constrains social life, but also activates and reinforces social bonds, and by this token how envy joins individuals, causing them to simultaneously be a part of and apart from the world (cf. Jackson 2011). I explore envy on multiple levels. I examine envy's role in terms of rhetoric and as a cause and explanation of phenomena, as well as how envy constitutes experience, encompassing the artisans' struggles for viable existence. Moving beyond labelling or regulatory frameworks (cf. Foster 1972b) and performative understandings (cf. Taussig 2002), I intend to discuss the multiple meanings and nuances of envy in correspondence with its effects and experiences. Drawing on different contexts where envy manifests itself, such as the body, craft, narratives, social relations and kinship, representations of the self and the ideas of personhood, as well as the sacred, I unravel the complex spectrum of envy, its multivalent meanings and oscillations in the life of Aguabuena people. Additionally, I intend to contribute to anthropological studies of rural potter communities in Andean Colombia, providing an alternative reading to previous works which focused merely on potters' crafts and their modes of production (cf. Mora de Jaramillo 1974; Duncan 1998).

My focus on envy emerged from the constant reiteration, effects and presence of envy in the daily lives of people of the hill. However, my concentration on envy does not mean that everything in Aguabuena takes place only within the domain of envy. Thus, although I show the centrality of envy to Aguabuena, I do not aim to portray potters as essentialised

others, constantly driven by an all-encompassing reified envy. Additionally, my analytical emphasis of envy should not predispose readers to see Aguabuena potters as some kind of pathological subjects, or as morally flawed human beings (as was often the case in some psychological accounts of envy and obsession with envy [cf. Epstein 2003, Smith 2008]). On the contrary, I aim to debunk such myths and moralising portrayals of envious beings in the world. As much as envy can at times be seen in negative terms by potters (or the anthropologist), it is also related to a range of other social and moral ties, securing a sense of belonging and establishing a particular relationship between the self, the world, and others.

In this introduction I outline four overarching themes related to Aguabuena potters' envy, which the thesis follows and on which it expands. In the first section, I consider Aguabuena as a construct more than a place name which indexes a group of people related by kinship and land-tenure practices. Potters' spatial distribution across the hill contributes to defining the experience of envy. In the second section, through the local term *rústico*, rustic, I address aspects of the identity of crafts and potters both within the village of Ráquira and in Colombia more widely. This section leads into the third, which focuses on the ceramic transformations that have occurred in Aguabuena in the past 60 years and on the interplay of gender in such changes. By placing gender roles and gender constructions within the organisation of labour and by drawing on the special status that women have in Aguabuena, I aim to underpin discussions addressed in subsequent chapters regarding the conflicting and subversive relationships between men and women. The fourth section presents an overview of why and how I became interested in the problem of envy. There, I describe my research interest in Ráquira and Aguabuena from my first visit to the area in 2001, my intellectual development over the years and my emerging relationship with potters. Drawing on my lived experience in the potters' world, I situate my estrangement and questions regarding Aguabuena potters' lives as the main avenue to start a reflection on a methodology for the study of envy.

The making of Aguabuena

Geographically, Aguabuena is located on a *cerro*, hill, called *Furca*, an indigenous name translated by locals as “devil.” It encompasses two districts (Candelaria Occidente and Pueblo Viejo) of the rural area of the village of Ráquira in the Boyacá region. Moreover, the name refers to the potters who live there, and who are related by kinship and *compadrazgo* ties, as shared land-tenure practices. In addition, having such a strong correlation with a precise feature of the landscape, the *cerro* also becomes an identifier of the location, exchangeable with the name of the place: Aguabuena or *El Cerro*, The Hill are synonymous. Moreover, Aguabuena potters are also called *la gente del cerro*, the people of the hill.¹



Figure 1. Localisation of Ráquira

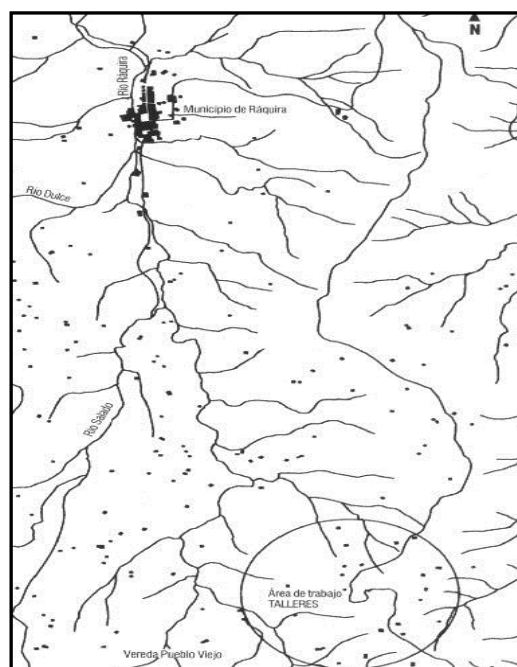


Figure 2. Approximate localisation of Aguabuena

However, Aguabuena does not officially exist.

There is no official map of the area and it does not appear in the municipality records of the

¹Following the local custom, I will use the terms “Aguabuena” and “*cerro*” as synonymous throughout the text.

village of Ráquira (which includes all the districts that make up more than 500 km² of this territory). The invisibility of Aguabuena in the eyes of the state, at least as far as official records (maps or documents) are concerned, stands in sharp contrast with the high visibility of the hill, not just as a feature of the landscape, but also – and mainly – with the visibility of its people and their pots within the region of Boyacá and the Colombian handcraft market.²

The name Aguabuena was first coined as the name of a *finca*, farm, owned by the grandfathers of a generation that is now in their mid-sixties and early seventies. This *finca* was divided among six siblings and their children. Over seventy years this large extension of land became fragmented across three generations in a scheme of land tenure among peasants known as *minifundismo*, partible inheritance, a characteristic of the whole Boyacá region, and a process rooted in the colonial period (cf. Borda 1979b). This system, however, overlapped throughout the 20th century with the practice of cousin marriage as well as spatial residence patterns, creating a ramified and interwoven universe of kin relations and land rights.

It was only 20 years ago that those born in the Aguabuena *finca* became the people known and recognised as the Aguabuena potters or the people of the hill. A *junta*, association, founded by two brothers-in-law which gathered most of the kindred who were also potters of the Aguabuena *finca*, was legally recognised by governmental authorities. As Helí Vergel, one of the men involved told me, he and Custodio wrote a letter signed by all their relatives addressed to the mayor of Ráquira and governor of Boyacá. Raising the issue of how far away the Aguabuena land was from the rural seat³ of both districts of Pueblo Viejo and Candelaria Occidente, and in consequence how difficult it was for children to go to school and for people in general to attend the health service, Helí and Custodio asked the

²In 2007 Aguabuena was referenced for the first time on a map appearing at the back of a handcraft catalogue produced to launch the products made by potters of the entire Ráquira region, a project that was sponsored by the Government of the Boyacá Region and a private foundation supporting economic initiatives focusing on exterior commerce. Interestingly, on the map, the place retains its ambiguous character, as its location is not very clearly charted!

³The administrative and political organisation of Colombia divides the country into 32 *departamentos*, regions. Each *departamento* is composed of a number of *municipios*, municipalities. *Municipios* encompass cities, towns and villages. When a *municipio* is a village, its territory is divided in *veredas*, rural sectors. As the area of a village is sometimes very large and access to its urban seat is limited due to bad road quality, rural districts have their own seats in which there is an elementary school and a health service post.

authorities to recognise Aguabuena as a separate spatial and administrative unit within the village of Ráquira. The officers accepted their claim and granted a small budget to the association which funded the construction of an elementary school and a basketball pitch, and the construction of electricity infrastructure. However, this official recognition did not translate into a territorial reorganisation of Ráquira, with new limits for its rural districts. The administrative unit of the municipality acknowledged Aguabuena as a separate social and spatial unit, but confirmed its status as belonging to Pueblo Viejo and Candelaria Occidente, increasing the official liminal status of Aguabuena (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. The back of the potter's T-shirt reads "Vereda Aguabuena" (Rural District of Aguabuena), a fact that is not yet acknowledged in the official map of Ráquira.

Strictly speaking, Aguabuena is a compound of no more than thirty homes/workshops (approximately 130 people) scattered on both sides of a dusty road that crosses the hill of *Furca* and which to the north (in the village of Guachetá in the region of Cundinamarca) becomes an asphalted street that joins the main road leading to Bogotá.⁴ Since its construction, this road has been the main route to and from Aguabuena. Being a secondary road, it receives little or no maintenance from the municipal or national authorities and is maintained by the potters themselves. Thus, by means of

ceramic shreds or broken pieces of pots used to replace asphalt or fill in the potholes in the way,

the potters have shaped the path. As a result, a

trail made of clay fragments is the means through which potters access the rest of the world and through which others (e.g. middlemen, monks) reach them. During the rainy season, Aguabuena becomes almost completely cut off as the bus stops passing through due to the difficulties and risks of driving on such a road (there have been several accidents in which people died). During this time, potters mainly walk to reach the village (it takes

⁴This dusty road was constructed in the mid-1960s and served the purpose of bringing a municipal bus that would transport rural migrants, working in Bogotá, back to their homes through secondary roads connecting small villages (such as Guachetá, Ubaté, Ráquira) and their rural districts.

approximately one hour), or ride motorcycles, while a handful of them drive cars or pay a *pirata*, pirate car,⁵ from the village to come and pick them up or bring them back.⁶ The rainy season also makes it difficult for middlemen to access the hill, although, paradoxically, it is considered by the potters to be the best season for their products as rains, they say, increase people's demand for clay objects.

In a sense, Aguabuena is the creation of the potters. Potters lobbied state authorities to achieve official status for Aguabuena, and they maintain the road used to access it, but mainly, they *are* the place. In fact, during recent years Aguabuena has been shrinking or expanding in relation to the movement of potters within a flexible territory which encompasses the fluxes of social relations. Upon my first arrival to the place, I tried to chart a map of the area. I wanted to have a clear idea of Aguabuena's boundaries, as the place was not referenced in any of Ráquira's official maps. Its borders varied according to potters' attempts to delineate them to me, and made me think of how the status of the place and its boundaries were a contested issue. Asking several of my informants about the limits of Aguabuena, I found their depictions often contradictory, but interestingly grounded in their relatives' locations.⁷

Moreover, Aguabuena is a panoptic place, a place characterised by the constant reciprocal surveillance of its inhabitants. The region of Ráquira is an arid area partly because of the intense deforestation resulting from the ceramic production that has been going on since colonial times (cf. Falchetti 1974; Molano 1990). The *cerro* is visible from the village of Ráquira located below and, through the high chimneys of their kilns, so are the potters'

⁵A private car which serves as a taxi but is not legally registered as such.

⁶Following Tsing (1993: 46), the meaning and mechanics of the difficult movements in and out of Aguabuena along the trail of ceramic shards, anchor debates and discussions on the marginality of Aguabuena potters whilst shaping state interpretations of them as well as their own interpretations of the state.

⁷This is what Doris, a woman in her forties said to me regarding Aguabuena limits: "Well... Aguabuena is... you climb the hill and there is a small path from there towards there... but that is not Aguabuena, instead it is Candelaria Occidente, but nevertheless it is also Aguabuena. (Aguabuena) is Teresa, the school, from there up to Blanca and Samuel, then my brother and from there you follow a small path, you go up and then turn left until you reach Yesid Vergel and Clotilde... that is what belongs to what is called Aguabuena. Here (it) is not Aguabuena, this is Pueblo Viejo... but still this is Aguabuena." And Villa Frader Vergel, her neighbour answered in this way: "Aguabuena's length goes from where the Vergels are until Flor and Ubaldo and its width goes as much as the road is wide."

In 2009 for example, according to some potters, Aguabuena enlarged its area as one of the potters' nuclear families moved downhill, providing it with a new boundary for its social territory. On the contrary, in 2010 it became smaller as one of the families living at the opposite end migrated to Bogotá.

workshops. Similarly, from Aguabuena, the valley of the Candelaria River and the villages of Ráquira, and neighbouring villages of Tinjacá and Sutamarchán are on display, satisfying the potters' visual appetite for the lives of others. From the *cerro* one can see the details of the Candelaria Monastery and Ráquira's main square, church, food market, cemetery, as well moving vehicles as they abandon the asphalted road and begin to disappear in a cloud of dust while taking the dusty road of pottery shreds. In sum, one can follow the life going on below, sighting it in great detail. In the same way, observing each other is a recurrent activity among potters, as those living downhill peer at those uphill and vice versa.

Representations of the place and its dwellers also contribute to Aguabuena's infamy. The villagers of Ráquira say it shelters *ladrones*, *mentirosos*, *peliones y envidisos*, robbers, liars, the quarrelsome and the envious, while potters themselves acknowledge their spirit and their envy, also praising the safety and enjoyable qualities of life and people. Thus, as much as I heard potters commenting on their own quarrelsome spirit with phrases such as "if they (outsiders) say yes, we say no, if they say white we say black, this is how people behave here." I also heard claims such as: "this is a very peaceful land, here the *gentecita*, local folk, are nice and caring... here you get a good living. You can go for a walk without fear even at night, or you can leave your house open... This is a paradise!" or more precisely, as I heard others ironically remark "This is the Devil's paradise!" Solidarity and empathy manifested in the local expression *entre ladrones no nos robamos, sino nos ayudamos*, "among us thieves we do not steal, but instead we help each other," summarised this paradox.

Rustic potters and pots

Aguabuena people are known in Colombia as potters and are not ascribed any other ethnic or social identity. Besides stressing their envy, they described themselves as *artesanos*, artisans, *campesinos*, peasants,⁸ and *gente rústica*, rustic people. With this last label they referred both to their lack of formal education and their rural residence. Curiously, being

⁸Potters also consider themselves peasants, as agriculture and sheep and/or cattle herding are complementary activities to pottery-making. However, these activities have decreased over time, coinciding with the intensification of ceramic production.

rural dwellers and craftsmen was, according to potters, a source of hardship and backwardness (in contrast with urban life and urban potters), but also an empowering condition. In fact, working at home in their own workshops and dictating the pace of their ceramic production was thought to grant them economic autonomy and independence in contrast to urban potters who worked in ceramic factories in the village of Ráquira and who did not own the means of production.

Moreover, and despite the official invisibility of Aguabuena as a place, Aguabuena potters are known in the region because of their ceramic techniques and crafts, considered to be *loza rústica*, rustic pots. Their vessels travel all over Colombia in the trucks of middlemen who come to the hill to pick them up and then distribute them to different parts of the country and even abroad to Ecuador, Venezuela, Central America and the Caribbean, and the USA.

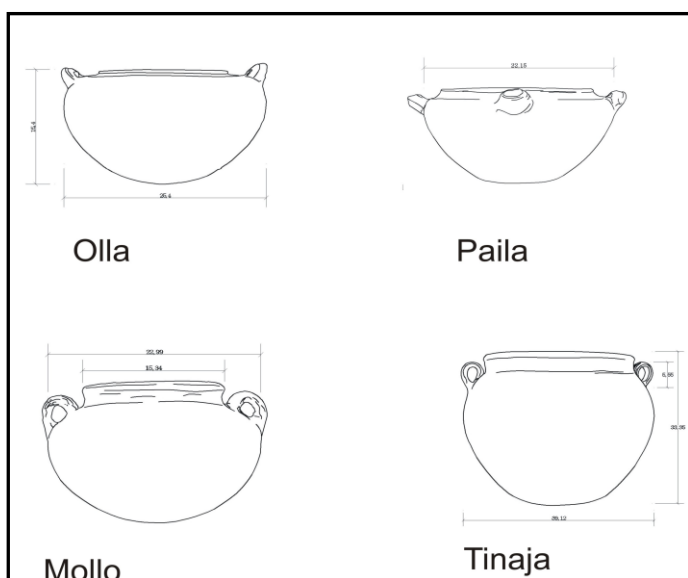


Figure 4. Some examples of shapes and names of vessels manufactured by Aguabuena potters.

The size of the pots range between medium (between 30-80 cm high and 20-60 cm wide) to large (up to 1.50 m high and 40-80 cm wide) and are used as decorative pots for planting plants (see Figure 4).⁹ Smaller vessels, used for cooking or storing drinks, are slightly less common. Pots are made by coiling and without the use of electric

wheels or moulds and lack glaze, polishing or decoration. They are

distributed in nurseries and *plazas de mercado*, food markets, and people buy them to adorn the inside or outside gardens of houses, hotels, summer houses and restaurants.

⁹The prices of the pots in Aguabuena are not fixed and vary according to the agreements made between potters and middlemen. The price increases with the size. Between 2009 and 2010, the most expensive vessels cost around 180,000 COP (60 GBP) and the cheapest – 5,000 COP (1.50 GBP). On the market, the price may be two to three times higher than the initial one.

Loza rústica is a local category used by potters, middlemen and municipal officials promoting handcraft production in Ráquira, and it conveys a variety of overlapping meanings. Firstly, *loza rústica* stands for the coarse look and texture characterising Aguabuena pots, a trait that differentiates them from other types of crafts across the nation. This stylistic and technological characteristic was advertised at different levels by potters, middlemen and officials. For example, both potters and middlemen tried to gain more profit by highlighting the coarse look as an aesthetic value which influences the quality and durability of the object. For the municipal officials, instead, this coarse look was taken as an aggregated value related to folk knowledge and skill. Secondly, the category of rustic denotes the rural origins of the pots and therefore the artisanal method of manufacture, and is sometimes also taken as a sign of the backwardness of potters themselves, especially by younger generations of potters. Finally, rusticity is also associated with the idea of a pre-Hispanic tradition.

This link between potters and notions of tradition needs to be located within the larger context of Ráquira and its position within the Colombian nation. In fact, the village of Ráquira is known in Colombia as a *pueblo de olleros*, village of potters, a label which was first employed in colonial documents of the late 18th century by Spanish officials (Orbell 1995)¹⁰ and which was later used and re-created by the Colombian state through institutions promoting the production and sale of handcrafts. Nowadays, the region is recognised as one of the main producers of clay handcrafts in Colombia. Indeed, pottery-making has been the backbone of the economy in Ráquira since the mid-twentieth century. Nonetheless, the last three decades have seen tourism become the second most important economic activity, displacing agriculture, via state programmes seeking to increase the productivity of the handcraft sector.

Aguabuena potters embrace Ráquira's fame in a contested way. The rustic quality of their goods is seen by them as both a family craft, but also as evidence of their marginality vis-à-vis other artisans in the region and the country. Thus, although potters use *rústico* as an auto-referential term, they also distinguish degrees of rusticity among people on the hill.

¹⁰ According to archaeological and ethnohistorical research, the village of Ráquira was a major centre of ceramic production prior to the arrival of the Spanish Crown to the area and throughout the colonial period (Falchetti 1975, Orbell 1995, Therrien 1991).

The potters considered to be the most rustic ones by their kindred were not necessarily those who were seen as more skilful in pottery-making, but those regarded as more vulnerable and powerless. Older potters having a serious disease, potters with no kiln of their own in their workshops, single mothers or widows, or individuals ostracised by their relatives (because they married someone outside the kindred universe or because of a legal fight) were among those who were often labelled as *rústicos*. *Rústico* also denoted people with loose morals, for example potters said to be in an incestuous relationship.

For example, Tránsito, an old widow potter living and manufacturing pots on her own was often referred to as a *mujer rústica*, a rustic woman. Expanding on her bitter character, greed and envy, neighbours often considered her rusticity to be the reason why she was ostracised by her children and grandchildren, who never came to visit her and lived in distant regions of Colombia. Also, people considered her a bad potter because of the poor quality of the pots she made, linking her lack of skill to her rustic qualities. Her rusticity also had to do with the fact that she, a woman in her eighties, was often portrayed as having a love relationship with her godson, a forty-year-old man, a relationship considered incestuous and lustful by other potters.

The rusticity of both objects and people can be brought together by a parallel between the coarse look of Aguabuena pots and the hardships of potters' lives, both perceived by touch. When shaking my hand, potters often commented on its softness, implying how little physical work I must have done in the past while also praising, by means of my hands, the better quality life people had in cities. In turn, they focused my attention on how harsh their skin was and how twisted their fingers were due to the hard work and suffering involved in making pots. One afternoon, a woman made me first touch her vessels and then her hands, as a practical exercise for me to understand that there was almost no difference between the two, and that they were both *materiales rústicos*, rustic materials, as she said. *Loza rústica de gente rústica*, rustic pots of rustic people, she added as a preamble to a narrative which later on turned out to be a portrait of the lives of others.

Ceramic transformations and gender

According to potters, it was not until the 1960s that ceramic production stopped being a part-time activity, combined with agriculture and animal holding, performed by women only, and became the main economic activity of the hill, involving the whole household. Until then, women were responsible for obtaining the clay at local mines, bringing sand and water from the creek for processing the raw material, as well as the manufacturing of pots themselves. Men collected wood for fuelling the kilns and fired the pots. Whole families transported their goods to local markets in Ráquira and neighbouring villages piled on the backs of donkeys or oxen. These pots were mainly designed for cooking or storing beverages and were used locally.

Under this division of labour, men were less essential to securing the basic income of the household. Often men were absent for months or even years, travelling across the country seeking forms of employment in low-wage physical activities such as picking coffee, farm keeping, logging, mining, or construction work. *Andariego*, errant feet, is the local category used to describe men's frequent travels and the activities they performed. During their time away, men's incomes were used for self-maintenance. Many of them formed new households and only came back to their women and children in Aguabuena when they fell ill or could not find any more work. Women conceptualised such life trajectories as the *destino de los hombres*, men's destiny, referring to their need to seek adventure outside the household, and reinforced their womanhood by presenting themselves as anchors or bedrocks of the family. Very few women accompanied men in their wanderings (and if so, they did so for shorter periods of time, returning earlier), as they say they preferred to stay at home to take care of their families and make pottery.

An increase in the demand for clay objects changed this situation at the end of the 1960s. Among the causes of this transformation were state policies and institutions encouraging the production of handcrafts within a nationalist project reifying the cultural diversity of Colombia and its people (cf. Chaves et al 2010). Hence, Ráquira became the target of government programmes encouraging pottery-making, which sought to transform it into an *industria cultural*, cultural industry (cf. Chaves et al 2010). Aguabuena potters, however, did not assign a clear role to the state in these transformations, and instead brought a different explanation to the picture. For them, the growing business of illegal marijuana

exports from Colombia to the USA and the use of ceramic vessels to transport drugs spurred a reorganisation of work at the ceramic workshops. Although people mentioned this to me as part of the local histories of craft that I was gathering, they also pointed it out as tangential information and were reluctant to provide more details about the link between ceramics and drug dealing (for my own safety in the field, I also preferred to avoid this topic). What seemed more interesting to me was the way they masked this illegality, by reassuring me that the growth in the ceramic market was something they themselves had made happen. In one potter's words, "One day, we came up with the idea of making a vessel that could be used for plants, and since then pots became so popular that both men and women started to perform this craft." In his statement my informant was unclear as to who came up with the idea or when the people of Aguabuena started to craft pots that could be used as flower vessels and not just for cooking. I heard similar claims by men and women, who never specified either who was responsible for the change or the time when this happened. Within this context, the differences between the official accounts and local stories were striking.

The first generation of male potters of Aguabuena is now in their 60s and learned the

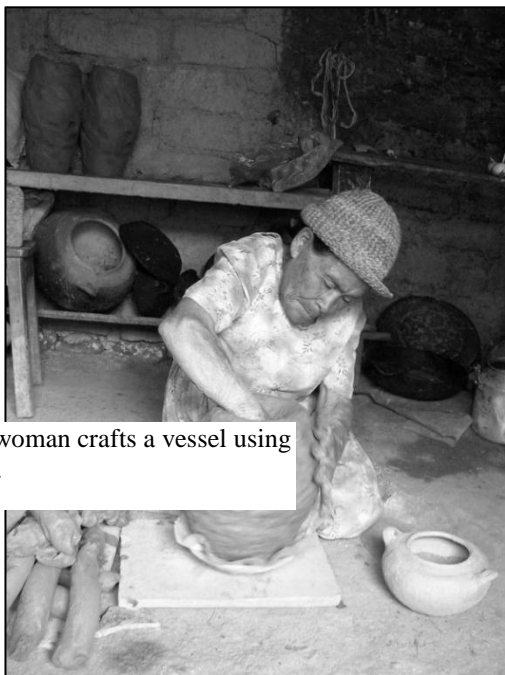


Figure 5. A potter woman crafts a vessel using the *cona* technique.

manufacturing techniques from their mothers or sisters. They were taught only one of the manufacturing techniques, coiling, as the other one, locally known as *cona*, modelling, is considered to come under women's expertise (see Figure 5). *Cona* is said to be more difficult than coiling, because of the skill and body position the person assumes during the manufacturing process, usually kneeling for long periods of time, as opposed to sitting, the position taken for coiling. The degrees of competence that *cona* demanded from the potter explained why men were never taught and never tried to learn it. In fact, men considered themselves

less skilful than women when it came to pottery-making, an idea also shared by women. While talking to me about how they had learned the craft, men often confessed (laughingly)

that pottery-making was a female activity, and that their fathers or grandfathers had never learned it or knew very little about it, and that a man who tried to make pots back then was seen as an *hombre dudoso*, a doubtful man or homosexual.

Currently, pottery-making involves both genders. Clay is obtained from local dealers who transport the material from mines in Ráquira (clay does not need to be processed with sand anymore) and to a lesser degree from the potters' own mines. Additionally, new kinds of raw materials have appeared. Timber is no longer used as fuel as it has been replaced with mineral coal, obtained from mines in neighbouring villages and sold to potters by local distributors.¹¹ Although men and women manufacture pots, women are the ones who make the rim and handles of pots and who give them a round shape. Firing, on the other hand, is still the task of men.

The intensification of ceramic production limited men's travelling opportunities and errant life style. Around the 1960s, men started to stay at home, working alongside their families.¹² However, their continuous presence at home did not change people's perceptions regarding men's contribution to the household economy. Nowadays, women are still seen as bearing the main responsibility for generating income from pottery-making; they are also in charge of negotiating with middlemen and making deals with the distributors of raw materials. Although men are responsible for a crucial step in the ceramic production process, the firing of vessels, their role in the household economy is perceived as limited and the reproduction of the household is seen as dependent on women's skilful management of ceramic resources and their role in economic production.¹³ In general, women are always portrayed (both by women themselves and by men) as more hard-working than men and as the decision makers at the workshops. In spite of their central role, women were sometimes the victims of domestic violence, both physical and verbal.

¹¹Between 2009 and 2010, the price of a truck full of dry clay was 600,000 COP (200 GBP), which could last from 4 to 6 months (depending on the intensity of ceramic production). Mineral coal was more expensive, ranging from 800,000 COP (270 GBP) to 1,200,000 COP (400 GBP) for a truckload.

¹²This situation changed slightly at the end of my fieldwork. Before leaving the field, potters were facing a crisis as almost no middlemen were collecting their vessels. Young men (from 18- to 40-year-olds) migrated to find employment in the mining industry or tried to open their own food shops in Bogotá. In 2012 I revisited the field and discovered that some of the men who had migrated were back in Aguabuena making craft.

¹³Other survival strategies in which women are actively involved include a series of monetary and non-monetary transactions in which debts play an important role.

Nevertheless, when men and women fought, women were not submissive but active, either contributing to legitimising such practices through moral discourses (entitling men to beat up women), or by fighting back (cf. van Vleet 2002: 568).

Another important aspect of women potters' agency is their sexuality. Told by both men and women, stories of *mujeres voraces y sin control*, sexually voracious and untamed women of all ages (especially older women) were often recounted across the hill. Stories of unfaithful married women (who were said to outnumber unfaithful men), single mothers to children fathered by married men or multiple men, or women seducing monks served to reinforce this depiction. Although women's sexuality was constructed as evil or dangerous, there was no social or symbolic control over it through the conflation of women with shame (and men with honour), as it has been argued for Mediterranean face-to-face societies and their moral communities (cf. Cole 1991).

In fact, despite the strong presence of Catholicism in the area and a longstanding relationship between potters and Augustinian monks, potters' gender constructs did not mirror hegemonic Church discourses; instead, they distorted them. For example, among Aguabuena women, virginity was seen as less important than fertility and women were encouraged to have children at a young age, even if they did not have a stable partner or if they became pregnant by a married man. Since motherhood was the most important attribute of femininity, lying at the core of womanhood, women were considered virtuous when they took good care of their children and their workshops, and not necessarily of their husbands. Moreover, astuteness was considered a desirable virtue and skill of both men and women. Thus, although women were represented as sexually threatening, men were also portrayed as dangerous and never taken as ideal complementary partners for women. Rape or attempted rape were common accusations launched by women at men, having sometimes the paradoxical reverse effect of questioning, in a jocular way, the women's sexual satisfaction. Lastly, the devotion to Our Lady of Candelaria, a cult spread in the Ráquira village and across the Boyacá region, was yet another aspect where representations and understandings alternative to the ones of the Catholic Church merged. Contrary to the loving and generous mother praised by Augustinians, Aguabuena potters portrayed the

Virgin as violent, quarrelsome, and – above all – envious, applying features of their own humanity to the deity (cf. Scheper-Hughes 1992).

A methodology for envy

I first arrived in Aguabuena as an undergraduate student of anthropology at Universidad Nacional of Bogotá. I was 20 years old and doing an ethnoarchaeological project as a part of my dissertation. For three months I lived in Ráquira and commuted to the hill every day. My aim was to map the ceramic workshops, taking special note of the disposal areas, and to track the ways in which, through human actions, objects became part of the archaeological record (Castellanos 2004).

During my fieldwork, I learned that local people believed that pots broke because of envy and not because of technical failures; this discovery kept resonating in my mind and years later became the starting point of my doctorate research. In between, as a Master's student of the joint programmes of social anthropology and archaeology in Colombia, I began a theoretical and methodological reflection on traces, taking up the case of Aguabuena once again. It puzzled me how certain beliefs and *imponderabilia*, like envy or luck, could be materialised and furthermore could transcend time by means of becoming part of the archaeological record. I progressed onto a discussion of ceramic style and human anatomy and proposed an understanding of the firing of pots as a rite of passage for both the potters and the objects (Castellanos 2007).

Between 2000 and 2007, I visited Aguabuena potters, making short trips of up to two weeks to the hill, sometimes for holidays. During these years, I was able to build a close bond with some families. They have witnessed my personal and professional transformation over these years, how I have aged, how I was a student then became a *profesora*, a teaching fellow at the University and returned to being a (PhD) student again (a change they found hard to understand), how I was single and then married. As some potters told one of the students on a field trip I took there for one of my classes: “we have known her forever,” or “since she was a child” or “she came as a child and never left the place.” *Danielita*, little Daniela, they have called me since then, attributing to me a child-like condition, which, despite my older age or different marital status, has never changed.

In the same way, I witnessed how some of them stopped working in pottery because of severe illness, how their children now have their own children and workshops, how some of them have migrated and then came back and felt the absence of a few of them who passed away.

My longest stay at Aguabuena was 12 months between the years of 2009-2010, a period when I conducted my most recent and detailed fieldwork. During this time, I lived with three different families located in different areas across the hill and visited others, sometimes staying for couple of days. I followed potters in their daily activities, as an apprentice in the craft and recording this process on video, going to Ráquira on Sundays for the food market, church services, the hospital or legal office, attending ritual and religious celebrations, and meeting middlemen. At night, I sometimes even dreamed about the potters (something I still do).

When I came to St Andrews as a PhD student, my initial plan was to research a new pottery-making field-site in the south of Spain (I never reached the point of specifying the location), comparing my new findings with the Aguabuena material. As much as I believed that I needed to move to a different field, I also felt that I had not achieved a satisfactory explanation of what life in Aguabuena was about (not that I had explicitly established such a goal in my previous research); I thought that a comparative study could help me in such an endeavour. Visa and funding restrictions required me to reconsider my research plans. My supervisors advised me to consider Aguabuena for field research once more, and as an opportunity to write an ethnography about potters, pushing my old inquiries further.

I then decided to revisit the problem of envy and its relationship to the material world in the demiurgic context of object-making (a ceramic workshop), attempting to tease out its complexities. Drawing on the previous findings of my first work on pots and envy, I proposed a project mainly oriented towards objects and their relationships with potters, with the problem of materiality being the grounding factor of my research. Within this framework, apprenticeship was a useful strategy for locating me in the field, this time being aware of my own body (cf. Dilley 1999, Jackson 1989, Wacquant 2004). Furthermore, apprenticeship raised sympathetic responses on the part of potters, who came to know me over the years but never thought I was interested in learning the craft or, as they phrased it,

“becoming as dirty as (them).” Learning how to make vessels became a major practical achievement of my fieldwork as well as a challenge, since I have always considered myself to have no talent for arts or crafts. Not surprisingly, I did not master the skill of pottery-making and remained at the level of a child, able to shape the body of the pot but not to *terminarla*, finish it, meaning to add handles or make the rim.

Potters enjoyed watching me make pots, not just for the novelty of seeing a *niña de ciudad*, city girl, as some of them sometimes called me, trying to work like them, but also because I am left-handed. “Everything is upside down with you, you sit the wrong way, take the coils the opposite direction and start coiling them the other way around... but still you manage to craft pots” they used to tell me amid bursts of laughter. However, *mis raros*, my strange hand gestures and body movements, as they claimed, were also an advantage that could lead me to unexpected results, like making better pots than them. Being more conscientious of my body in the pottery-making made me more aware in general of my bodily engagement during fieldwork and the physical conditions of the place and of potters’ lives. The dryness in my hands because of the clay, my constant allergies to flea bites, dust or smoke, and my asthma problem, were taken by potters as my own embodiment of the place, turning my fragilities into an avenue inside ontological or social aspects of the life in Aguabuena, and more concretely of its envy. Thus, as much as I started my research project with the intention to answer the question of how was it possible for pots to break because of envy, in other words, how pots embodied envy, my own embodiment within the place gave me a better way to address the problem of envy. Being immersed in Aguabuena life and consciously engaged in a bodily way with the place made my interest in envy grow significantly.

In Aguabuena, both women and men were engaged in the experience of envy. Throughout my fieldwork, however, I became closer to women’s lives. Intentionally, I avoided spending time alone with men as doing so could have caused gossip, involving me in accusations of affairs followed by tension or fights with their female partners, and only approached male potters when they were with other members of their family. As a result, most of my data record women’s voices. Nevertheless, in my interactions with men, envy was recurrently used to refer to their lives and their relationships with others.

Envy proved to be not only my intellectual interest, but, most importantly, the potters' obsession and reality and an experience that I could, just like potters, embody. Quickly I came to know that not only did pots break because of envy but that objects themselves were said to be envious. Moreover, the place and the materials were envious too and the fleas, dust, smoke, asthma and all their dirt as well as the potters' bodies constituted traces of that envy. In the same way, saints, potters' kin, monks, and I myself were said to be envious. Envy was a visceral (sometimes scatological) lived experience, shaping human bodies and selves, empowering or constraining human agency. Thus, the initial problem of the cracking or breakage of a pot turned out to be a detail of the whole world, cross-cutting other physical and metaphysical realms. How then was this possible? What was cementing this world-view? And moreover, what was the relationship between envy and being in Aguabuena? What kind of implications can we draw from it for our anthropological understanding of envy in general?

Puntos, *locations for envy*

Shortly after I arrived to Aguabuena in 2009, I felt as if there was an exacerbation of envy occurring in the place and the people. Potters kept telling me how the clay or the pots were envious, how the Virgin or other saints to whom they prayed were envious, how the Devil cursed the place with envy, how the rubber hoses of their artisanal aqueduct were being envied, and even ascribed me with envious qualities. To my surprise, envy was also a favourite subject of the dominical preaching at the Catholic Church and a theme present in the clerical literature, as I discovered one night in the quiet of my room, reading one of the religious booklets sold at the entrance to the monastery of the Candelaria Virgin. Soon the pages of my field-diaries turned into a diatribe of envious beings or the envy in the world, never-ending but in continuous expansion. I did not have a clear understanding of Aguabuena potters' envy, but I soon learned that envy was omnipresent; moreover, that it was a concern not only of potters, but also of other people surrounding them.

In this thesis, I present my unfolding understanding of envy by using both a potters' concept and material detail, *punto*, location, referring to a spot from where Aguabuena people enter different vistas of the world or denoting a precise time when things or

materials change their physical qualities. *Punto* refers to a spatio-temporal location circumscribing a spot or a point. It can be a location in space, but also a perspective, angle, viewpoint on the world, or an interstitial location of transformative power.

Puntos, locations, permeate Aguabuena materiality. Kilns, for example, have three *puntos* (or even more) from where a potter supervises the pots as they are fired. Living spaces, such as the kitchen, bedrooms or workshop walls, also have *puntos* from where potters survey the surrounding world. *Puntos* are holes, fractures, gaps in the walls (irregular breaks or unfinished walls), corners, bushes or high places, that create spatial discontinuities (cracks) or allow panoramic viewpoints whence to observe and envy people (or objects). *Puntos* also facilitate a temporal and transformational aspect of the physical world, made possible through human work. For example, a kiln is said to reach its *punto*, when the pots complete their transformation from raw to cooked. It does not have an exact duration, although there are precise signs informing potters about it (like the smell, colour and density of the smoke coming out from the kiln's chimney). Also, a piece of clay achieves its *punto*, when it is neither too soft nor too hard, like bread dough, and it is ready to be shaped. When it is a location in space, a *punto* is covered or uncovered through simple arrangements, such as cloths, plastic sheets, or breaks, making people visible or invisible. Thus, it is intentionally made or unmade; created or erased. When used to refer to the transformations of objects or materials, it is the human skill, care, engagement, and complicity of the world which fully merge at a single time. In sum, *puntos* entail a spatio-temporal experience, intentionally created by artisans and ascribing the way an individual relates to others, materials or objects. Moreover, *puntos* are specific details of the materiality of the potters' world and have a material frame. Through *puntos*, potters intervene in the material world and affect other potters. In the same way, being specific interventions of people on the physical world, *puntos* are also affected by the artisans and their interrelations with materiality. Furthermore, in Aguabuena, a *punto* is used as a device for envy, allowing surveillance or control. Following these ideas, I employ *punto* as a device in my writing, serving the purpose to disclose a realm of envy, while recreating its experiences. As a result, the thesis as a whole does not follow an inductive or deductive structure, neither is the analysis an organic or a holistic one, but each chapter is considered

a *punto*, displaying a particular problem or a set of problems, seeking to immerse the reader in the lived experience of envy.

Chapter 1 brings together a collection of stories, disclosing by means of potters' narratives the realm of envy, and a variety of agents and situations in which they were involved. Describing my encounter with potters' envy, its possibilities and reach within the Aguabuena world and why it caught my attention, the chapter demonstrates how stories became my first and most proximate *punto*. In this sense, as a fracture or location intentionally opened, such narratives displayed to me vistas of the hill and its people. Some of the stories of the chapter were transcribed from voice recordings; others were registered in my field diary, with added comments or questions in order to provide a wider context. As much as they were a subject of my study, I also made of them a method of my analysis, an essential element in my fieldwork practice (Jackson 1982: 4), affecting my questions or research interests, but also being affected by my own developments in the field. In a sense, the chapter reads as an extension of the introduction, as it offers proof of the variety of contexts where envy is present via potters' own words and my field observations, while also opening problems for the study of envy, echoing in consecutive chapters.

Following an overview of the ubiquity of envy in the Aguabuena world, I then moved to consider ways of addressing it theoretically. Recalling the ways potters talked about envy, especially the thought that envy is a force *que se bolea de un lado a otro*, bustling about from side to side, I decided to frame theoretical problems regarding envy as a series of oscillations. This choice enabled me, on the one hand, to show tensions, movements, comings and goings of my own intellectual development around the subject, and on the other, to place Aguabuena potters' envy in a wider anthropological framework in a way that did not seek final resolutions but opened avenues of thought. Providing a pendular digression, shifting between theoretical axes, I disclosed envy by oscillation, moving between envy's destructive and creative qualities, its etymology, and more ethnographically grounded definitions, being for one and being for others, its incompleteness, plasticity and totality, a force, a sin and an emotion, and envy's telos and bodily existential groundings. Gathering these oscillations in Chapter 2, I aimed to create further *puntos* from where to continue engaging with the ethnography of Aguabuena potters.

The last oscillation of Chapter 2 became the entry *punto* into the anatomy of envy, explored in Chapter 3. Pointing at the visceral dimension of envy and its relationship to potters' bodies, this chapter unfolds the bodily pragmatics of envy, and its sensory perceptions, bringing envy's enactment to the fore. Thus, by making envy and its body a subject of our attention, Chapter 3 considers the experiences of the person who envies and of the one being envied, revealing envy's sense-scape. By means of providing a *punto* into the embodiment of envy, I argue for an experiential understanding of envy, detaching myself from previous readings, which have privileged envy's symbolic aspects.

Other important realms where envy was said to act in Aguabuena was the material world, as my very first encounter with envy and pots had proven, and years later, potters' stories about the envy of objects and materials confirmed and expanded. Following these ideas, Chapter 4 is a *punto* for exploring the interconnectedness of the agency of people and objects within the world of craft, elaborating on the ways people besides potters engaged with their envy. Exploring potters' concept of *armar*, assembling, I address the relations between people and the material world, bringing to the fore not only the relationship between potters and their objects, but also between potters and middlemen, between middlemen and Aguabuena vessels, and between clients and state officials. Thus, the analysis transcends the locus of craftsmen, and focuses on how the ways of relating among different actors involved in the craft world are brought together.

As well as paying attention to the physical world, I could not but be immersed in the continuous narratives that surrounded me. Stories about envy's multiple presence considerably expanded my interest, disclosing an unimagined spectrum of envy's possibilities. As time progressed, one particular type of narrative became more recurrent in my encounters with potters, triggering inside me feelings of being deceived. The stories dealt with potters' lives and deeds and engaged everyone in Aguabuena, interweaving people in a sort of conversation with reverberation effects. Crimes, assaults, rapes, and evil and immoral characters were often the subject of potters' stories, which were always about other potters. Thus, enmeshed in a matrix of portraits of infamous characters and grotesque bodies, I started to experience feelings of entrapment in what seemed to me to be the deceptive nature of potters' manners and oral assemblages.

Potters' narratives about others and my own sense of deception are the topic of Chapter 5. Exploring the mirroring capacities of stories and their narrators, their distorted images of individuals and self-fashioning processes via these narratives, I unveil a crucial aspect of envy's dialogic performance and its relationship to the construction of the self in Aguabuena. In this sense, Chapter 5 is a *punto* into a universe of borrowed skins, in other words, a world of people constantly blurring the boundaries between the self and other by means of narratives which, while diverting potters, also provide their lives with existential grounds.

Narratives, however, were not the only features grounding potters' lives. Kin and *compadrazgo* ties as well as land tenure and residential patterns also played important roles. Moreover, debts, legal actions, and water distribution were activities that reinforced bonds and moral obligations among Aguabuena people, placing them in a web of conflicting relationships of changing fluxes parallel to the mesh of stories regarding potters' infamous lives. Chapter 6 discusses these forms of relatedness via potters' sense of closeness, a perception nurturing the experience of envy as lived by Aguabuena people. Taking as a starting point the artisans' expression *estamos demasiado juntos*, we are too close, I explore forms of reciprocity, touching upon the tensions between the negative, corrosive and infamous features of potters' humanity and the more caring and supportive dimensions of their social life and kinship system. The chapter is a *punto* engaging the reader with the dense and overlapping web of family and moral bonds occurring on the hill, and the fluxes within this web that smother individuals whilst simultaneously bringing them together and differentiating them from each other.

Closing this set of *puntos*, the thesis ends with a digression on the ambivalent and yet complementary relationship between envy and the sacred. During my fieldwork, I learned that envy was one of the main topics linking potters to monks and priests. However, as much as envy was a popular theme used by monks in the evangelisation of potters, it was also, according to potters, an existential condition of the priests. Chapter 7 shows the ubiquity of the category of the sacred in a variety of environments where envy is also present or juxtaposed. Using ethnohistorical and historical data, local narratives and ethnographic observations of daily interactions between potters and Augustinian monks,

and gender performances revolving around the Virgin and the Devil, I build a framework which expands the arguments explored in previous chapters. One of the axes of the chapter is the tracking of the relationship between the *desidia*, idleness, and inhumanity attributed to indigenous people in colonial documents, and the *desidia* and humanity of the medieval monks and its possible relationship to envy. This oscillation of *desidia* between inhumanity and humanity, progresses onto the narratives of potters about their historical and yet discontinuous relationships with the aborigines and hermits, another important axis of the chapter. Finally, in complement to the ways potters and clerics related to each other historically, I consider the present-day contesting relationships between the two parties, and by the same token, address the subjectivities of women, oscillating between virtue and vice.

CHAPTER 1

The Realm of Envy: Short Stories of Envious Beings and the World

The ubiquitousness of envy, and the reach within the potters' world, was made clear to me through the stories that potters tell. This chapter revolves around a collection of short stories that I recorded among Aguabuena potters. In it, I seek to point out the omnipotence of envy as well as the ways in which potters talked about envy. The stories disclose a series of contexts in which envy is at work, encompassing aspects of the social life, beliefs and practices of the potters and people surrounding them, and by this means, unveiling different agents in Aguabuena's world. Through the narratives, supernatural beings such as the Devil or the Virgin, or materials, such as clay, and objects such as pots, are ascribed envious agencies influencing both the hill and its people. Moreover, other subjects, like humans, who may also be saints, or the anthropologist herself, are also portrayed as envious beings, while priests contribute to the constant reiteration and performative utterance of envy through their preachings.

The narratives that follow were directly collected during informal chats on my visits to the artisans' households, or through pottery-making sessions that I either observed or participated in. Other stories emerged as part of my exposure to potters' lives as I became more and more embedded in the field, accompanying them on their daily activities, especially Catholic Sunday Mass. The stories are a compound of potters' monologues. Some of them include dialogues re-told and performed by single speakers, intertwined with my own narrative voice as a way of providing a wider framework for my observations.

More than just demonstrating the ways people talk about envy, using it as a mere expression indexing a feeling or condition, the stories touch upon envy's wide experiential range in Aguabuena people's lives. In this way, they are a framework from where to address envy's existence and interventions in different realms of Aguabuena's world and through its different subjects. Each story in this chapter opens a world of possibilities which, in turn, I have used as a device to introduce key themes regarding Aguabuena people's envy and its effects. By means of a narrative device – my retelling of the potters'

tales – the chapter puts forward a series of reflections that continue echoing throughout the rest of the thesis.

As the narratives show, envy, experienced at times as a living force, independent from people, is also rendered at other times as human dependant, both affecting and being affected by the potters and by the material world. At the same time, envy oscillates between empowered and disempowered humans, between supernatural agents and the physical world. It is precisely these tensions around envy, between being independent of and dependent on people, as well as for and against Aguabuena potters or other actors of human or non-human nature, which constitute the main aspects I seek to highlight through these stories.

The Devil's envy and the Virgin's envy

“Prior to the arrival of the first monks to the region of Candelaria, the valley was the dwelling place of the Devil and there was nothing here but envy” reads the first sentence of a small booklet published by the Augustinian order, a booklet that like any other tourist or pilgrim I obtained at the entrance to the Monastery of the Candelaria Virgin. Its pages expand on the history of the first hermits and the Augustinian order in general as well as on the construction of the monastery and the miracles performed by its Virgin (see Figure 6).

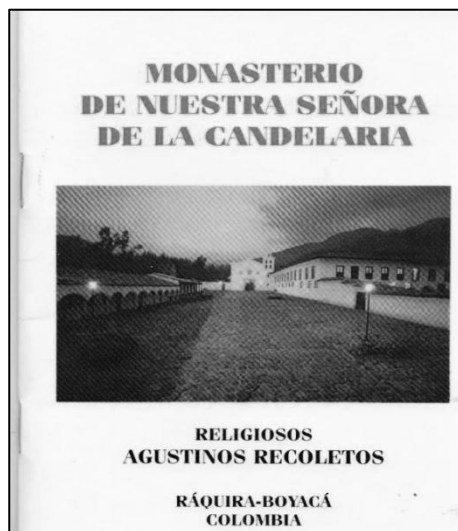


Figure 6. The front page of the Augustinian booklet.

The official religious history of the Augustinian order placed the envious nature of the Devil and the area around Aguabuena as a foundational condition, legitimising the monks' evangelising mission in Ráquira and its surroundings. Similarly, Aguabuena potters also attributed a metaphysical condition of envy to the area, interpreting their envy as a feature inherited by living on the hill. As the stories below show, an ontology of envy was established when the Devil was defeated and expelled by the Virgin, brought by the first missionaries. In fact, once the Devil

was expelled, he hid on the hill, cursing the place and the people, and condemning them to an existence characterised by envy.

Aguabuena potters, like the majority of the Colombian population, are Roman Catholic. However, their Catholicism is full of local tales and folk characters that create a web of intertwined canonical and local beliefs (cf. Moreno 2007). A sign of this is the fact that both the Devil and the Virgin are portrayed as envious, quarrelsome and violent characters, a representation that, in the case of the Virgin at least, the monks disagreed with.

The following stories revolve around the Devil's expulsion, the monks or the Virgin's struggles with the Devil, and the Devil's evil actions towards the monks. Closing this series of short narratives, and as a way to contrast the envy and evil of the Devil, I include a story on the Virgin's envy. The narratives uncover a mythological world, explaining the origins of envy. They celebrate an ontology of envy, stating how envy is a condition of "being-in-the-world" (cf. Jackson 2005: xiv-xv) of Aguabuena. Moreover, within this setting, the Virgin also shares this envious condition, together with the potters and the Devil.

One afternoon in 2009, Helí Valero told me the following story at his house:

When the monks arrived (in Candelaria valley) the Devil became furious at them because he was so envious and decided to screw up any attempt the friars made to build the monastery. Once, Father Ezequiel Moreno¹⁴ had to exorcise an indio¹⁵ possessed by the Devil, using a holy chain that he used to carry with him. The Devil was using the indio to harm the missionaries. The Virgin had to intervene, forcing the Devil into exile from that place. Before the Devil left, he cursed them all (including the Virgin? I was asking myself while listening to Helí) promising that entanglements and niguas¹⁶ would never end.

Helí's sister Josefa was also present in the cosy kitchen that day. Taking a rest while smoking a cigarette and drinking a cup of coffee, Helí remained silent while Josefa took up his story, adding more detail to the picture. And so she spoke:

¹⁴The official Augustinian religious history, as the booklet reads, claims that the first one to fight the Devil was father Mateo Delgado, one of the founders of the monastery.

¹⁵*Indio* has a broader meaning. It is not merely used to index the ethnic ascription of a person. It also refers to backwardness, uncivilized manners, lack of education and the low moral condition of a person.

¹⁶*Nigua* is commonly referred to in English as chigoe, sand, jigger flea or chigger flea.

The Devil brought wood to knock down the monastery that the friars were building. Sometimes the stream of the river was also used for that purpose. While the fathers were building the atrium, the Devil made the oak trees so heavy that it was almost impossible for the monks to cut them down, or to carry them to the place where they were constructing the monastery. It was as if there was something supernatural underneath the soil holding down the trees. What the fathers built during the night was gone the next morning, so they had to re-start their work every day.

Helí and Josefa did not show any sign of disagreement at what they both told me. Each of them nodded in approval at the other's version. After Josefa's contribution the conversation shifted to something else, and the weather, the middlemen, and debts became topics of conversation. I did not push them to go back to the Devil's story and enjoyed myself, instead, following the flow of the conversations. Days after, this time at a different potter's house, I found out more about the Devil and the Virgin.

I was sitting at Flor's workshop when she started a story that she thought would interest me. She wanted to share something her parents had told her when she was small. In her story, she touched on some of the issues Helí and Josefa had already mentioned. However, she also added other details:

The Devil also stole the bell of the monastery. That bell is used to announce the start of the prayers. The Devil hid the bell inside a rock.¹⁷ Every morning, the monks were able to bring the bell back to the monastery; however, at night the Devil went back to get it. One night, Father Moreno could not hold himself anymore and ended up fighting the Devil. It seemed as if he was boxing against the Devil. He was a saint, so he beat the Devil. The Virgin fought against the Devil too. She punched him and knocked him down, forcing him to go and hide on the hill.

After hearing Flor, I decided to make an excuse to leave her and run to my house, not far from hers, to write in up my field-diary what she had just told me. The stories I had heard so far showed me a paradoxical Devil, powerful enough to destroy the monks' work by conspiring with the natural world, but weak against the Virgin or Father Moreno, whom he could not defeat. In the same way, the narratives presented both the priest and the Virgin as

¹⁷The rock where the Devil hid the bell is nowadays a tourist attraction called *la piedra de la campana*, the stone of the bell.

violent, engaging in a physical fight with the Devil instead of through spiritual means – as the Church claims. In the long run, however, although the Devil was expelled, he made a greater impact by cursing the hill and its dwellers to envy. And not even the Virgin seemed to be able to resist the course, as this next story on the Virgin's envy, told by Olga suggests.

Only a few people here are evangélicos.¹⁸ Navitividad is one of them. She always preaches with a Bible, but the Bible she uses is not the true one. She tells us nonsense, like that we are going to burn in a kiln, a big kiln (she pointed at the kiln in her workshop). Natividad and her neighbour Flor were becoming friends. One afternoon, Natividad brought the pastor from her church to Flor's house. The pastor prayed at the house and freed the workshop from bad spirits, or this is what people say. Afterwards, Flor became lucky. None of her pots broke while being fired, and she sold them all. Natividad and the pastor continued visiting Flor's workshop. Flor became an evangélica too. Not even two months had passed, when she had a big fight with the neighbour. She forbade Natividad, or the pastor, from ever coming to see her again. Well, it came to pass¹⁹ that the Virgin was envious. As Flor wasn't a Catholic anymore, the Virgin made all her pots break, in revenge. This happened one night while she and her husband were firing them. Flor lost the entire hornada.²⁰ Now Natividad and Flor greet each other, but they are no longer friends.

The portrayal of the monks and the Virgin as violent characters, punching and knocking the Devil down in a face-to-face fight, is a provocative depiction that is far from the compassion, spiritual authority and power of the usual representations used in Colombian Catholic imagery. The monk and the Virgin seemed to me as quarrelsome as the potters themselves. On the other hand, the Devil shared other features with potters, such as cunning and artfulness. In the end, violence drove Christianity to become hegemonic in the area, in a battle which, in the long run, had more crucial consequences for the potters than for the Devil himself. Equally interesting – to the point of being humorous – was the persistence of the Devil, willing to pursue the destruction or sabotage of the monks' endeavours, a sign of his defiant attitude and, moreover, of his enormous envy. In a way, such envy turned out to be a source of encouragement, pushing the Devil towards completing his plan, despite

¹⁸As used by the potters, the term *evangélico* is a generic term for those who are not Catholics. The category is not strictly applied to those who have joined the Protestant faith but also refers to Jehovah Witnesses.

¹⁹Potters usually introduce a story with the same phrase, *sucede y pasa*, it happens and comes to pass.

²⁰*Hornada* refers to the assemblage of cooked pots that are put into the kiln to be fired.

multiple failures. At the same time, a conspiracy with the natural world against the Church, expressed as a force coming from underground, took place in cooperation with the Devil by means of heavy trees, diverted water flows, rocks or chigoe fleas. Finally, the Virgin's direct involvement in the misfortune of a potter woman, also due to envy, reveals a deity who, like humans, affects people and pots, bringing them sorrow and enmity (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. A poster of the Candelaria Virgin on one of the inside walls of a potter's house.

Envy affects supernatural beings; moreover, it unites the Devil and the Virgin, making them equally dangerous for potters. And yet, envy can also be a moral feature of humans that does not stand in contradiction to the fact that those same envious persons could be saints or could reach spiritual worlds. The following story gives account of the transition of Mónica, an envious woman and a sinful saint who, after dying and going first to Purgatory, ascended to Heaven. Juxtaposing saintliness with sinfulness, Santa

Mónica experienced a change of location as she moved through different realms from the mundane to the heavenly, a shift that did not correspond to a change in her inner qualities as a person. Moreover, both her envy and holiness helped her through her transitions from life to death.

Santa Mónica's envy

One afternoon, Clotilde told me the following story:

Santa Mónica was a very sinful saint, she was an envious woman. She was also mean and miserable.²¹ Once on her way home she found a very skinny woman on the road, starving. Santa Mónica was carrying a bag full of food. She was coming back from shopping. The starving woman asked Santa Mónica to give her some food. Santa Mónica refused to share

²¹In Spanish *miserable* can be translated as being extremely poor. However, it can also denote a person who is extremely poor in morals, in other words, an extremely bad person.

anything with her. However, something about the skinny woman moved Santa Mónica, who, in the end, decided to give her a spring onion. Of all the things she had, she just gave her a spring onion! She was so envious. Ha, ha, ha, ha! The two women died on the same day, that same afternoon. The starving woman went to Heaven. Santa Mónica went to Purgatory. Down in Purgatory, Santa Mónica spotted²² the skinny woman above, in Heaven, and asked for help. She wanted to get to Heaven too. And so the starving woman helped her, or tried to help. She passed her the spring onion that Santa Mónica had given her that day. But the flames of Purgatory burned the spring onion. Santa Mónica then had to spend more time in Purgatory. But our Lord sent many angels to take Santa Mónica out of that place. While she was being lifted up by the angels, other souls were trying to hold onto her skirt, because they wanted to get out of that place too with Santa Mónica. She started to shake her body. As Santa Mónica was shaking, the souls fell away from her skirt, like fleas. But, she fell too, and had to spend even more time in Purgatory before reaching Heaven.

I never asked Clotilde how much more time Santa Mónica had to spend in Purgatory. For me, it was already surprising that a person so miserable could make it to heaven in the first place. While listening to Clotilde, I imagined Santa Mónica looking like any other woman from the hill, wearing a colourful skirt and a black hat, with long hair arranged in a plait. I pictured Santa Mónica walking along the dusty road, coming from the food market to her home with a basket full of vegetables, fruit, potatoes and bread, like any other potter woman. I thought about the women's encounter, about how they greeted each other, about how Santa Mónica looked at this skinny woman, perhaps very observantly and about the expression on her face when she handed the spring onion to the other lady. Clotilde's picture of the saint, however, also detailed Santa Monica's good qualities by showing her empathy towards the starving woman, although it was an aspect easy to forget due to her greedy personality. If Santa Mónica was able to spot the skinny lady from Purgatory it was also because of her special visual skills, just like most of the Aguabuena people, I thought.

Years after hearing this story, in one of my return visits to the field in 2012, I learned at the Monastery of Candelaria that Santa Mónica was Saint Augustine's mother. The friar who was guiding me and a group of tourists through the monastery remarked that Saint Augustine, the founding father of the religious order and the Candelaria Monastery, was

²²Again *Santa Mónica* spotted the second woman because as she was envious she was able to see too much!

“the most human of all saints and the most saintly of all humans” and that it was his mother, Santa Mónica, who inspired him to follow God. At that moment Clotilde’s story came to my mind, and despite the fact that it could only be a coincidence of names between the two Santa Mónicas, I could not help myself and laughed at the possibility that the holy man of Hipona had a mother who was a saint, but also an envious woman.

Envy does not clash with holiness: both the Virgin and Santa Mónica are proof of that fact. As much as we might view the stories above as small vignettes on the potters’ special Catholicism, what follows widens the panorama, by showing how priests engage with envy, and by this token, reinforce the assumption of envy as being an existential experience of the potters.

Two days of preaching by the priest on envy

This is a twofold story. It tells what happened on two different days, both illustrating the encounters between the potters and the local priest. It describes the priest’s sermon on envy and the reactions of the potters to the clerical message.

On Sundays potters go to the village. There, they go to the food market, and to the holy Mass. It is a busy day of intense socialising occurring in different places: the church, the main square, the food market, the hospital, the corner *cafetería*, the municipal palace, and the inspectorate. On Sunday all the potters are elegantly dressed. Sometimes, they like to “pay for a Mass” and they invite the rest. In this region, people “pay for a Mass” by giving a monetary contribution to the priest and the Church. In exchange, the priest explicitly prays for relatives or friends, announcing their names aloud during the homily. Among the reasons for paying are health problems, or the annual celebration for a living or dead person.

1st Day

That Sunday in September 2009 *comadre Teresa* “paid for a Mass” for her health. She was the biggest *matrona*, matron, on the hill, as she was one of the oldest descendants of the potters’ ancestors to whom the farm *Aguabuena* belonged (cf. Chapter 1). Most people from the hill came. She sat in the front row, next to the lady with whom she shared her flat,

nicknamed *Rabbit*. Both looked very elegant, wearing long skirts and skin coloured stockings, heels, silk blouses and pashmina shawls, as well as black hats decorated with colourful feathers, which they took off and placed on their laps during the Mass. Their dyed black hair was arranged in a long single plait. The two women sat proudly, like statues; both wearing long tear-shaped gold earrings. The church was half full. Other people from the village were there too, some of them friends, godsons, or goddaughters of *la comadre*.

“We are gathered this morning in honour of Teresa Valero *viuda*²³ de Rodríguez to pray for her health. Brothers and sisters, let us pray!” said the priest. After the usual prayers and songs were over, the priest began his speech.

“Brothers and sisters, the Gospel invites us to live in harmony and peace according to the rules of God. If people live their lives full of envy they will never be able to live in peace. Where there is envy, there is anarchy. If envy rules human lives, people will not progress and they will always be divided.”

Teresa and her companion followed the sermon, all the while maintaining their proud posture. Meanwhile, the remainder of the potters, spread across the church benches, were sleeping or ironically smiling at what the priest was saying. I was sitting in a diagonal wing of the church, at the back and was facing Teresa, Rabbit and most of the Aguabuena people who came and who were sitting behind them. During the service potters often threw concealed glances to one another. But not *doña* Teresa or Rabbit, who were directly facing the altar. The priest finished his sermon. People were asked to stand up. The Paternoster followed and then the shaking of hands, with the Aguabuena people, the envious ones, giving each other the sign of peace.

2nd Day

Every first Saturday of the month, a priest (either from the village or one of the monks from the Candelaria Monastery) came to Aguabuena, and celebrated Mass at one of the potters' houses. This Mass commemorated *San Isidro Labrador*, Saint Isidore the Farmer, the patron saint of the crops. People were supposed to bring gifts to the church: the first crops they harvested, money, or pots. In exchange, the priest celebrated Mass, and gave

²³Widow.

communion to the elders who could not go to the village on Sunday. People believed that those who happily gave gifts would receive twice what they had given. The priest also distributed among the poorest of the parish food and clothes that were collected through charity programmes ran by the Monastery across the Boyacá region.

That Saturday in late November, some of the Aguabuena teenagers celebrated their first Communion. After a long ceremony in the Monastery of Candelaria, everyone returned to the hill again. People were setting up the table to serve the food and begin the party outside one of the houses. There was going to be one joint party for the young potters who had made their first Communion that day. They all belonged to the same extended family; all were cousins. The table was laid out with a big cake and two bottles of champagne, one on each side. Before any alcohol or food was served each child posed for a picture, standing behind the table. They posed with their relatives in all possible kin combinations. Over a short period of time I managed to take over 100 pictures. As I was yelling “Who’s next?,” arranging new people for a new picture, the priest passed by in his jeep, stopping briefly to tell the people that he would come in 20 minutes to celebrate the Mass. He demanded to have everything set up by then. As soon as they saw the priest approaching, some men managed to run and hide the alcohol, while others, starting to joke, lifted their bottles of beer, still unopened, cheering the priest. Some women disapproved of the men’s toast. Others started to gossip, as soon as the priest was gone: “He likes alcohol too, in fact he regularly drinks whisky... and he also likes women, he just got a nice young secretary.” After 20 minutes, the priest came as promised. Some women were finishing preparing the table. The cake was moved inside into the kitchen as were the two bottles of champagne, waiting to be consumed after Mass. The table now served as an improvised altar. Most of the men, however, were gone to the *tienda*, shop,²⁴ to drink as they waited for the priest to leave. The women were mad at their men because it looked like the latter were using this as an opportunity to spend money without their approval. The Mass began with a short song that most of the potters knew: “*Yo te alabo con el corazón*,” they started to sing and clap. The priest interrupted the singing with a slight remark: “What’s wrong today... you are not

²⁴A small shop owned by one of the potters and located in his house. This shop sells basic food, soap, toilet paper, non-alcoholic beverages, and alcohol, mainly beer and *aguardiente* (a strong Colombian alcoholic drink made of sugar cane).

clapping well... are your hands too heavy?" The potters laughed and a shy female voice was heard replying, "Our hands are heavy because of our work." More laughs followed. Soon after, the priest began to preach his sermon: "As you know today is San Isidro's day, and it is up to you to celebrate it or not." The priest's voice had a threatening tone. After he finished his speech, the priest expected to get the first gifts from the potters, who, as if not caring much about what he had just said, instead remained immobile and silent. The priest looked at them and then said: "To the disappointment of God, this is the first place where people don't want to celebrate such a special occasion. You can be a part of the Holy Blessing by giving some money if you don't have any crops to give. You can also donate some crafts." The encouragement of the priest was in vain, although this time potters explicitly answered that they did not have anything to give. The bad atmosphere created by the priest's pressure on the people and their unwillingness to give to God was smoothed over somehow by agreeing that they would arrange a celebration in the near future (something that never happened). The priest tried to overcome his anger and to continue with his preaching:

Dear brothers and sisters, we don't have any material possessions because all things belong to God. We should free our minds from our ambition and realise that we don't possess anything. You should not be envious in front of God. If you keep on being envious, people, then you will not be able to live the life that God wants for you all. All of you get so envious because the neighbour has a prettier wife, because he has bought a better car, because she has longer hair.

A collective laugh made the priest's voice inaudible for a moment. Then, someone from the crowd responded: "Here, envy is our daily bread." The Mass finished and the only ones who were happy were the first Communion children, who had the chance to take Communion twice in a single day. Before the priest left he was served a piece of cake and a small glass of champagne. Soon after he was gone, the initial heavy claps of potters at the Mass were replaced by strident laughs, drinking, and dance.

As on that occasion, envy was often the theme of the liturgy. When I heard the priest preaching on envy for the first time (during the story of Day 1), I was amused to see how envy was also a popular trope used by the clergymen when addressing Aguabuena people. I

also found the priest's messages intriguing. The relationship between envy and anarchy or envy as constraining life's potentialities and God's will for human beings, were interesting aspects, opening possibilities for social analysis. According to the priest, envy put the social contract – on which communal life was based – at risk, to the point of denying social life, an idea that has also been addressed in the anthropological literature on envy (cf. Shoeck 1970). At the same time, the defiant attitude of the potters towards the clergyman and his message or their lack of cooperation and reciprocity towards the Church on the day of the Saint, were other elements of this picture. Moreover, potters did not trust San Isidro and his ability to return twice as much as what they had given him, perhaps partly because he was also thought to be envious (just like other supernatural beings or saints), and because the giving and receiving of gifts was not practiced among the potters (cf. Chapter 6).

The envy of the clay

What follows is the story of Doris and Helí, two cousins who had an argument over the clay that one of them had borrowed from the other. The narrative recreates the version of the woman and the man accusing each other – and the material – of being envious, by means of a retrospective dialogue showing the point of view of both of the characters involved. Recreating the way artisans usually speak, imitating or quoting each other in a sort of theatrical monologue persuasive to the audience (cf. Chapter 5), the story also shows how Doris, at times, impersonates Helí, by talking like him and imitating his voice.

Doris's father owned a white clay mine located not far from their house. It is not very common among potters nowadays to own a clay mine and usually, they buy the clay from vendors who bring the material to their workshops from the surrounding area. On that occasion Helí needed white clay to mix with the yellow clay that sellers bring in order to make a striped effect on a finished vessel, to have whiter and darker parts. Helí then asked Doris to sell him some of their clay on credit, promising to pay her back once he sold his *hornada*. They made a deal. The next day, a truck on the road appeared in front of Helí's workshop half full of greyish lumps that he would turn into white clay. Doris did not see

him or hear from him for a month or so until one afternoon he came from the road, yelling and swearing at her.

‘You gave me this fucking clay and it is because of this clay, full of stones, that all my pots broke in the kiln! Now what am I going to do? Are you going to pay for the work I have lost? Are you still going to charge me for this damned material you gave me?’ said Doris, imitating Heli’s voice and gestures. Then she continued.

He was unstoppable and just continued using offensive words that I prefer not to repeat here. Who should be to blame? Poor man... some clay shrinks and some does not and no one knows why. Some people blame the material for being envious and they start cursing it in response. They should not do this. They should not swear at the material with which we all work because it is from this that you eat. Something similar had happened to him before. He was always losing his pots in the kiln and so people pitied him. Some people brought him coal and clay so he could work but he lost the pots again in the kiln and so he cursed. He thinks so high of himself, but he is always in trouble. Things go wrong because he is continuously cursing the clay, and then when he puts the pots inside the kiln, he is always cursing his luck.

As for Heli, this is what he had to say one afternoon when I visited him at his workshop.

Doris and her family lent me some material, saying they would charge extra interest if I did not pay them back within a month. That material they gave me was shit. It was full of stones. I could not work as (quickly as) usual because I had to remove the stones from the clay and then from the pots all the time. Then the clay started to shrink so the pots twisted... it was so weird. I forced myself to continue working with that material though I knew it was shit. What else could I do? I blame the damned material. After almost a month of hard work, I completed the *hornada* and fired it. A few days after, when I opened the kiln, many of the pots were broken, some others were raw, only a few survived. I still blame the clay they gave me. They are mean and envious people. Here you cannot be hard-working or make nice pots because then the rest will screw you. ‘Thanks for the favour,’ I told Doris. ‘But don’t expect me to pay for something that just ruined me.’

Doris and Heli’s argument is one of the many examples of conflicting relationships and tension among potters that I came to know during my fieldwork. Their testimonies build on their mutual accusation of being envious, clay being the means of conducting the

allegations. This condition which they ascribed to the material, transformed daily by their work with pots, made their exchange very intriguing. For Helí, Doris passed her envy through the clay she had lent him and which materialised in the poor quality of the material (full of pebbles) and twisted pots, causing him misfortune. For Doris, on the other hand, Helí affected the clay with his bad temper, mistrust and accusation of it being envious. As much as Doris highlights the risks involved in pottery-making with uncertain or unpredictable outputs for the potter, Helí's risks were linked to Doris's own actions and ability to affect him and not just the material. The incident does not give insight into the envious nature of the clay itself, but instead – into its envious conductive powers. Drawing on the fact that the area is affected by a metaphysical condition of envy, as shown in the previous story, as well as an active nature, serving the purposes of the Devil, is it then possible that clay might be equally envious? Or does it need to belong to potters or be in contact with them in order to have such qualities? The following stories seem to exemplify this second idea.

The envy of the pot

This story takes place one afternoon at Helí's workshop. It revolves around the activity of putting pots inside the kiln, and the care and attention potters display while doing so. As Helí explained, pots are envious; therefore, potters need to know how to place them inside the kiln's chamber, so as to prevent potential breakages.



Figure 8. *Apilando* inside Helí's kiln.

Apilar, loading the kiln, is how potters referred to the process of putting the raw pots inside the kiln before firing them. It was a task that took an entire day of work, and involved as many family members as possible. Although the more people willing to help the better, usually potters avoided accepting help when it came from

someone they suspected was not skilful enough (see Figure 8). People should know how to lift a pot, how to carry it, how to put it down again and how to place it inside the kiln. A *mal esfuerzo*, bad effort, or *mala fuerza*, bad force, on the pot could cause it to break during the firing. Usually, it was a man who went inside the kiln and started to place the bigger pots in the chamber. The wife or other kin passed the pots to him through a small gate. Inside, he put the pots close to each other, but always maintaining some space between them. Once the first *vuelta*, round of pots, was complete, more pots, this time smaller, were put on top of the first ones. “There should always be space in between them, for them to breathe, and for the light (from an electric bulb, illuminating the chamber), to pass through the gaps between them,” Helí told me.

Then he continued:

Apilar is done by finding the shape of the vessels. It is like a jigsaw, like a riddle, you must foresee all the moves so the first pots you put inside the kiln are the rights ones. The first vessels will tell you onwards what to search next, what shape to look after, and how to put them next to each other, as not all the pots are the same. Some pots have bigger bellies, other bigger mouths, so they are not the same, though they look the same. Besides, some pots are more envious than others. For example, *Botero* is a very envious shape that does not like to be next to other pots (boteros are considered to be male gendered). You have to put him alone otherwise he will damage the pots next to him. I first made the botero, it is the specialty of my workshop. I gave him that name because it is a big, fat, heavy vessel, just like Botero’s²⁵ paintings. *Botero* is so difficult to apilar, and it is so difficult to make. I only make two or three per hornada. They are very delicados, delicate,²⁶ so I prefer not to risk much by making lots of them. People here have tried to copy the botero, but they don’t do it the same. They cannot make it. And the middleman knows it - that is why he collects the botero just from here... So in the end, people stopped making boteros as they weren’t selling their pots.

While describing the shape of the pots, Helí introduced envy as a part of their characteristics, and within such classification the *botero* arose as the most envious of all the

²⁵He refers here to the Colombian artist Fernando Botero.

²⁶This word as it is used by potters implies more than its literal translation, delicate. It also means wicked or deceitful and is used to describe someone who takes offence easily, but who does not expresses his or her emotions.

pots, as well as his workshop's speciality. Its prominent typological features, as well as the skill, energy and amount of clay needed to make it, made it a risky enterprise, bringing either economic or symbolic recognition from the middlemen and other potters, or a great loss. *Botero* was also a type of vessel that needed to be inside the kiln on its own since other pots could affect it, causing breakage. *Botero's* envy went as far as becoming exclusive to one potter, or so we learn from Helí's story. The narrative draws on the potentialities of objects and their agency as well as on the special connection between pots and Helí, *botero* being his outstanding creation. *Botero* is an envious vessel (like Helí), and together they provoked envy among the rest of the pots, and the potters. Even the name, *botero*, exemplified Helí's self-education and intellectual engagement, which he often used to distinguish himself from others (he was also the one who together with Custodio claimed a special status for Aguabuena in the eyes of the state), separating him (just like his pot in the kiln) from the rest of the Aguabuena potters.

An unused aqueduct

Apart from clay, many other different types of matter can conduct envy. This next story is an example of how the water pipes of the Aguabuena aqueduct became conduits of envy. The narrative touches upon potters' relationships with the material world and with one another. Moreover, the relationship between envy, dryness and water, envy and the physical world, and the idea that envy could operate like a gear assemblage, exemplified in the potters' expression "the chain of envy," are ideas that keep resonating in the following chapters.

Agua-buena literally means "good water." However, there is almost no water in this area. In 2003, potters managed to construct an aqueduct, with funding from the municipality and the regional government. They organised themselves in a committee and received legal recognition, forming an association called "AsoAcueducto." That was one of the few times they worked together for communal purposes, gaining recognition from the local and regional authorities. I attended the inauguration religious ceremony and the party that followed what was proclaimed to be the first rural aqueduct of the village of Ráquira, "constructed by the community and run by the community." On that day, the priest came

and said Mass to consecrate the aqueduct. He blessed the well, to ensure that the water always runs from underneath the soil. After Mass, “AsoAcueducto” threw a huge party in the workshop of one of its main leaders. *Chicha*, corn drink, grilled beef and boiled potatoes were served throughout the rest of the day, and until the early hours of the following morning. In the evening, two bands came to play folk music. One of them was one of the most famous *carranga*²⁷ bands at the time. To this day, everyone on the hill remembers that party.

Not everyone joined the aqueduct association, however. At the time of construction of the aqueduct, people were asked to become members of the association by paying a monthly instalment, attending regular meetings, or giving extra money to cover the leaders’ travel when they needed to go to the neighbouring city to deal with administrative matters. Tales of how the association leaders misappropriated funds meant that the number of active members began to decrease. Some leaders ended up without any aqueduct service, as their water tubes were not allowed to cross through their neighbours’ land. Instead, they had to set pipes above ground over their neighbours’ properties. As *doña* Teresa explained to me: “*Envidean* (they envy) the pipes and then you have to pass them through the air and also through the wind so people will not *las envideen* (envy them [i.e. the pipes]). My nephews had to put the pipes in the air in order to pass water to my house.” In the end, just like everyone else, Teresa ended up without any water connection (the idea of water pipes suspended in the air presented a very futuristic and psychedelic image to me).

The first aqueduct in Ráquira, “made and run by the people,” turned out to be a disappointment. Municipal authorities blamed the potters for “being envious.” In the same way, potters blamed each other for being envious too. “So much envy dried up the aqueduct,” both literally and metaphorically. Although the inauguration party was attended by the whole community, more than half were not members of the aqueduct association. Additionally, on top of this “chain of envy,” as people often called it, was the fact that the aqueduct never worked. The well blessed by the priest is now covered with grass and mud, as are the pipes, which are also starting to rust.

²⁷Typical folk peasant music from the region of Boyacá.

Like clay, water pipes were conduits of envy. It was interesting to see how the potters did not blame the municipal authorities for the unsuccessful aqueduct but, instead, accused the members of their community themselves. A consensus between the potters and the officials from the development department of the municipality supporting the process of the aqueduct construction, made envy the ultimate explanation of such collective failure. This was one of the few occasions when I witnessed any agreement between the two parties. After the incident, what continued to resonate in my mind was the possibility that pipes, besides water, could also channel envy (see Chapter 6).

The envy of the anthropologist

I became envious during my stay in Aguabuena. The following short story focuses on this development, including my own reflection on how it could have taken place.

During the time I stayed in the field, I received only a few visits from my friends, most of them towards the end of my fieldwork. The longest visit lasted a week, and it was from a friend that wanted to make herself a pot in the shape of a cat, as a way to remember her pet that had recently died. None of the potters made pots in that shape, though most of them were willing to do so if she could tell them what it was supposed to look like. Some of them thought that this could be an opportunity to improve their “business” by means of the new cat-shaped vessels. I took my friend to one of my closest informants in the field, Marina, a middle-aged woman with whom she also got along very well.

That afternoon my friend explained to Marina what kind of pot she wanted. She said that she wanted to make the pot herself. Marina showed her some basic moves with her hand, and told her to watch and repeat her movements. She told my friend to start crafting a basic form, before trying to make the cat. She told her this would help her to “train her hand.” My friend looked confused and was unable to follow Marina. Marina did not give any further explanation and continued shaping the pots very quickly. I then decided to sit next to my friend and help her. I showed her how to make the base of the pot, and then had her start again from scratch. I tried to verbalize what the potters only communicated through movement. She started coiling the vessel and I bent closer to her, verbally explained while showing with my hands how she was supposed to do it. She repeated the movements I

made and I corrected her as needed. After she had managed to start “putting up” the vessel, I left her and got distracted, chatting to Marina. As her vessel was getting higher, my friend started to doubt her work. Her pot was becoming narrower at the top and wider at the bottom. It looked like a funnel. She asked Marina for help. Marina stood up from her working spot and came to see my friend’s piece of work. She put her hand inside and started to shape it with the arch of her hand, making it equally round and even. “Daniela did not explain that step to me... I did not know I was supposed to do that. She is a bad teacher!” said my friend as a way of making fun of me, a “city girl” living among rural potters. “She did not do it because she is envious, as envious as everyone here on the hill” replied Marina, exploding with laughter. Her comment brought to my mind a claim made by someone else. A few days ago, as I was crafting some vessels in a different workshop, a potter man told me: “since you started to get muddy you are like us.” His comment, also ironic, was mocking my clumsy way of doing craft in the same way as my friend who was staying with me. “Was my dirtiness now a sign of my (embodied) envy?” I wondered. “Is envy a contagious state that reaches everyone who is in touch with conductive materials (like clay) or through different channels (for example, water pipes)? My own anatomy, later on, gave more clues in this regard (Chapter 3).

The awareness that I was also being portrayed by potters as an envious person, like them, surprised me. Scholars working on envy have never written about the possibility of them becoming envious in the field (cf. Foster 1972b; Shoeck 1970). For example, Ariel de Vidas (2007) explicitly tells us that envy was a condition shared by the Teenek community in Mexico, which shaped their identity, never ascribing it to outsiders like herself. Only Taussig reflects on his obsession with envy in the academic relationships of scholars in American universities, an aspect that he became aware of after he left his fieldwork site (2002). My experience among Aguabuena potters challenged me with the possibility of being envious, causing me to have mixed feelings. On another occasion, I heard that the daughter of one of my landlords was gossiping about me and accusing me of having gone to talk to the mayor of Ráquira. According to the woman, I had asked the official to stop a social project that was about to start on the hill because I was envious of the people of Aguabuena. That day, I remember that I cried. Not only was I upset at the woman’s lies as I had certainly not gone to the mayor, but I also rejected the fact that people could think of

me as an envious person with bad intentions. Later on, this incident made me think about the distinction that I was making between Aguabuena potters' envy and the possibility that I could be characterised as an envious person. I took artisans' envy as a matter of everyday life in Aguabuena without using moralising implications, or seeing the potters as "mean" people. However, I found myself morally offended when I was accused of envy. Moreover, I also started to think more and more about the fact that envy circulated in Aguabuena, and also, that it was contagious, and that these were important aspects defining how it was experienced by the potters. I became intrigued by these possibilities and by the continuum that – by means of envy – existed between the body, environment and mind.

Closing thoughts

The stories above reveal a series of multiple layers in which envy was present; moreover they give a sense of its reiteration and exacerbation in Aguabuena life. As shown, potters believed they were envious because the world, into which they had come to be, was envious as well, as were its supernatural agents, the Virgin and the Devil. Envy was "natural" and expanded through conductive materials which have been in contact with the potters, such as clay and water, or could be avoided through less conductive means, such as the air. Furthermore, pots were said to be envious, their envy being a sign of their special relationship to potters. Additionally, the envious fame of the place was also acknowledged in religious texts, for example in the religious booklet sold at the entrance to the Monastery. Envy was also part of the official discourse promoted by municipal authorities. In the same way, and equally relevant to the experiences of envy, were the priests' sermons and the potters' attitudes and responses to them. In the cleric's own phrasing, envy created "anarchy," or a society without a governor or rules. In other words, it denied communal life and moral righteousness. However, the same envious character, construed as a deadly sin, did not prevent envious mortals from becoming saints, as the case of Santa Mónica demonstrates. Through the manipulation of the materials of the place (by touch), perhaps even an apprentice of pottery-making like myself, the ethnographer, was said to be (or to have become) envious as well. Envy also dealt with dryness, with fluxes and channelling of these fluxes, and with physics, as in the case of the water pipes put up in the air as the only physical means that helped to prevent envy. As much as envy seemed to stand outside

potters' reach, it was also put in motion by the potters themselves. They were conducting it through clay, passing it to pots or through other means, such as water. In the same way, potters were capable of circumventing envy. Potters' stories were my way into metaphysical and physical problems, revealing realms that were not opposed or divided, but conjoined via envy's great dynamism and contagiousness.

Chapter 2

Oscillations on Envy

The stories in the previous chapter showed that envy is an experience grounding potters in the world that balances in between being separate from people but also dependent on potters. They, in turn, are responsible for the circulation of envy as well as the channels and directionality of its motion. Moreover, for Aguabuena potters, envy does not entail only negative features of humans, deities or objects, but also involves empathy and care. Thus, envy brings together different realms (often contradictory, for example, saintliness and evilness) and actors (i.e. materiality, super natural beings, the anthropologist, among others), posing tension on multiple spheres.

In this chapter, it is my aim to address the tensions of one of these spheres, particularly concerning theories of envy. In anthropology and its sister disciplines, envy has been conceptualised in various ways: as a behaviour operating as a functional device labelling societies (cf. Foster 1972), as an emotion (cf. Shoeck 1970; Foster 1972b), as a sin or vice (cf. Epstein 2003; Shoeck 1970; Taylor 2006) and as a category of social knowledge (Taussig 2001). Furthermore, social sciences and literature have also portrayed envy as a “pan-human” phenomenon of corrosive consequences (cf. Epstein 2003), describing the specific ways groups combat or neutralise it (see e.g. Maloney 1972; Foster 1972b), never questioning the local ways in which envy is enacted. Drawing on these ideas as well as on my own ethnographic material, I discuss continuities and differences between Aguabuena potters’ understandings and experiences of envy and those of people elsewhere, addressing key theoretical tensions. Hence, by means of a series of oscillations, I reflect on the comings and goings of my own development around envy and vis-à-vis the ideas of other scholars working on the subject. Borrowing the idea of envy’s perpetual and pendular movement from the potters (see Oscillation 2), I envision the continuous back and forth of a pendulum between two axes as the proper way to resemble the complexities of envy, its potentialities of being and becoming, and its ubiquity in the human experience of Aguabuena potters (cf. Rapport 2005).

Oscillation 1: Destructive, creative

In one of the first theoretical anthropological accounts focusing on envy, Foster (1972b) referred to what he called a “pan-human” phenomenon as “a particularly dangerous and destructive emotion” that implied “hostility, aggression and violence capable of destroying societies” (1972b: 165).²⁸ According to Foster, humans fear envy and its consequences; it represents a threat to both individuals and to society. As a way to cope with this fear, humans developed different kinds of “symbolic behaviour,” which the author explored in his seminal article entitled: “The anatomy of envy: a study in symbolic behaviour.”

Envy, so “destructive to our self-image,” appeared to Foster not to have a socially acceptable justification that would allow humans to confess to it (1972b: 165). In his claim, Foster was influenced by Shoeck’s work entitled “Envy. A theory of Social Behaviour,” one of the pioneering and most complete works written on the subject so far. In his book, Shoeck similarly remarked that: “the envious man will confess to almost any other sin or emotional impulse before he will confess to his own envy” (Shoeck 1970: 142 in Foster 1972b: 166).

Making envy a taboo, Foster also tells us that envy is present in multiple aspects of human life: “Envy is with us all the time, it surrounds us and penetrates to our innermost being”; likewise, “it is probably because of the enormous hold that envy has on us, and a measure of the inner depths to which it stirs us, that we are reluctant to admit to envy and to discuss it openly, except, perhaps in situations formally defined as competitive” (Foster 1972b: 165). In sum, our “psychological sensitivity” to envy makes us not only less inclined to discuss it but also to recognise it in our selves (Foster 1972b: 166). Here, it is important to note that although Foster refers to envy as a universal phenomenon, he ethnographically grounds his observations in what he calls “American society” as well as in his studies among peasant communities in Mexico.

²⁸Interestingly, the author points out that this “fear” would also explain the scarce attention that the topic had received from scholars (cf. Foster 1972). However, together with the fear stands the fascination that envy raises “the mostly inherent to human nature and one of the most powerful emotions leading to behaviour” (Celse 2010: 3). Prior to Foster, many philosophers such as Aristotle, Hume, and Kant also thought of envy as a negative emotion.

Foster's view of envy as "destructive" and "threatening" has been very much shared in other ethnographic works, focusing on the consequences and neutralisation of envy. In many of these works, envy is linked to illness, aggression, or witchcraft (cf. Briggs 1998; Eves 2000; Overing and Passes 2000; Taussig 2002), needing to be counterbalanced because of the fear it instils. However, this envy that endangers social life is portrayed as an exception in human behaviour, a morally condemned feature of human existence socially fought through cultural and symbolic means.

If envy is as negative and threatening as Foster and other scholars argue, it is then reasonable to think that its presence always endangers social life or puts communal values at risk. However, could it be possible to think in the opposite way? Could we think of envy as the base of communal life and society? Could it be conceived of as an aspect bonding people so strongly that it creates a web of human relations and interactions and constitutes the foundations for family life? If this is the case, then how could we better define what envy is?

Aguabuena potters' lived experience of envy balances between destructive and creative features, posing an interesting tension. Thus, although potters' behaviour shares some of the negative aspects described by Foster in his account of envy, for Aguabuena people, envy is also significantly different, being not hidden, but very much explicit in people's narratives, actions, and bodies, whilst lying at the core of social life. As much as in Aguabuena envy is "destructive" or "threatening", it also creates communal life and bonds people, whilst also conferring on them an identity (cf. Ariel de Vidas 2007). Moreover, it also offers a means for thinking and narrating the world and individual lives providing a means to ground the self (see Chapters 1 and 5), and places artisans in a dense web of social relations and moral obligations to one another (see Chapter 6). At the same time, it underpins Aguabuena's local history (see Chapter 7) and makes potters visible at a regional level (See Introduction and Chapter 4).

Contrary to Foster, Taussig (2002) suggested instead that envy adds to social life through its performativity and theatrics (2002: 473). He coined the term "social implicit knowledge" as a way to approach the enviousness and the evil eye in the relationship of *mestizo* people and indigenous shamans in the Putumayo region, southwest Colombia. He

defined it as a collection of experimental techniques used to interpret the various subtleties of social events, skilfully and conscientiously employed by a subject that visualises the possibilities of social relations, the self and the other (2002: 473). Thus, Taussig highlights the instrumentality and experimentalism of envy performed by an active subject. His focus is on the semantics, through which this instrumentality and experimentalism are displayed. He pursues the visualised image that shaman passes onto his patient through *montage*, within which envy is a device. Hence, for Taussig, envy matters only as a discursive force through which one searches for the meaning or the lack of meaning of sociability (ibid).

In his narrative, Taussig represents envy as powerful and contagious. However, in the Putumayo valley the nights of drinking *yagé*, prepared by indigenous shamans to heal *mestizo* people, reveal a viscosity of envy, violence of the senses, physical exacerbation, exceeding its mere role as a language device. As much as Taussig recognizes envy's experimental and creative heuristic possibilities, relating it to the agency of subjects, by focusing merely on its language performativity his approach denies the experiential and existential grounds of envy in human lives which my analysis, by contrast, seeks to highlight.²⁹

Similarly to Taussig's case, among Aguabuena potters envy relates to conflict, aggression and violence, compellingly entangling the lived experiences of people who feel powerless because of envy. However, in contrast to the Putumayo valley, the Aguabuena example also unfolds the possibilities of envy in rendering individuals socially and existentially very close – because of this shared quality (see Chapter 6). Thus, on the hill, envy activates

²⁹Despite the fact that Taussig's field site is far away from my own, it seems that this anthropologist was exposed to a similar kind of Putumayan exacerbation (and even brought back to his memories of first fieldwork in the Cauca Region) during a short stay in the Andean mountains of Boyacá region. One of his books (*My Cocaine Museum*) acknowledges to the Kogi priest *Mamo Luca* the things that he told the author about coca and gold (Taussig, 2004: xiv). *Mamo Luca* (rather than living in The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta- north coast of Colombia, traditional place of settlement of the indigenous Kogi) lived –not continuously- from the early 2000's until his death in 2008 in a valley below the Aguabuena hill. He was brought there by a group of revivalist intellectuals engaged with the survival of indigenous worldviews. He used to be consulted by potters with suspiciousness and fear in things related to envy and "*mal de ojo*." The funerary urn that serves as his coffin was crafted by one of the potters' women who is one of the main characters of this thesis. The imagination of potters envious overlooking from their hill at Mamo Luca and at Taussig during his short visit is a small vignette far from anecdotal!

social and kin networks, as well as affects. Additionally, it provides a means for expressing the world and the social sphere, crafting their bodies (see Chapter 3).

Oscillation 2: Etymology, definition

It is often the case that scholars working on envy usually refer first to the etymology of the word as a strategy to analytically explain the concept, and then discuss their ethnographic data (see for example Foster 1972b; Ariel de Vidas 2007). Thus, local understandings of envy are taken for granted and undermined through an etymological approach that appears to provide an immediate interpretation for what envy entails across different ethnographic contexts.

As discussed in those etymologically oriented analyses, envy comes from a Latin root that derives from a verb describing a precise action and the intentionality through which this action is performed. In fact, the English word “envy” (or the Spanish word “envidia”), both stem from the Latin *invidia*, related to *invidere*, a verbal form compounded from *in* (“upon”) plus *videre* (“to see”) (Foster 1972b: 167, cf. Ariel de Vidas 2007; Schoeck 1970: 17).³⁰ Envy, therefore, literally means to “look upon,” an action and intention that has been translated in English as to “look maliciously upon” or to “look askance at.” At this point it is interesting to note that although the etymology of the word refers to an action and its intentionality, envy has been mainly understood as an emotion (see e.g. Foster 1965, 1972, 1972b; Ariel de Vidas 2007; D’Arms 2002), demonstrating a tension between the etymology of the word and the common understanding of the concept.

In fact, other more popular definitions of envy (commonly found in dictionaries) describe it as the desire to acquire something possessed by another person or which is attributed as belonging to another person (Foster 1972b: 168), or the desire that the other person would

³⁰Discussing the etymology of the word *invidia*, Kaster (2003) reflects upon the definition and translation of the term in the Oxford Latin Dictionary. He shows how the word derives from the adjective *invidus*, which in turn is formed from the compound verb *invidere*, meaning to “look against” (2003: 254). Similar to what I have stated, he draws attention to the characteristics of the hostile look, implied in the look that is “against” someone. For this purpose he makes explicit the implied distinction between active and passive *invidia*, showing how this difference was obscured and blurred in the Latin and therefore English use of the word, despite its presence in the meaning and uses of the concept of envy in the ancient Greek world. Active *invidia* is “the ill will, spite, indignation, jealousy that we feel toward some person or object or state of affairs” whilst passive *invidia* refers to “the odium or dislike directed against us” (ibid.: 255). This highlights a significant difference between feeling *invidia* and being the object of it.

not have it at all (D'Arms 2002). Such an understanding presents a threefold relation that involves an envier ("subject"), a party who is envied ("rival"), and a possession, capacity, trait, psychological state, that the "subject" supposes the "rival" has ("the good" or "desired attribute") (D'Arms 2002; Celse 2010).

At the same time, and under these popular definitions, desire is the driving force from which the distress arises. However, desire is always targeted at someone because "envy is a directed emotion; without a target, without a victim, it cannot occur" (Schoek 1970: 7). Bringing together the etymology of the word and its more common definition it could be argued that the target or direction of the envious emotion goes hand in hand with the directionality of the gaze of the one "looking maliciously upon" someone else's possessions, virtues or skills, that is, the envier's gaze. Moreover, social comparison among similar people and the "pain" followed by the sense of inferiority, triggered by such a comparison among equals, are said in philosophical debates to lie at the core of envy (cf. Aristotle 1941; Ben-Ze'ev 1992; Hume 1898; Kant 1797).

It is the common definition of the term, however, which poses the main problem to the analyst. Moreover, it is this common definition that should be taken as the primary step in the endeavour of defining envy if we are to follow this line of thought. The tension is related to the need to analytically consider *desire*, from which envy it is said to arise. Furthermore, equally fundamental is to know how this *desire* comes to be, is to establish how it relates to the emotional distress it nurtures, and moreover, how it connects to the gaze. So far, these are key questions that have not been fully explored although they are central to our common understanding of envy as a phenomenon.

At this point, it is interesting to recall Spinoza and his philosophical account about the psychology of human beings, as he raises an important reflection on desire, influential in later anthropological developments (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]). Spinoza posited the striving of body and mind, which he called "appetite" or "desire" as the driving force of all men. He explained how all humans "desire" in order to preserve themselves and to increase their power of acting, their agency (Spinoza in Parkinson 2000, Della Rocca 1996). If the "desire" is the agency of humans followed by their striving, then perhaps their envy, always reliant on their desires, preserves humans whilst empowering them to act. The

striving and the visual core of desire placed at the heart of envy still need to be explained. A step toward a solution is to consider how it is possible “to look upon,” or what practicalities it entails, and what are the subtleties involved in such an action. The key elements in this discussion include the performances of envy rather than its consequences, or envy as a subject rather than an object, in other words, how we envy without merely reducing it to the transitivity of the action or the things we are envious about.

It is equally relevant to consider the local understandings of envy, its performance, and the contexts in which the term is used among Aguabuena potters, as a way to circumvent the hegemony of the etymology or dictionary definitions in the social analysis of envy. The potters and I speak Spanish as our first language. This common linguistic base made me less aware, at least at the beginning of my fieldwork, of different meanings ascribed to words, one of which was *envidia*. Perhaps, when researchers are not native speakers of the language of their informants, the need to translate words makes the analyst more aware of the gap between one’s understanding of people’s words, and the significances that phrases seem to carry (cf. Rosaldo 1980: 33).

In my case this consciousness came as a result of my immersion in the field. Both potters and I use the word “*envidia*,” but with a different semantic field. Like most Spanish speakers we both use envy as a noun (*envidia-invidia, envidias* – this use in plural is less common among middle-class Colombian people), and as an adjective (*envidiosa, envidioso*). However, unlike me, they use this word as a verb (*envidear*), conjugating it in the present or future tense (never in the past tense), using only the third person singular or plural (*el/ella envidea/ ellos envidian*) and never the form *yo, I*.³¹

In chat between potters, envy is mainly phrased through actions, and propositions do not distinguish clearly between the subject and the object or the “rival”, towards whom the envy is targeted. This blurs the axial directionality that the common use of the word establishes, and provides a complement that either contextualises or grounds the action. They say: *la envidia seca a la gente y a la tierra*, envy dries out the people and the soil, *la*

³¹An interesting observation must be made regarding this point. The verb *ver*, to see, has a peculiar way of being conjugated by potters and peasants from the Boyacá region. Instead of saying “yo vi,” I saw, they use the form “yo vide,” form that reminds the Latin root of the word (*videre*). It is interesting to consider this “misuse” of the language in relation to the etymology of the word envy.

envidia arruina, envy ruins or spoils, *la envidia jode*, envy fucks up. Envy also appears as a force which *no deja que alguien haga nuevas formas de loza*, prevents one from making new ceramic designs, or *no deja progresar*, prevents one from progressing. Other uses of envy place it as a predicate for people, *está enferma de envidia*, are sick with envy, or *sufren de envidia*, suffer from envy. And lastly, envy is portrayed as an oscillating force which *se bolea de un lado a otro*, bustles about from side to side, a description which I find particularly intriguing and very appealing in my attempt to write a chapter devoted to oscillations.

Potters' remarks about envy never step out of envy itself, in other words, potters do not question the source of their envy. A question like "What are potters envious of?," a question that I was usually asked after summarising the theme of my research to various persons, ascribed a clear-cut transitivity and axial directionality to envy, which was often blurred in Aguabuena. On the other hand, envy's performance involves all the potters' senses and does not rely only on vision as the etymology of the word or its common dictionary definitions tend to suggest. The envious experience draws on the awareness of people's co-existence by means of an active perceptual system, a sense-scape through which potters shape and engage with social life (see Chapter 3).³²

Oscillation 3: Being for oneself and being for others

A trend within the studies on peasantry of the 1950s, 60s and 70s proposed the "mentality of distrust," and the importance of envy, suspicion, gossip, and the like as main features of the world view around which the social structure and social life of rural communities revolved.³³ The ontological scarcity of resources of various kinds (materially, socially and

³²At this point it is useful to recall James Gibson's ecological approach, focusing on the interrelation of the eyes and other senses and body parts like the ears, neck, and brain. For him, sight was a result of "scanning, looking, focusing and visually searching", within an overarching "perceptual system" (Downey 2007: 227).

³³The "mentality of mutual distrust" (Friedman 1958: 24 in Foster 1965: 302), widespread in the ethnographies of peasants (cf. Foster 1965), became in itself a means to define peasant societies (as opposed to tribal societies). Searching for "cultural criteria" or "internal arrangements," grounding definable a set of attitudes of peasants toward the world and human beings, scholars found agreement in the fact that "interpersonal relations among peasants were characterized by mutual suspicion, envy, malicious gossip about the successful, an expectation of brittleness in human relations, and the like" (Friedl 1963: 280; Foster 1961; Lopreato 1962).

naturally)³⁴ was used as the main explanation for peasants' lack of solidarity or communal spirit in the model of "limited good,"³⁵ a model popular when explaining features of social life – such as envy – of rural communities (see Friedl 1963; Foster 1961; 1965, 1972; Lopreato 1962).³⁶

The "limited good" framework changed previous understanding of peasants (popular in the first quarter of the 20th century) as tightly knit communities with a high level of mutual understanding and cooperation (cf. Redfield 1930) into the opposite, that is, highly individualistic groups torn by "fear, envy, and distrust in interpersonal relationships" (Lewis 1951: 428; Foster 1965; 1972; Pitt Rivers 1960-1961).³⁷ Following these ideas, some classical accounts of peasant societies (e.g. Fitchen 1961 in Friedl 1963: 276) suggested the prevalence of volitional and contractual obligations over kin relations as principles of the social structure of peasants (cf. Friedl 1963). Along the same lines, Foster (1961) proposed the "dyadic contract" model to exemplify social relations in a Mexican Indian rural village,³⁸ and later developed the model of "the limited good." Within these

³⁴Such resources include land, wealth, health, friendship, love, manliness and honour, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety (Foster 1965: 296).

³⁵This model referred to the nature of interaction between people of similar and different statuses. It was understood in terms of a zero-sum game in which the status quo style of life resulted in equilibrium among individuals. "The theory of the limited good" appeared as a normative model that seeks to exemplify unconscious behaviour (or a "cognitive orientation") in peasant societies. It can be summarised through five main principles or assumptions: 1) the social and natural environment is perceived as a closed system; 2) resources are insufficient, finite, static and unexpandable; 3) unlimited "goods" are available outside the boundaries of a community; 4) the gain of a person with respect to any "good" implies another's loss; 5) prevalence of egalitarian principles maintains the equilibrium among individuals in the sense that no one can be permitted major progress with respect to any "good" (Foster 1965; 1972: 58).

³⁶In the absence of ethnographies focusing on potters' social structure over the economic, technical and aesthetic features of their craft, I shall use here the literature on peasants to point out aspects of their social relationships, self-identity and consciousness. Potters have been included in the wide and yet ambiguous category of peasants together with fishermen, small farmers and other rural people whose primary orientation is toward subsistence rather than reinvestment and who are characterised by a special relation to land (Foster 1961; Kearney 1996). In the 1950s and 1960s anthropology experienced an explosion of peasant studies as a result of the success of the twentieth-century revolutionary movements among industrial workers in predominantly rural, peasant populations (e.g. Vietnam, China, Mexico) (cf. Barnard and Spencer 2002). The post-war period and the Cold War made peasants a key theme in the social and theoretical agenda as residual images of preindustrial European and colonial societies (cf. Kearney 1996). The construction of peasantry as a social type focused the attention of scholars of this period who were trying to define the rationality, decision-making, personality and economic values of peasants. (For a critique of the reification of the category of "peasants" throughout different historical and political stages of anthropological thought, see Kearney 1996).

³⁷The internal organisation and characteristics of peasant society or community were approached by postulating the existence of an analysable entity translatable as either a bounded system of social relationships, or a territorially delimited group of people in social and cultural interaction (cf. Friedl 1963).

³⁸The model of "dyadic contract" consisted of an informal and implicit form of social contract, neither based on nor sanctioned by law, between two adults who do not necessarily belong to the same nuclear family. The

various theoretical frameworks, suspicion, envy, and gossip were seen to serve as “functional devices” by which families and individuals protected themselves against the possibilities of loss, whilst any achieved power and wealth imbalances were neutralised through redistributive mechanisms like ritual hospitality (Foster 1972: 58).

Although the “limited good” model provoked many critiques shortly after being published (see Gregory 1975; Kaplan and Saler 1966; Kennedy 1966; Piker 1966), many scholars continued to support the idea that limited resources and productivity, expanding population and unclear rules of descent and residence caused ongoing rivalries within peasant societies. At the same time, envy, mistrust and gossip continued to be important themes of discussion in anthropology and were considered central to the understanding of peasant social structure, despite disagreements on methodological issues regarding how to operationalise and quantify these traits in the cultural and social life (cf. Friedl 1963).

The mechanistic explanation of envy as a factor regulating or balancing social relations has also inspired more recent understandings on the topic (cf. Eves 2000, van Vleet 2003, Ariel de Vidas 2007). For example, Eves’ work among the Lelet of Papua New Guinea constitutes a more recent approach to envy which, nonetheless, follows a line of thought similar to Forster’s analysis.

Eves interprets the increase of envy and witchcraft as a loss of control in the ways the Lelet create and reproduce their social relations, which stands in correlation with the Lelet increased incorporation and participation in capitalist markets (2000: 466). For Eves, when an individual buys or receives a truck (a foreign good in the culture of the Lelet), an imbalance in the system of gift-giving is created. As a consequence, social values of wealth

interaction was entered into only at will of the participants and was dissolved in the same way. Long-term reciprocity served as the mechanism of this type of contract, establishing a functional requirement of the system in which an even balance between partners could not be established.

At the same time, the contract became the means through which more institutionalised statuses such as kinship, *compadrazgo*, friendship or neighbourhood were actualised (Foster 1961). They also explained why in peasant societies there was an absence, on the one hand, of factions and, on the other, of cooperative community activity (cf. Friedl 1963).

together with the social ways of displaying and reciprocating are modified, while also altering social relations and their fluxes.³⁹

The “limited good” model explains envy as a result of the competition and scarcity among peasant communities, while reducing envy to a mere problem of regulation, mainly of wealth. This mechanistic view puts aside the actors and their intentionalities, portraying a uniform mass of people operating under the same logic. However, what about other experiences of envy, like that of the Aguabuena potters, where envy is not monolithic but has a wide spectrum of possibilities (cf. Chapter1) and meanings, grounding individuals in the world?

If envy is the norm rather than the exception – as potters argue is the case in Aguabuena – by common definition everyone is an envier “looking upon” another in a “malicious way” (cf. Oscillation 2), and therefore the flow, directionality and target of envy (*sine qua non* of its existence), are multiple and more complex than the case of a single individual that envies a person without the latter envying him back. And the same observation can be made for the intentionality of the look. How is it then that a whole group end up in a network of envy “looking upon” the other and being also “looked upon”? In the bustling about that, according to potters, characterises the milieu of envy in Aguabuena, how can the directionality of the multi-centred gaze, the targeting of the desire and its source be traced? How can the degrees of various malicious intentions be identified? In other words, what is the causality of envy and its teleology? Or what are the envious people of Aguabuena envious of? Moreover, is this the right way of phrasing this question or should we think of alternative ways of addressing the question of envy when applied to potters?

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1969) describes the scenario of the watcher in the park who discovers that he is alone and in command of his visual field, fulfilling his self-possession. His plenitude is brought abruptly to a halt when another person enters into his

³⁹The correspondence between Eves’ and Foster’s ideas is a very strong one. Foster, in his classic explanation of envy as a “functional device” within the framework of the “limited good,” drew our attention to how envy acted as a self-regulating social mechanism of peasant or traditional societies. It kept individuals levelled whilst controlling their rivalries and tensions, preventing them from accumulating wealth, goods or status, and freeing them from witchcraft (Foster 1961, 1965). In this framework, the act of acquiring a new commodity by an individual provoked and increased envy of the people around him. Likewise, the fear of witchcraft from the one being the object of envy obliged this person to distribute the new goods among all members of the group, or even prevented him from acquiring them in the first place (Foster 1972).

visual domain. This intrusion breaks the peace of the first watcher, fracturing his self-enclosure by the act of also being watched. Sartre's portrayal could be compared to the situation of a single-observer/envier looking upon the other. In Sartre's account, importantly, the person being observed is aware of another observer looking at him, a crucial reciprocity also conveyed in the envious experience in Aguabuena (cf. Chapter 3). However, the intentionality of the observer, who, according to Sartre, threatens the self-realisation of the first spectator in the park, is undermined in the philosopher's depiction. Moreover, this intentionality represents a key feature if his example is to be used to think of a hypothetical envious observer.

What happens, though, if we are in a situation of multiple observers? Subjects equally "sovereign on their visual kingdoms," using Sartre's phrase, but who also are aware of their mutual visual reciprocity? Where can we place the vanishing point of Sartre's observed-observer example in a scenario of multiple envious observers? This multidirectionality of social relations and of envy is crucial in the anthropological exploration of Aguabuena, where the clear-cut division between being affected by others and affecting others is blurred. Following these ideas, the thesis continues to disclose envy's *modus operandi* by means of the conspiracy of the hill, rendering individuals visible to each other via their acute engagement with the world through body and senses (Chapter 3), or the tight-knit web of reciprocal moral obligations that entangle potters in a net of kin relationships, debts, legal actions and irrigation systems (Chapter 6), as well as the blurred relationships between self and other (Chapter 5).

Oscillation 4: Incompleteness, plasticity

Envy does not constitute a coherent phenomenon. One of the things potters believe is that they are envious because they were born in an area made envious by the Devil's curse at the time he was expelled by the Virgin (cf. Chapter 1). However, when talking about envy, the person speaking never admits their own envy. Envy refers only to others, to Aguabuena as a whole community, and yet never to their own selves, although each person openly claims to be a part of Aguabuena.

Along the same lines as Evans-Pritchard's observation on the "plasticity" of magic beliefs among the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1976); envy is also plastic in the sense of representing a contesting and contradictory field of interpretations for potters themselves. Evans-Pritchard's classic study advanced the understanding of what witchcraft meant and how it worked in Azandeland through the exploration of problems posed by native belief in witchcraft, and the social and physiological condition of belief and its social value. Azande magic and its contradictory representations posed a logical problem and targeted the core of Western philosophy and logic; it remained a long-debated issue between rationalists and relativists (cf. Da Costa and French 1995; Jennings 1989; Tripplet 1988).

Evans-Pritchard argued in favour of the Azande contradictions stating that the inconsistency of the Azande's beliefs in the eyes of the Western analysts did not question their nature, as Azande did not approach the subject theoretically. For Evans-Pritchard, any explanation of witchcraft or magic needed to be formulated in terms of its practice and experiences, as for the Azande it was impossible to think about witchcraft outside the framework of their own mystical beliefs, grounding these experiences.

Contrary to some studies where envy appears as a feature of identity exclusive to the studied people and never ascribed to outsiders (Ariel de Vida 2007; Eves 2000; Foster 1965b), envy in Aguabuena seems to be highly contagious. There, all people, materials and supernatural beings related to potters and in contact with them (including the ethnographer) are said to be envious too, constituting a dialectical process of subjects and objects that reflect and contain each other (cf. Rapport 1999: 190).⁴⁰

Among potters envy does not arise because of wealth or status, although those features may increase it. As stories in Chapter 1 showed, envy is granted as a condition of being-in-the world (cf. Jackson 2005), and as an experience placing together potters, deities and materiality, at times empowering potters and at times marginalizing them. Envy is taken as an explanation in itself; furthermore, it does not always trigger a sense of inferiority, but also reinforces the self-pride and agency of the people.

⁴⁰At this point it is useful to recall Bateson's ideas on the status of "man-environment" relationship as a "unit of becoming [...] so an individual's knowledge of the world, and of himself, and the nature of the world as such, are inextricably tied" (Bateson n.d. in Rapport 1999: 191).

Similarly to how Evans-Pritchard described the workings of witchcraft among the Azande (Evans Pritchard 1976[1937]), among Aguabuena potters envy can explain potters' anatomy, why someone died when they did and why in certain circumstances, why a certain pot cracked when fired, why someone worked too much in their workshops or why someone did not sell their craft, why potters are marginal and rustic, or why they are *demasiado juntos*, too close to one another. Were it not for envy (as much as for witchcraft among the Azande), the world would be ultimately incomprehensible and unpredictable.

Oscillation 5: Passion, the driving force of life

Michelle Rosaldo's analysis of Ilongot headhunting (1980) gives insights on how to approach an unjustifiable and violent practice, in some way comparable to envy. Whilst explaining Ilongot promptness to kill, Rosaldo made language the focus of her anthropological analysis (1980: 23). Thus, to approach the question of why Ilongots take heads, she proposed the analysis of the concepts of "passion" (*liget*) and "knowledge" (*beya*) as key categories involved in such violent behaviour. Her ethnography viewed Ilongot utterances, not in terms of their semantic sets and lexical fields, or in terms of their underlying symbolic explanations, but in the framework of the ethnography of communication. She asked in what sorts of discourses concepts are used, so that we can access the "pragmatic stuff of common sense" which motivates action in the Ilongot society (Rosaldo 1980: 24).

Similar to Evans-Pritchard's findings about the "plasticity" of witchcraft for the Azande (1976), Rosaldo found different contexts of use for the terms *liget* and *beya* among the Ilongot. *Liget*, for example, was not only what Ilongots claimed to make them kill, but was also seen in a person hard at work, in graceful dancing, in focused magical spells before the rice harvest, in what is concentrated in semen that results in reproduction, and in envy (Rosaldo 1980: 24, 46). Moreover, associated with *liget* and *beya* were other concepts related to various emotional states and to the "heart" (*rinawa*).

Additionally, Rosaldo analysed envy in an interesting way. She presented envy as the *liget*'s bedrock (1980: 46), "anger" roused from comparison and feelings of inferiority. In her own words: "[t]he things that people strive for and desire are things they want because

other people have them; in fact, informants told me, if men were not envious of one another's exploits, no Ilongot would have enough 'anger' to want to kill" (1980: 47). Thus, the envy of Ilongots resides not in distress, but in the *liget* of the one holding on to his desire. Desire makes Ilongot passionate, expectant and vital, making the underlying *liget* disturbing and at the same desirable (ibid). Ilongot existence oscillates between *liget* producing "wild violence, social chaos, personal confusion and an ultimate passivity and loss of will" and the "lack of such a motion" (ibid). However, this lack would make life impossible. *Liget* is ambivalent then, as it generates both chaos and vitality. There would be no "human life" without it. Consequently envy becomes what "stimulates industry and spurs people on to labour" (ibid), in other words, a principle activating human agency.

This last remark about the vitality of envy, although left undeveloped by Rosaldo, is worthy of further exploration. The Ilongot world, in Rosaldo's depiction, makes us think of the possibility of envy being a driving force of human life. Ambivalent in its chaos and vitality, *liget*, born out of envy, is more than a mere feature threatening social life and self-realisation: *liget* is the motor of human life, in a way – its agency. Rosaldo's account opens a possibility to think about envy as something other than just a "levelling mechanism" in society. As she points out, mainly referring to her analysis of *liget*, "[t]hese various possibilities are imagined in terms that link the emotional dilemmas of individual human actors to certain general conditions of human existence [...] [T]hese constitute a system that embodies not only the core of Ilongot emotion, but also the stuff of life and human effort as Ilongots in their reflections know them" (1980: 47). In the end, human existence, life, and effort, lie at the core of Rosaldo's remarks, giving envy the main role as a principle driving human life and human action among the Ilongot.

Oscillation 6: Emotion, sin, intersubjective experience

There is a general consensus in the literature (not just anthropological) to understand envy as an emotion; particularly, a resentful emotion, leading to aggression and violence (cf. Shoeck 1970) or witchcraft (cf. Eves 2000; Overing et al. 2000). Now, the anthropological conceptualisation of emotions oscillates between earlier views of emotions as bodily, universal, irrational, unconscious psychological forces (cf. Rorty 1980) and more recent

developments seeing emotions as socially shaped and socially shaping the self in a moral order (cf. Rosaldo 1980; Lutz and White 1986). Following this latter line of thought, some works emphasised the social relevance of emotional language as containing a code for statements about the self, intentions, actions, the social relations, and politics of everyday life (cf. Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Levy 1984; Rosaldo 1980, 1983, 1984). Moreover, within this framework, concepts of and narratives about emotions are seen not as abstract or symbolic statements, but rather “thoughts which are necessarily linked with social situations and valued goals that give them moral force and direction” (Lutz and White 1986: 419).

The relationship between emotions and social actions, proposed in latter developments, ascribes an active role to emotions in the “negotiation of social reality” (cf. Lutz and White 1986: 420) which was not granted in earlier theoretical views. However, the idea that emotions can provide a framework that creates, contextualises, and constrains social action (cf. Lutz and White 1986) has been criticised for emphasising the role of emotions as mediating forces between an ideological realm and a factual one. Thus, the tension between being conceptualised as “thoughts” whilst also being modes of action puts emotions in between individuals and the social structure on the one hand, and on the other, between the mind and the body (cf. Csordas 1990; Leavitt 1996).⁴¹

Looking at the construct of envy, in other words focusing on the Latin etymology and dictionary definitions of envy, we can recognise these same tensions. On the one hand, the etymology tells us that envy primarily refers to an action (the “malicious look”), on the other hand, the general dictionary definition conceptualises it as an unfulfilled desire that leads to the emotional response of distress. But, how do the action of the evil look and the feeling of discontentment relate at general and particular levels? This is a question that the view of envy as an emotion does not address theoretically or ethnographically.

Parallel to the concept of envy as emotion, envy has also been considered to be one of the seven deadly sins or vices; furthermore, the subtlest and most insidious of the capital sins (Epstein 2003: 2). Within this framework, envy is classified as a “coldblooded sin,

⁴¹Rosaldo’s account tried to challenge this division between the cultural and ideational realms. However, she reproduced this tension by understanding emotions as “embodied thoughts” (1984: 143).

proceeding from the states of mind” and therefore more “rebukable, less forgivable and inherently crueller” (Epstein 2003: 9). Although regarding envy as a sin places it at the core of human nature (Epstein 2003) and in relation to “the agent’s thoughts and desires, focusing primarily on the self and its position in the world” (Taylor 2006: 1), this analytical lens draws further on the dichotomy between mind and body. Relating envy to the mind, on the one hand, and on the other, acknowledging its bond with uncontrolled “passions” (Taylor 2006: 2), the conceptualisation of envy as sin or vice puts aside spheres which in Aguabuena do not stand aside or do not conflict, for example, sinfulness and sacredness (cf. Chapter 7).

Moreover, in Aguabuena, narratives of envy have an emotional tone, which, I would argue, do not reduce envy just to an emotion, and only in few cases put envy at the level of a sin. As shown in Chapter 1, the stories of envious beings in the world place together ideas, sentiments, actions, discourses and bodies around envy. Traits of potters’ cosmology and beliefs, morality, social relations and relations between people and materiality importantly disclose artisans’ abilities to affect envy, for example, by conducting it through clay or water pipes, to avoid it by placing water pipes in the air, and to reinforce or divert it by changing fluxes of water circulation (see Chapter 6 for more about this last point).⁴² Thus, the power of envy lived by potters as an oscillating force is interestingly intensified or limited by artisans themselves via altering the axes and orientation of envy’s pendular pulses. This dynamism and intense circulation of envy, put in motion by potters, place them as both objects and subjects of envy, while moving through webs, channels and fluxes which they contribute to change.

At this point it is important to note that anthropologists have also criticised what they see as the Western concept of emotion (Lutz 1988), raising the issue that “emotions as Western cultural categories may overlap with the semantic fields of categories used in other societies” (Leavitt 1996: 516). From this perspective, alternative definitions describing emotions as “experiences that involve meaning and feeling, mind and body” have been launched in the attempt to crosscut these divisions (ibid). Within this discussion and acknowledging the tensions that the category “emotion” entails, the intersubjective

⁴²Other ways of avoiding envy involve senses, such as the touch and smell (see Chapter 3).

character of the envious experience is an alternative standpoint that allows us to circumvent the tension between the ideological and factual realms, considering the role of envy in shaping social relations and being shaped by social dynamics, whilst also giving the body an important role.⁴³

Intersubjectivity implies an awareness (minimal or acute) of the other's coexistence (cf. Husserl 1960), awareness enabled by empathy, which can lead to – or has a possibility for – a shared understanding (cf. Duranti 2010).⁴⁴ This awareness of the other's coexistence is a crucial factor in the lived experience of envy that takes various forms. For example, in Aguabuena, traces (material or not) of the co-presence of others significantly constitute the subjective lives of envious potters (see Chapter 3 and 5). In the same way, the senses are acutely active in trying to engage potters' bodies, apparently indifferent to the outside world of the ceramic workshop, whilst eagerly interpreting signals of the others' lives (see Chapters 3 and 6). As discussed earlier, the person who envies needs a target for their envy. However, envy's targets are multiple; moreover, various targets occur at one time as there are multiple subjects and objects of envy. Thus, directionality changes and so do the parties of the relationship. Importantly, this transitivity implied in the envious act predisposes the engagement with social life, shaping it in a special way. Potters live performing for others and their realisation as envious beings draws upon the “borrowed skins,” through which they become other Aguabuena potters (Chapter 5). At the same time, their envious bonds lay on the existential quality of them being exceedingly close to one another (see Chapter 6).

⁴³I am aware that conceptualising envy as an affect is one possible way of making new developments on the relationship between emotions, actions, and the body. The so-called “affective turn” (cf. Ticineto and Halley 2007; Richard and Rudnyckij 2009) argued for new forms of causal links between the body and the mind as well as reason and the passions by referring to affects' parallel developments and correspondences to both sets of relations (Hardt 2007). Affects are defined as an ability to affect and be affected, in other words, “both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationships between these two powers” (Hardt 2007: ix). Appealing as this statement is for my exploration on envy, I find a lack of consensus between what affects may entail for the social analysis (perhaps one example is affect being defined as pre-personal, pre-conscious or pre-social by Massumi [2002] and then proposed to be social by Ticineto [2007: 2], or the different approaches to affect exemplified in Ticineto and Halley [2007] and Richard and Rudnyckij [2009]).

⁴⁴As defined by Husserl, intersubjectivity deals with “the possibility of human interaction and human understanding, a possibility that is at times realized by the mere evoking of an Other's presence (as when we perceive the surrounding natural world as a cultural world that has been touched, modified, exploited, or enjoyed by other human beings), and at other times it is presupposed by the presence of tools and artefacts that were made by humans” (Duranti 2010: X).

Oscillation 7: A Telos, a body

A popular trope in Foster's work on envy and still influential in later developments, was the conceptualisation of envy as a regulatory mechanism. Thought of as creating homeostatic equilibrium inside a society, envy made people bear their limited good condition (cf. Foster 1972). Thus, in societies where scarcity of different kinds of resources motivated a zero-sum game between individuals, envy was a regulating factor of the economy (Foster 1965), the symbolism (cf. Foster 1972b; Ariel de Vidas 2007) and the psychology of groups (Schoeck 1970).

Aguabuena potters have conflict-laden relationships. Rivalries, fights, competition, and tensions are common, and involve kin members of different generations and genders (cf. Chapter 6). People fight or compete over ways of doing craft, contact with local and non-local middlemen, land, resources such as wood and water, access to state programs, love and family ties, etc. Envy is often used as the explanation for these constant rivalries. Within this context, and bringing back Foster's ideas, what are the regulating and labelling roles of envy among potters?

As much as rivalries and competition are very much present among potters, their lived experiences however, are not reducible to a zero-sum game à la Foster, where envy serves the purpose of maintaining the equilibrium, preventing individuals from standing out from the rest. I argue instead that envy is to be understood as an experience grounding potters' existences. From this perspective the focus on the effects of envy are less important than the conditions making this experience possible, in other words, what envy entails for potters' lives.

Moreover, the focus on envy as a mechanism draws heavily on envy's teleology. In Aguabuena, envy has multiple directionalities, just like the spider web-like system of rubber hoses through which potters transport water (see Chapter 6), shifting the fluxes of water or even stopping them. Thus, perhaps, rather than just a mere problem of labelling and regulation, envy's constant presence in Aguabuena world refers to flows, speeds, affects, channels, that is, aspects which all contribute to an exacerbation of envy. Under such circumstances what would then be the envy's *telos*?

In Aguabuena, as opposed to other ethnographic examples, envy does not trigger a sense of inferiority (cf. Foster 1972b) and does not prevent people from buying new properties or goods (Eves 2000). On the contrary, envy is seen as nurturing ambition whilst driving people to stand out by, for example, working more and investing in improving workshops' technological features, or by owning a large number of properties or goods (cf. Chapter 4). On the other hand, envy is not a system of social relations, culturally symbolised through a resistance language rooted in the colonial order (cf. Ariel de Vidas 2007), although it could be argued that it has a colonial legacy (cf. Chapter 7).⁴⁵ Neither is it reduced to a lack of control over moral categories or value systems, resulting from cultural changes (cf. Eves 2000).⁴⁶

Furthermore, in Aguabuena, envy and witchcraft have an important non-straightforward relationship, a link that was discussed in the vast majority of ethnographic studies on envy (cf. Overing et al. 2000). In fact, among the potters, envy is never compared, confused, or called *mal de ojo*, "evil eye,"⁴⁷ even though eyes play a main role in Aguabuena social life (cf. Chapter 3). It is the latter term, according to the potters, that always involves an act of witchcraft or sorcery. However, both – envy and evil eye – share the enviousness of the agent(s) involved since all acts of evil eye have an envious cause although not all acts of envy can be reduced to an expression of evil eye.⁴⁸ Lastly, I agree that envy mirrors social features, informing us about systems of value and morality, ideas of wealth and conceptions of wellbeing (cf. Aries de Vidas 2007; Dow 1981; Eves 2000; Foster 1972; Wolf 1955). However, using envy as an inverted reflection of desirable social features undermines its importance, in terms of how it is lived and experienced by people themselves.

⁴⁵Thinking about envy through resistance impoverishes it by reducing it to a discourse, often not even recognised by the people employing and experiencing it.

⁴⁶The changes faced by Aguabuena potters (for example, different ways of making the craft) increase their marginal situation within the "hierarchies of value" (Herzfeld 2004) that frame their place in the global market. Potters do not live outside of the capitalist system; on the contrary, they are very much aware that they are part of a global world. For example, they know very well that their crafts are exported and are very keen on following the debates of free trade agreements, which the Colombian government negotiates with the EU or the USA. In a sense, they are the result of capitalism, as Herzfeld shows in the case of Cretan artisans (2004). This differs from Eves' example and, therefore, blurs the dichotomy of the modern and the traditional.

⁴⁷Potters told me on many occasions that envy (*envidia*) is not the same as the evil eye (*mal de ojo* or *ojiar*). The latter is an action performed by an envious self who seeks to harm someone through witchcraft.

⁴⁸Similarly, it is impossible to find a potter who explicitly claims to be a witch or a sorcerer but it will be the most common thing for the potters to portray other potters as envious people.

For potters, the body is the ground for all envious experiences. Envy begins in the body, as a result of sense signs of the envier (a look, a taste, a smell), and ends in the body of the envied one, who then becomes ill or even dies. In other words, envy is embodied by both the envier and the envied; their bodily relationality is what brings them together. Drawing from a phenomenological perspective, the body serves as envy's *telos*. Thus, the body, a "setting in relation to the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1962), where envy starts and finishes, provides the "existential ground" (cf. Csordas 1990, 1994) for envy as a modality of human experience. Within this context, it is possible and legitimate not to question the enviousness of Aguabuena people by reducing it to mechanistic explanations, but, instead, to understand its embodiment by dissecting the field ingraining such experience, presence, and engagement in the world (cf. Csordas 1994: 12), as well as comprehend how and why such experience is possible (cf. Jackson 1989; 1996).⁴⁹ Drawing on a phenomenological approach, the problem of envy then becomes a starting point rather than an end.

⁴⁹I find Jackson's ethnographic approach to witchcraft and existence of witches among the Kuranko in Africa, very inspiring (Jackson 1986). He focused on people's experiences and practices as a means to understand the possibilities of being sustained by those types of narratives. Yet, rather than reduce the analysis just to a matter of semantics, the author takes the opportunity to capture experiences from narratives and material details alike.

CHAPTER 3

The (An) Anatomy of Envy

In Aguabuena, envy lies inside potters' bodies as much as it exists outside in the world, independent from people. This bodily-grounded condition of envy impinges on anatomical boundaries via the ways and means through which envy is experienced and enacted. Thus, envy occurs in a wide range of possibilities; however, this same flexibility does not correspond with an equally vague anatomical realm. People *sienten envidia*, feel envy, *sufren de envidia* and *sufren por envidia*, and suffer because of it and through it. Envy has the capacity to devour, gnawing on someone (*se lo carcome la envidia*), or providing a way to eat it (*se lo comen a uno de la envidia*), but also constitutes a means of *cuidar*, caring, for people (see more on this last point in Chapter 6). On the hill, artisans become sick because of envy, and sometimes die because of it too, as potters' narrations often made me aware. Equally appealing is the symptomatology through which potters trace envy in their bodies. In fact, potters consider *la sequedad de sus cuerpos*, the dryness of their bodies, as a sign of their embodied envy. This *sequedad*, dryness refers to thinness and lack of vital energy, which translates into finger nails never growing, or bodies always being thin. Difficulty in gaining weight and a lack of corporal fat are physical conditions with moral connotations not highly appreciated among these rural people, for whom round and curvaceous body shapes and rounded cheeks are a sign of well-being.⁵⁰

In what follows, I consider the visceral dimension of envy and its relationship to potters' bodies. To do so, I focus on the bodily pragmatics of envy, engaging importantly the senses. It is my aim to provide a sense-scape of envy, arguing for an experiential understanding of it as opposed to previous readings, which privilege its symbolic aspects only (cf. Ariel de Vidas 2007; Foster 1972b). The chapter's title alludes to the title of the seminal article on envy written by Foster in 1972, *The Anatomy of Envy*; however, in contrast to his approach, my argument avoids reducing the anatomy of envy to a mere problem of symbolic behaviour (cf. Foster 1972b). Instead, my understanding of an

⁵⁰The condition of dryness is also ascribed to pottery as a craft. Women potters – more than men – often highlight how pottery (and envy) “finishes the person” or “dries out the person” and the land. For example, the heat of the firing kiln is said to “dry” the mother's milk when she breastfeeds, or to interfere with the ovulation cycle, making a women infertile.

anatomical dissection of envy stands closer to Burton's classic work *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1972 [1621]), and his thoroughly bodily-grounded *in-crescendo* exploration via a physical and moral analysis. Inspired by Medieval and Renaissance ideas, Burton conceptualises melancholy as a disease or illness (cf. Volume 1 of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*), and provides a medical and philosophical analysis expanding on melancholy's definitions, types or kinds, causes, symptoms, prognostics, and cures while using melancholy as a lens to explore human nature.

Previous attempts connecting envy to the body have objectified it by focusing on how it manifests in the body as an illness, and as a symptom of disruption in the social order, like witchcraft (Overing and Passes 2000; Maloney 1976; Taussig 2002). Through such a lens, envy and its more proximal frame, the body, share a passive character that undermines the agency of their rapport and the possibility of being a subject creatively shaping the self (Csordas 1990; Reischer and Koo 2004). By contrast, an embodied envy is a means of making a call for an anatomy of envy and the experience it conveys, recognising envy's transformational capacities on subjects and its potential to affect people. In such pursuit, the performance of both the envied and the envier, and their body repertoires, are needed.

The following sections explore the relationships between the body, social life in Aguabuena, and envy. By means of a series of ethnographic descriptions, emphasising the centrality of the body and the senses in framing and expanding the envy of Aguabuena potters, I seek to dissect envy's lived experience as performed from and for the body (cf. Jackson 1989). In my analysis, I complement previous anthropological depictions which drew only on vision as the main sense involved in envy while also picturing the body as passive object of envy (see Chapter 2; cf. Ariel de Vidas 2007; Cole 1991; Maloney 1976). Instead, I argue for an understanding of envy as an experience grounded in an active body and performed through bodily praxis involving all the senses in a significant way.

Seeing and being seen

In Aguabuena, experiences and narratives concerning the eyes connect to envy and to the body, providing a magnified sense-scape through which social life is shaped and reaffirmed

by means of seeing and being seen (cf. Berger 2008; Ewart 2008).⁵¹ For example, considering the way potters (both male and female) dress when they are not working, usually wearing one whole piece of thick woollen gown called the *ruana*,⁵² which covers their upper body, it could be said that a potter is literally just his eyes. In the evening it is common for families and *compadres* and *comadres* to gather inside the cosy kitchen, sitting next to the wood stove or the hearth, listening to each other and chatting while the meal is being prepared. All of them wear *ruanas*, and sit with their bodies curled up, squashed together on a low bench, in a hunched position, with arms or hands drawn under their *ruanas*. Sometimes, they also cover their mouths, only their eyes are visible and, as their whole body is reduced to the eyes, there is no other body signal apart from their gaze to indicate approval or disapproval of the story being told.⁵³ While the *ruana* conceals the physicality of the potter's body, it also highlights the centrality of eyes and vision for comprehending the surrounding world.

Potters constantly refer to the use of their eyes in the performance of numerous daily life tasks, starting with their craft, which is not learned through any formal or verbalised apprenticeship, but rather just observed and individually mastered. Similar to the situation described by Herzfeld among shoe-making apprentices in Crete, in which young boys “steal with the eyes” their masters’ techniques (Herzfeld 2004: 93),⁵⁴ potters cunningly observe others at work (for example when there are several of them working in the same workshop, or when they go on short visits to their relatives’ workshops), to inform themselves about new ceramic styles, or new small body and hand movements which could

⁵¹I draw attention to the eyes and the vision; however, it is not my intention to revive an oculocentric tradition, widely criticised by postmodern accounts, which challenge the Western hegemony of sight in the construction of knowledge and the modern subject (Levin 1988; Ingold 2000;; Howes 1991, 2003, Pallasmaa 2005). My focus on the eyes, instead, follows an ethnographic interest. Potters’ narratives and daily practices have the eyes as a recurrent theme. The relevance of the eyes in potters’ experiences and aesthetics encouraged me to pursue an anthropological inquiry about this sense in relation to the life experience it encompasses and the subjectivities that it crafts.

⁵²A *ruana* is a sleeveless garment with a big hole in the middle for the head so the piece of woollen cloth hangs from the neck covering the chest and back. It is a traditional outfit worn by both men and women in the Andean rural areas of Colombia.

⁵³There is a saying about *ruana* relating it to the fact that it hides violent hands, as one cannot tell what the hidden hands underneath are holding: “no one knows what is behind *ruana*, *ruana* is on top but a machete could be underneath”.

⁵⁴Herzfeld’s account relates to the “male gaze” as apprentices and masters are usually men. In the non-verbal environment of the workshop, the apprentice silently and subversively learns the craft through stealing it from his master, reversing the power relation that characterises the apprentice-master rapport in that setting (Herzfeld 2004).

improve some manufacturing techniques. Although they see their craft as a *tradición familiar*, family tradition, they also claim that *nadie sino ellos mismos*, nobody besides their own selves, has taught them the craft, and that they learned it only through observing others.⁵⁵

Other narratives expand on the aesthetics of vision in relation to envy, whilst highlighting the eyes' great agency and expressing important qualities of being human. For example, *blanquiar los ojos*, to whiten one's eyes, hiding the pupils to reveal only the whites of the eyes (the sclera), which gives one a look of a dying person or a person who is in trance, is the most common way to refer to envious eyes and the envious gaze. "As I was telling this to him, he was just whitening the eyes," potters would recurrently say and perform the movement when narrating their encounter with someone, as a way of proving the enviousness of the character being discussed. Also, eyes can glance in a violent way as they can *lanzarse*, throw themselves at someone, or can *clavarse*, stick in a surface like a dart in a board. For this to happen, potters say that one of the persons – the envied – has to stay still, while the second one – the envier – moves. Often this visual confrontation involves women and takes place in open and public spaces such as the food market or the main square of Ráquira. Lastly, *sagacidad*, shrewdness, is another eye manner which relates to the intentionality of the gaze and its secrecy. In this case, a visual platform, from where viewers look at others' actions without being noticed, allows them to unveil minimal details of peoples' lives. Thus, a corner, a discrete point in space, a hole or a fissure in an unfinished wall for example, are all gaps that are transformed into *puntos*, locations where secrecy and conspiracy occur within an envious landscape. In addition, it is not just the retina of the eye that is involved in the vision but, very importantly, the corner of the eye, or *el rabo del ojo*, the eye's tail. Hence, when standing aside from others, potters are still able to look in a *sagaz*, shrewd way and to catch all the details involved in an action, as if

⁵⁵The question for an apprenticeship of visual techniques among Aguabuena potters is an interesting one, even more so in the absence of explicit narratives around the apprenticeship of hands. Ideas on "embodying knowledge" strongly relate the senses to skills, arguing that eyes, as hands or any body part, are susceptible to training (Grasseni 2007; Downey 2007). Grasseni (2007: 213) coined the term "skilled vision" referring to an active search for information from the environment, obtained through apprenticeship and an education of attention.

they were standing facing the others.⁵⁶ These eye activities, moreover, take place not only during waking hours but during sleep time as well. In fact, eyes closed, a potter continues to scan the world, since dreams are considered to be a visual vehicle, which permit one to look in secrecy at others.⁵⁷

Social life among people with such peculiar eye agency has special, and indeed spatial, requirements. Imagine people who live next to a dusty road that crosses a hill, and who are positioned in such a way that everyone looks at each other no matter where they are actually physically located. This visibility is further increased by the potters' skill in interpreting traces of social life. It comes as no surprise that everyone knows where the neighbours or their relatives have been, what they were doing, how they were dressed, and even what they had or planned to have for meal. Similarly, external to this world, when all of them go to the village on Sundays to buy food at the market and to attend mass, and when they interact with other inhabitants of Ráquira, Aguabuena potters' lives are still a matter of public domain both visually and discursively for the other Aguabuena artisans. It is a question of who looked at whom, what they had for lunch, if they drank beer or not, how many beers they had, what banknote was used to pay for the drinks, who was having an affair, who fought with whom. People even speculate on the possible topics of conversation of others based on the gestures of those observed at a distance. The very common expression of greeting *Yo la/lo vide y usted no me vio*, "I saw you and you did not see me," hinting at how one of the persons outwitted the other one, is a way of joking and teasing each other, that opens the game of secrecy and signals an awareness of these possibilities.

In this world no one is invisible although, paradoxically, everyone tries to remain unseen. Potters collectively fabricate a sort of "oppressive transparency" (Foucault 1977: 193). The picture of individuals looking covertly at others from interstitial spaces or *puntos* on a Sunday afternoon, like a street corner or through a hole in the village pub's wall, is an

⁵⁶In his study among capoeira apprentices, Downey (2007) addresses a multi-tracking vision. He refers to the peripheral vision or "sideways glance" as a conscientious visual technique that, when mastered, allows a person to perform capoeira in a better way. Such a technique, described by his informants as "staggering, spinning style and wondering gaze", allows scanning the space around, and expanding the field of vision, whilst misleading the opponent and controlling his movements (2007: 225-226).

⁵⁷A woman potter once made an interesting remark about the act of sleeping. She said sleeping is just the action of *apretar los ojos*, shutting the eyes tightly.

exacerbated feature of such a life experience.⁵⁸ The scenario, moreover, becomes more radical as everyone is aware of the awareness of the others, and by means of the possible and multiple platforms from where, one and everyone at the same time are over-looking at the other's world. This constant balancing between observing and being observed makes the experience of a panoptical or axial mode of vision more complex, objectifying the world and distancing the subject from what he observes, opening the experience for a reciprocal vision and surveillance, an intersubjective gazing (cf. Strathern 1988; Reed 1999), which helps to create intimacy among the potters/spectators whilst coercing their actions.⁵⁹ Under these circumstances, both the capacity to disguise one's self and one's actions, and acts of concealment themselves are highly valued. "You see how he is looking at me as if I haven't noticed it?" Marina, with whom I was living at the time, remarked to me one Sunday morning, while we were buying some food at the *Plaza del Mercado*, pointing with her mouth to the place where the man was standing. "Let's make him believe that we are going there" she suggested, and she pulled me in the direction of the hospital, laughing and saying, "When we are far away enough (meaning out of sight) we will come back to the *Plaza* behind his back!" Just like a magician who performs tricks in front of an audience obscuring one key detail in the set of actions that constitute their magical act, potters' skills rely on staging an act for the viewers (i.e. other potters), and on making them believe in their magic.

⁵⁸A corner is just not a physical locus. Any spot in a continuous space could be transformed into a corner if it serves the purpose of concealing the viewer from what/whom he/she is looking at. Thus, a corner is mainly a gap, a fissure in a spatial and temporal experience as much as an existential location, an artificial stage built on the part of a conscientious character who over-looks the world.

Similarly, other ethnographic works have thought about the multidirectionality of the visual and the sensorial experiences of subjects interacting in a place. The image of a Delhi market as a "starry place" (cf. Favero 2003) implies an absence of linear directionality in the visual interrelation of subjects, blurring the limits among the characters seen and being seen, redefining the subject and object of vision. Using Berger's ideas of the "ways of seeing", Favero claims that in a "starry" place a point in space is not the minimal component of a straight line but rather the "infinitely small part of an infinite number of lines, as the centre of the star" (Berger 1974: 40 in Favero 2003: 553).

⁵⁹Intersubjective gazing refers to a mode of vision in which there is a reciprocity of gazes between the viewers, making every act a way of revealing an individual but at the same time a way of anticipating and meeting the expectations of someone else's regard (Reed 1999: 50). Strathern suggests that such reciprocity "coerces" the action being witnessed (1988: 297) and establishes a relation between two subjects – as opposed to the relation of subject and object of the panoptical model – who individually act with each other in mind (1988: 274). As she explains: "the agent acts in the knowledge of his or her own constitution as a person in the regard of others and indeed fabricates that regard (objectifying her or himself) in activating the relationship" (1988: 275).

The following three short stories, about eyes and the gaze of women, exemplify some bodily praxis and local ideas about vision in Aguabuena, whilst also opening a window onto the problem of the pragmatics of envy. The narration is very visual as an attempt to recreate the sensual experience from which these stories originated, and with the intention of positioning the reader as an envious onlooker. The style of writing takes inspiration from the narrative devices of potters and their taste for constructing visually powerful images (see Chapter 5).

The eye's tail

Imagine Deolfina as she was standing in front of the stove making lunch for her and myself. She was frying some *plátanos*, plantains. She was facing the stove, her profile parallel to the road. She spotted a young man coming up the road on his motorbike. She shouted to him “*Adiós, adiós!*” even before the man had the chance to notice her. Seconds later, the young man honked his horn in a late reply to the woman’s greeting. Then she said to me “There goes Giovanni carrying some bags with food for lunch. I caught him with the tail of my eye.” After she said this, I turned my head towards the road but only spotted the back of the motorbike disappearing in a cloud of dust. I was not as fast or as skilled as my companion. Observing her movements as she was cooking, her tense eyes able to capture every movement and detail even when not facing the scene of action, I remembered the ancient Egyptian drawings where human bodies and face appear in profile but their big black eyes still face the front. That was how Deolfina appeared to me, as an Egyptian figure with her body and her face turned but her eyes in the front, large, observant, nimble and nervous. She proceeded to serve me the food. She poured a big bowl of corn soup and served the *plátanos* as a side dish. She was still standing, apparently focused on the stove. After trying my food, and as I was about to have my second spoonful of soup, I gently removed what to me seemed like a hair. But before I could even lift up my face from the bowl of soup she was already telling me: “that is not my hair, it is the corn’s hair.” I did not

reply. Again she had anticipated my reactions; she looked over at me. I felt surprised and intimidated, almost naked in front of such sharply observant eyes.⁶⁰

A potter's dream

Now dream Felisa's dream. Stretched out on the bed, she was woken by a shy knock on the bedroom door. She stood up and silently walked towards the door making sure not to wake up her husband. She opened it. There was no one. She then went into the corridor, manoeuvring between the raw and unfinished vessels. She moved fast as if hunting a ghost. She went to the kitchen. There, next to the stove she spotted a blurred yet recognisable image. It was her son. Even before she was able to speak a word to him, he told her that her husband was having an affair with a woman who sold chicken grain on Sundays at the village food market. The next morning and now awake, outside of her dream, Felisa observed the movements of her husband's body sitting next to her while both of them were crafting vessels. I was sitting at her side, watching her observe him. She carefully examined his nervous hands that were unable to hold the clay firmly while coiling the vessel. She looked at him, unable as he was to sit for long and disapproved the lack of discipline of his body. In the meantime, he stood up, lighted a cigarette, and walked in the direction of the kiln. There, he sat on a broken vessel and smoked, looking towards the valley in the direction of the village. The wife looked at the husband while he looked towards the village, trying to erase with his eyes the distance between him and his lover, and perhaps attempting to reach her with the smoke of his cigarette. At least this was as far as Felisa's imagination goes as she described her thoughts to me. After a while he came back again to his craft, sat down next to his wife and restarted his work. He was still absent and lost in his own thoughts, his hands were shaking, his mouth was open and he began to drool. Not even five minutes passed when he stood up again. This time he went to the clay tank, leaving the

⁶⁰Similarly to Deolfina's eyes, the eyes of others have caused impact for their skilful rapidity and capacity of heightened vision. Ted Williams, a hitter from the Red Sox, was portrayed by Frank Stella, an art critic, to have the fastest vision of humankind as he was able to see the stitching on the baseball as it comes over the plate. The example is used by Krauss (1988: 51-52) to demonstrate the visual character of modernism. The anecdote on William's capacity turns out to be a comment on the relation between the subject and the object of vision. Krauss says: "Vision had been pared away into a dazzle of pure instantaneity, into an abstract condition with no before and no after. But in the very motionless explosion of pure presentness was contained as well vision's connection to its object, also represented here in its abstract form – as a moment of pure release, of pure transparency, of pure self knowledge" (ibid: 52).

woman, me, and the pots behind. Now he was sitting across from Felisa and me. He lighted another cigarette, sat down on the tank and melancholically smoked, again facing the village. Now Felisa observed him with the “tail of her eye” and she had no doubt that her husband had gone mad because of that woman. Again, she was looking at how he looked. And me, I was looking at her looking at him.

A visual corner

Picture Marina, a woman in her early forties. She was standing in a corner of the only petrol station in the village, waiting for her lover to pick her up. She had come all the way down from the hill, walking through a dusty road for about forty minutes. As she was waiting, she cleaned her high heels, which were full of dirt. Before leaving her place, up in Aguabuena, she had “done some craft,” as potters usually refer to the work they perform daily. She had also covered the raw vessels with a big plastic sheet just to make sure that the wind would not dry them so much as to make them stiff for the next day of work. She locked up her chickens. After that, she made lunch for herself, her teenage daughter, and me. Earlier on that day, she had sent her younger daughter to stay at the neighbour’s for the whole afternoon, claiming to the landlady that she needed to go to the hospital to pick up some medicines. Before saying goodbye to us, she washed herself, taking special care to remove the dry clay from her arms and hands, and even hair. She dressed in her Sunday outfit on an early Tuesday afternoon. While erasing every trace of the journey and the place from her body, she spotted her lover’s truck and saw him inside. He was just about to start the engine but before that he needed to said goodbye to a second woman who now appeared on the scene, who was not his wife either. Marina from the hill guessed what the man was telling this second woman, how he was promising to come back in the early evening, and how he was recapitulating to her the itinerary of his day’s work. They kissed on the mouth, and then the man closed the truck door, started the engine and began driving. It took him less than five minutes to reach the petrol station where Marina was. As the man approached the petrol station, Marina continued observing the second woman, who was now also looking in the truck’s direction, making sure that the man was taking the *camino correcto*, right way. After following the truck with her eyes for a few seconds, and until she was unable to see it anymore, the second woman went inside her flat with a confident smile. In

the meantime, Marina was looking at her, looking at the way she looked, and losing all interest in the man and the truck. As the second woman entered her house, Marina laughed to herself at this deceived woman. She stared at her lover's unperturbed face as he approached her. She was still in the corner of the petrol station, in the locus from where she looked out on the world as she waited to be picked up.

Smelling and tasting envy

The sense of smell increases the experience of envy, raising the potency of vision when there is no direct sight of what is happening. On the other hand, taste is a sign for the person being envied that helps to confirm the evil intentions of others towards him or her. Odours in Aguabuena do not correspond to the idyllic aromas of fresh air, grass, green fields, or fruit trees expected of a rural area. On the contrary, the predominant smell on the hill is the heavy smoke of burnt mineral coal emanating from the chimneys of the firing kilns or wood-stoves. The heavy and polluted air above potters' heads, as they explain, increases the dryness of their fields, preventing the rains from falling. Nevertheless, it is also possible to experience a fresh breeze, and the consequent illusion of pure air from time to time, especially, in the periods when only very few of the potters are firing pots.

Smoke from the firing of pots has a very strong smell, easily perceived from distant workshops. On numerous occasions while visiting a workshop and sitting inside, accompanying a family in their daily ceramic routine, I heard comments on the smell coming out of someone else's kiln, followed by attempts to guess who that someone was, calculations on how often he fired, and the expected amount of money he received for his work. At times, these same remarks ended up blaming that someone for polluting the air and increasing lung disease among the potters, remarks which I thought were very ironic, given the fact that everyone fires pots, and therefore, pollutes the air! The elucidation was sometimes confirmed by a quick excursion outside by one of the family members who, after seeing the smoke and its direction, came back inside the workshop, rejecting or approving the hypothesis.

In the same way, the smoke of the wooden stoves triggered potters' imaginations about the kind of food or hot drink being prepared inside a household. Remarks on how a neighbour

was grilling meat – a sign of having money – or just boiling potatoes – a proof of one’s cheapness or of being broke – raised the awareness of those particular smells and increased the gossip and fantasies around it.

Other smells, less likely to be detected from greater distances but equally powerful and of a more scatological nature, increased potters’ awareness of each other’s lives via their bodily traces. Remarks on smells of excrements were common, as most of the potters did not have a proper toilet or latrine, and went outside to the field to defecate or urinate. Neighbourly disputes over where to dispose of household excrement, or accusations made against someone for intentionally disposing of their faeces in a neighbour’s crop field, were frequent. The smell of blood from sanitary towels, supposedly left on purpose in the grass fields of adjacent houses, was also used to accuse others of evil intentions. And so the acutely sensitive noses of these artisans and intermingled odours, which nurtured their sense of vision, reinforced their sense of togetherness and the impossibility of secrecy or isolation. Bodily scatological traces interconnected them in very visceral ways.

For the person being envied, taste is an important means of confirming their suspicion of being the subject of envy. One case, very often mentioned during my fieldwork, was that of a potter in his mid-sixties, Adriano, who died *por envidia*, because of the envy of Angélica, his wife’s cousin and neighbour. Adriano died, as people told me, after drinking a cup of coffee that Angélica gave him. Although Adriano’s death happened in 2006, it was still a popular story in 2009 and 2010, which I heard on several occasions from different potters. By discussing Adriano’s case, and also others, potters emphasised how the envy of the people around was a major risk faced by the artisans. The following is Custodio’s version of Adriano’s death, a narrative recorded in April 2010:

Both Adriano and the old lady (Angélica) argued a lot. They were fighting all those years, they kept accusing and suing each other over land plot borders, water hoses and wood. One afternoon, as the man was passing by the woman’s workshop to check on his plot, which shared a border with Angélica’s land, the old bitch came out of her kitchen, and from the door invited him for a coffee with arepa.⁶¹ The man, who wasn’t stupid, refused the invitation, but the old lady kept on insisting that he should come in. She encouraged him to

⁶¹Corn bread.

set aside their problems, and behave like the family they were. The man didn't go in, so that old fox came out instead. She brought him the cup and the arepa wrapped in a napkin. The man drank half the coffee, while the woman waited for him to finish it all, and took the arepa with him, promising to eat it later. He did not do this and instead, he gave the arepa to Angélica's dog, once she was already inside the house. A few weeks later, Adriano started to feel ill. He became very thin, *seco* (dry), lost his energy, and lay in bed most of the time. His sons took him to the village hospital, and then to a private doctor in Bogotá, but none of the doctors found anything wrong, and just ordered him to rest more. Back in Aguabuena, people started to come and visit him more often. On those visits he told them, he even told me, about the coffee that Angélica had given him, saying that it tasted bitter. Although he only drank half of it, he was sure that she had put some *porquería* (dirtiness) in it. In two months he was dead, and Angélica went to stay with one of her daughters in Bogotá. She was afraid of the revenge of Adriano's sons.

When referring to Adriano's death, the potters always related it to envy and never to witchcraft. Although most people believed that Angélica used *porquerías*, dirty things,⁶² and hence witchcraft, to harm Adriano, they also believed that the man's illness and his death were a consequence of Angélica's envy. Adriano himself, when still alive, had warned people about this by referring to the bitter taste of that afternoon's lethal coffee. No one commented on the cause of the woman's envy, neither did people refer to Angélica as a witch. Adriano, although pitied because of his suffering, was also portrayed as greedy and, above all, as an envious man, never willing to do favours for the rest of the Aguabuena community, or else doing favours but always expecting money in return.⁶³

Witchcraft is a common theme explored in the anthropological literature dealing with envy and in those frameworks in which envy is conceptualised as a levelling mechanism (cf. Foster 1972b; Maloney 1974). Often phrasing witchcraft as a consequence of envy, scholars have argued that people avoid acquiring new goods or accumulating wealth because of the fear of envy and the witchcraft to be followed (see Chapter 2; cf. Ariel de Vidas 2007; Eves 2000). In the case of Adriano's death, it is important to note that although there is a relationship between envy and witchcraft in Angélica's mischief, potters portrayed both Angélica and Adriano as envious persons. Understanding envy as a shared

⁶²Among the *porquerías* that potters often refer to are cemetery soil or menstrual blood.

⁶³Find more about lending practices among potters in Chapter 6.

living experience among Aguabuena potters, the hypothesis that envy could trigger a more egalitarian spirit in order to avoid witchcraft is not sustainable. Instead, witchcraft is only one way of dealing with envy, but there are others, such as legal accusations (cf. Chapter 6), narratives about evil and grotesque potters (cf. Chapter 5), or the sabotages of water into the artisanal Aguabuena aqueduct (cf. Chapter 6).

After hearing Adriano and Angélica's story, I became more aware to the fact that potters usually avoided drinking or having food in the homes of those with whom they were having conflict-laden relationships. When tasting meals or drinks outside their households, they were wary of bitter or spicy flavours, as these were perceived to be signs of people's envy. Two of my landladies in the field warned me about this, telling me to be more selective when consuming food or beverages at the households of those whom I was visiting. Likewise, they were often curious to know what I had to eat or drink when I came back home after visiting some families. The relationship between envy and the ways in which it was indicated by taste through food or drinks was, however, not a clear-cut one, as sharing food was also a major sign of potters' conviviality.

Sound tracks

Sound is amplified and echoed all over Aguabuena, placing potters socially in relation to others (cf. Ingold 2000: 247). Remarks on peoples' farts, snores, sex groans, voices, laughter, and ways of moaning or crying were frequently made and helped constitute the sensuous repertoire of the bodily knowledge that potters had of each other through their constant vigilance and awareness.⁶⁴

Complaints from people lacking proper sleep due to the snores of distant neighbours, or about people farting too much when they were out in the field, struck me as a part of the senses' reverberation that I felt that took place in Aguabuena. The sound-scape of a workshop, combining loud radio or TV sounds, verbal chatter, laughter, the noise of the tools used for specific tasks during the manufacturing process, the "roar" of the kiln while it was firing, and equally, the sound of the smoke coming out of the chimney, made public

⁶⁴ Referring to the power of sound, Gell rightly remarks on how the notion of concealment does not always apply to the visual. Among the Umeda, for example, to be hidden deals mainly with the auditory as presence is always determined by sound (Gell 1995).

what was taking place inside a certain workshop or household to the rest of the potters. As a middle-class person and “city girl”, I never felt that I had privacy during my time there; on the contrary, I felt that I was constantly exposed to potters’ acute senses.

Other important sounds came from the road and were means for potters to know who was coming to or from Aguabuena whether they were potters, middlemen or foreign people. This bodily awareness of people’s movements was an important aspect of the experience of envy, enabling potters to control the lives of other potters. For example, the sound of the bus dictated the rhythm of the day for the potters. Usually before 5:30 a.m., the first honk of the bus coming from Ráquira to Bogotá was heard by the potters who were already heating their stoves, preparing the first coffee of the day, and starting to boil the potatoes needed for the breakfast soup. They tried to hear how many times the bus stopped, whilst recalling the place and the people who were getting on the bus, and speculating on why and what things they were going to do. Around 10:45 a.m., another bus coming from Bogotá drove down the dusty road to Ráquira passing the devilish Aguabuena on its way. Once again, the potters listened to the sound of the bus, trying to count the number of times the bus stopped, while imagining who was getting on it and why they were going to Ráquira. That same bus was heard once again at 1:45 p.m. on its way back to Bogotá. The last bus sound of a day was at 5:45 p.m. This was the second bus from Bogotá to Ráquira, which would wake up or find potters in their early morning activities on the following day. Again, the same interest in hearing every detail of the bus journey piqued all the people of Aguabuena.

Apart from the bus connecting Aguabuena to the village of Ráquira or the city of Bogotá, there were also other sounds, like the motorbikes of potters living on the hill or returning to it or of peasants living in faraway rural districts, the priest’s or the school teacher’s car, the cars of random tourists or potential new buyers, or the noisy engines of middlemen’s trucks. All these were sounds which potters recognized with ease and which did not require confirmation through sight. Only upon hearing the engine of an unknown truck, would a potter try to identify it through a tiny hole in the workshop wall, as a way of informing themselves about new buyers for their crafts. They would then run to the road and signal to the driver to stop, to find out what he needed, and invite him to come inside the workshop.

Fingertips walking clay paths

The sense of touch adds further possibilities to the acute sensuousness of potters' lives. Their hands, with short nails, and twisted fingers from the arthritis developed from the craft, or as they explain, from switching between cold and hot materials (such as the constant balancing between clay and fire), are their most infallible tool when it comes to avoiding or recognising deception.

While crafting a vessel, a potter needs to *andar*, walk, as if the fingers transformed into feet were meant to travel around the world of a vessel, following its clay paths. As I was told by different women and men during my several attempts to learn the craft, to *andar* the vessel is the best way to feel it and to know if the artificer is completing their creation correctly. That same movement of covering the clay-scape of a vessel with fingers turned into feet, walking and feeling the smoothness of the surface and the curves of a pot under their fingertips, is a frequent gesture made over a fired vessel to appreciate the maker's technique and skill. This same procedure is used to identify the potter behind the pot, for example, when the kiln is opened after the firing process and several members of a workshop are trying to find the outcomes of their work.

This was the case of the Valero family, who lived next door to each other. Some members of the family, a widowed grandmother, her son, daughter, and granddaughter, had a communal kiln (see Figure 9). One of my visits coincided with them opening their kiln. On that occasion, all the family members were anxious to know the results of the firing. After breaking the adobe brick wall built at the entrance of the kiln, the brother went inside the chamber with his hair and face covered. A strong smell of gas came from the inner chamber and made some of us sneeze and our eyes fill with tears. His wife stood outside the kiln and started to receive the pots as her husband passed them on from the inside. The sister of the man inside stood behind his wife and received the pots from her, organising them in clusters, according to the household to which each object belonged. The family members who were not a part of this chain of hands were alert and did not want to miss any of their relatives' moves. When all the pots were taken out from the kiln, and were classified into three clusters, the man came out, with his hair all white because of the ashes, and slightly

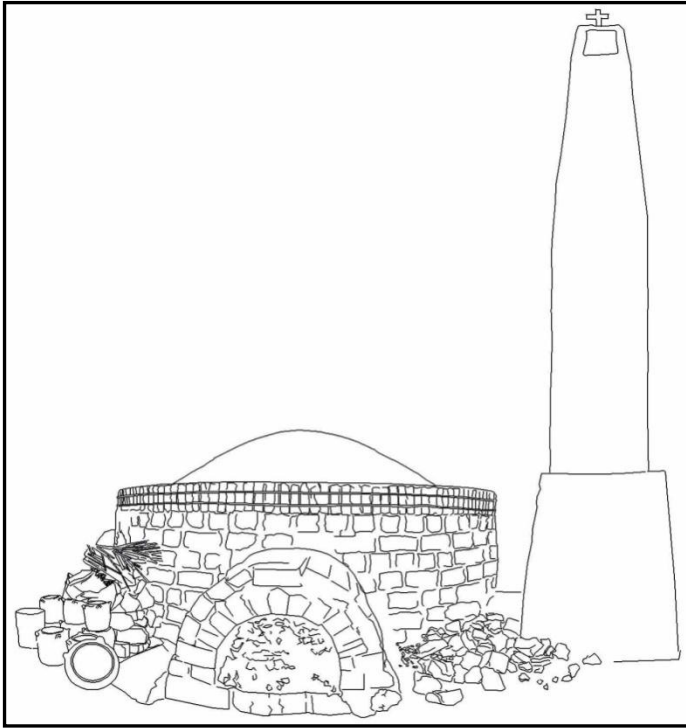


Figure 9. The kiln in Aguabuena. Note the long chimney with a cross on the top.

dizzy because of the gas. The pile of the grandmother was added to the granddaughter's cluster. It did not take long for complaints to arise. The granddaughter blamed her aunt for "stealing" some of the pots crafted by her or her husband and went to revise the aunt's pile, inspecting every single vessel with her hands. By trying to identify her own body gestures imprinted on the clay of the fired pot, she started to make claims on the ownership of

certain vessels. A whole discussion on ownership took place, reaching

deep levels related to hand movements and pot making gestures: "How dare you come to tell me that this is your pot, when everybody knows that my pots have up and downs (referring to an uneven surface), and you are always telling me to improve this and to make smoother vessels? Come and touch this pot over here and stop bullshitting me!" The granddaughter's husband came and "walked" his wife's pot. The aunt and the sister-in-law did the same. However, both of them refused the claims of the niece and her husband, telling them that they were mistaken. After listening to the women's discussion, the uncle went to touch the vessel himself. After "walking" the pot, he moved it to his niece's pile, telling the women (his wife and sister) they were wrong. Days after, while I was having a coffee at the niece's house, she started to comment on that same episode. She remarked how much her own family were envious of everyone, adding the following sentence that kept on resonating in my mind: "As if I was too stupid not to be able to see with my hands! Here, you have to be watchful all the time."

Dirty bodies, smoky lungs and the case of the eye test exam

Potters' bodies are dirty most of the time. Their hands and forearms are muddy or have traces of dry clay, as do their feet, which they use for making the first plate that serves as the base of the pot. Their everyday clothes, full of holes, are also covered with fresh clay, or have accumulated layers of dry clay from the past days or months of work. They are conscious of this dirtiness and feel ashamed in front of outsiders or visitors, blaming their lack of cleanliness on their craft. They dislike being photographed when they are working, for this same reason. When introduced to outsiders, they avoid shaking hands, but instead will always give their elbow to be shaken in the hand of the newcomer as a way of saying hello or goodbye. In the same way, they blame their work, the smoke, the ashes of the kiln, or the stove, for making it impossible to keep their houses tidy. According to them, the dust of the road, transformed into mud in the wet season, and the vehicles passing by also contribute to this level of pollution. Often, after a day of work, they do not wash themselves, and go to bed wearing the same clothes that they used for crafting. However, Sundays are the days when everyone transforms themselves to go down to the village, by taking a shower and wearing clean clothes.

Lice and fleas are very common, and – for the potters – constitute a sign of their physical and moral *suciedad*, dirtiness. In fact, dirtiness and envy are intertwined in a local tale which explains them both as the consequence of the *maldición del Diablo*, the Devil's curse, put on them when the Virgin Mary defeated him (see Chapter 1). People say: "The Devil promised that he would go but left lice, fleas and envy for us in return", or "he swore that *niguas*, chiggers, and *enriedos*, entanglements, will be with us forever after!"⁶⁵

The pollution of the place, embodied in the bodies of elder potters, transforms into a chronic illness whose scientific name, *epoc*, has a poetic and at the same time playful name (*Enfermedad Pulmonar Obstructiva Crónica*, Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease). "Our

⁶⁵Similar statements about the devil and his course were collected by other ethnographers working in the area (see Moreno 2001; Ramos 2010). Moreover, Ramos (2010) draws attention to the relationship that fleas and lice have with death and cannibalism in the Andean Quechua mythology. In Aguabuena, potters use a common expression related to fleas, "fleas eat you alive", referring to the agonistic and parasitic rapport between them and humans. Along those same lines, envy could be thought of in terms of a parasitic relationship causing one "to be eaten" by others in a way comparable to what fleas do.

lungs are full of smoke and that is why they get dry and we cannot breathe,” I was told on several occasions. Most of the artisans, in fact, develop minor asthma in the middle of their lives, which then transforms into this gracefully named illness. Its resemblance to the word “epoch” seems to suggest a possible relationship between its chronic status and the *chronos*, melancholically embodied in those human shapes.

I, myself, have suffered from asthma since I was a child, and, against expectations, did not grow out of it as a teenager. On the contrary, it became worse. The time that I spent on the hill made my asthma even more severe. Often, inhalers and trouble with breathing were shared themes between elder potters and me. They found it hard to believe that I had similar symptoms to their own despite the fact that I was young and that I had not been exposed to the type of smoke and dirt that they had. For them, being used to “manoeuvring through the smoke and swallowing it,” as much as “making their living from the dust and soil,” to be ill was normal, also because “the envy of their neighbours made the smoke of their own kilns and stoves more intense so as to densely cover the whole hill.” Although older people were the only ones seriously ill, there was a generalised concern with illness among all Aguabuena people, a concern very much nurtured by the belief that ceramics is very physically demanding work. Often, people comment on how sick they felt, or how sore their muscles were. Health was an obsession for most of the potters.

Potters receive free health services at the local hospital. However, they preferred to consult alternative doctors such as homeopaths or *sobanderos*,⁶⁶ and paid them for private consultation. A *doctor alternativo*, alternative doctor, who was advertised through the local radio station and who was travelling around different villages in the region of Boyacá, became very popular in 2006, and at the time of my fieldwork was still remembered. Potters told me about a *doctor muy especial*, very special doctor, who made “special” examinations of his patients. He had a machine that scanned the eyes and using the attributes of different eyes (such as colour, shape of the cornea, ratio from the pupil to the inner corner of the eye, etc.), measured the well-being of all body organs. This machine was able to penetrate the eye to give a complete anatomy of the person scanned, in terms of physical attributes and also of psychological ones. Through the right eye, the test inferred

⁶⁶A person who gives massages, is similar to a chiropractor and heals anything related to the skeletal structure, from backache to bone fractures.

the state of the pituitary gland, the digestive system, the transverse colon, or the *ego personal*, personal ego. Through the left eye, the machine analysed the nervous system, larynx, mental capacity, and *centro vital*, vital centre. Some features were repeated in both the right and left eyes, and others, especially the psychological ones, were particular to one of the eyes. When the “doctor” visited the village of Ráquira, most of the people from Aguabuena went to see him. The test lasted only a couple of minutes and cost approximately £25. Many of the potters had to borrow money to pay for the examination. After the test, the result was given to the person: it was a sheet of paper divided into two halves. The first half of the page had a heading in capital letters, *Detalles del Cliente*, Client’s Details, followed up by the patient’s name, date and mobile phone number, and an inscription in English, “this is not a registered program,” under which a large image of eyes appeared. The second half of the paper contained a diagram of blue and red bars distributed in a Cartesian chart. The vertical axis represented the body parts and the horizontal one, a series of numbers going from -40 to +40. Apart from this information in graph form, there was no other analysis or connection between the magnified eyes and the diagram. There was no diagnosis or medical explanation (see Figure 10).

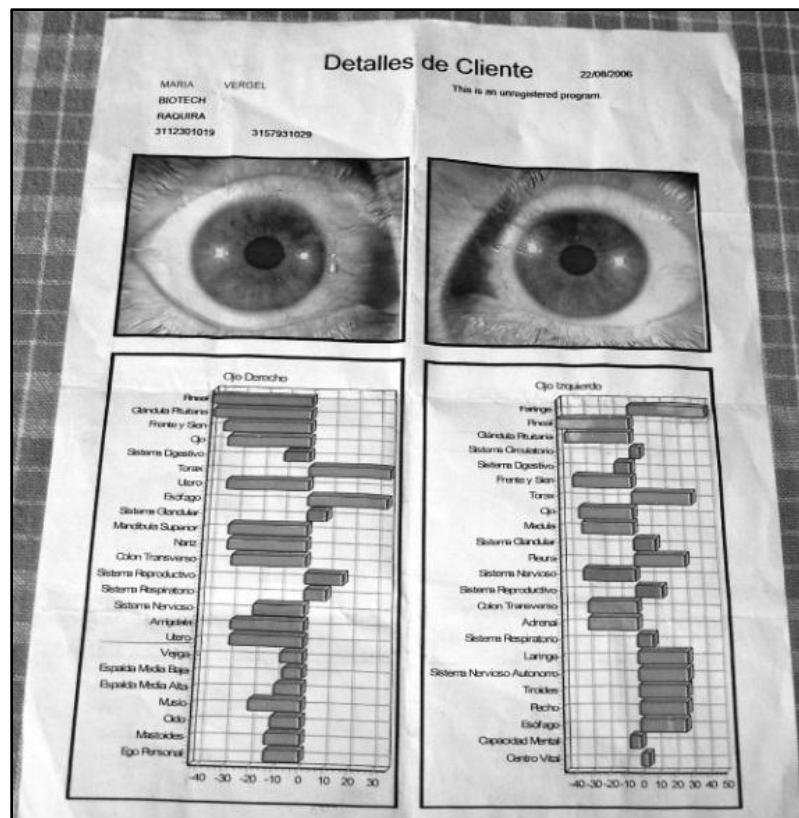


Figure 10. The anatomy of potters’ envy as shown by the eye test exam.

During my fieldwork, I saw two of these documents and got permission to photograph one. Many of the potters are illiterate, and the ones who knew how to read and write did not feel confident enough to interpret the results by themselves. This is how I found out about the doctor, the machine and the test, as I was asked to explain what the documents said. Potters told me that the “doctor” did not give them any further clarification, just the sheet of paper, which he claimed was self-explanatory enough. In all the cases that I knew of, he prescribed the potters multivitamins or fish oil, which he sold to them at outrageously high prices.

For me, the “doctor” and his eye exam were frauds. For the potters, although unable to understand the test results, it was provided proof of their levels of sickness or even confirmation of the risks of living next to envious people like those on the hill. Many potters kept their results on their bedside tables, or somewhere inside their bedroom, alongside identical bottles of multivitamins which rested on top of the refrigerators. These same potters, so cunning and deceiving towards each other, willing to mock the eye photographs of their relatives from their eye tests, comparing them to the look of a “cow,” were meekly paying small fortunes to the eye-machine “doctor” who was, in a way, revealing to them, the anatomy of their own envy.

Closure: my own anatomy

The (an) anatomy of envy in Aguabuena draws on a visceral experience that goes hand in hand with an exacerbation of the senses. Vision is not the only sense at play. What is also central is the whole body in concert with all the senses, and the complicity of the place. Moreover, a scatological connection pulls together the threads of the lives of potters, while grounding the embodied envy (by means of the awareness of peoples’ presences) and their body performance.

Bodily activities are never private in Aguabuena. Seeing or hearing others washing their bodies, urinating, defecating, or having sex are activities frequently commented upon, from which gossip arises. During my fieldwork, I heard stories of how couples were caught in the middle of the forest having sex or were even seen through the holes in their dormitory walls. While accompanying potters for walks, I also heard the shouts of potters informing

their family members that they were defecating, a situation that unleashed the scatological imagination of those whom I was accompanying.

Several times I walked with potters to high places with the purpose of observing others (see Figure 11). While curling up, sometimes behind a bush or just as a more comfortable way of spending a long time in a single position, I found myself looking at how potters looked at each other. They stared at the world while unveiling the minute details of the life below. They noticed so many things and scanned the figures below and the landscape, moving from the particular to the general, spotting the traces of others and making a complete story out of the scene observed. This perspectival vision made the entire reality below converge in the eye “as to the vanishing point of infinity” (Berger 2008: 9). However, the potters’ power of, to paraphrase Berger, making their own situation was constantly threatened by their awareness of others (enviously) observing them observe.

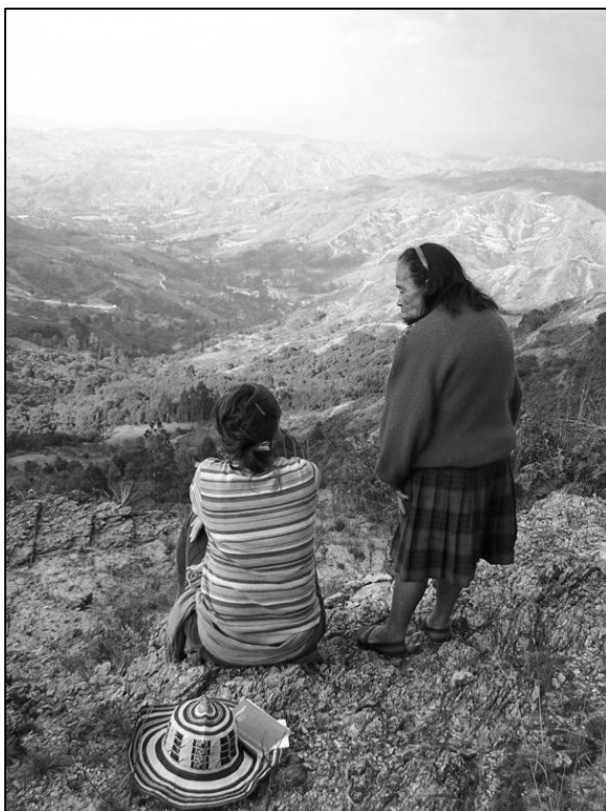


Figure 11. Clotilde and I enjoying the view from a high place. Photo: Jan Grill.

Throughout my stay in Aguabuena, I also became aware of smells, such as dust and different kinds of smoke, as I touched the dryness of the potters’ hands, and felt the entire place in my own body. I tried to resist the dryness by buying moisturising creams for my informants and me, but they did not help. I was often the target of fleas, leaving my skin swollen with red marks, which served as inspiration to the potters to expand on stories about the envious nature of the place. I enjoyed eating chilli pepper with meals not just because of the taste, but also because it helped to prevent

the envy of my host families.

Like the potters, I constantly felt exposed to others. On many occasions people told me where I had been or whom I had visited, hinting at how they had seen me from a distance. Going to the toilet or taking showers became one of my deepest concerns, especially when I was staying at places where there were no bathrooms or proper latrines. And the answer of my hosts, which was always the same, *tranquila que aquí nadie mira*, don't worry, here no one looks, just increased my anxieties. I experienced the interconnectedness of Aguabuena people enmeshed in a cluster of bodily traces via my own senses, and moreover, I felt how my own anatomy was starting to be part of the potters' corporal entanglements.

Chapter 4

Assembling Relations in the World of Craft

Armaz, to assemble, is how Aguabuena potters refer to the task they perform daily: making pots. It is the first step in the process through which a vessel comes into being, joining persons, materials, movements and rhythmic repetitions of body gestures (cf. Ingold 2001: 345). Phrases like *camine vamos a armar*, let us go to assemble, or *hoy necesito armar diez vasijas*, today I must assemble ten vessels, were common ways of starting the day at potters' workshops. Assembling is a process performed with the hands, and also, at some stages, with feet and does not involve the use of any mould or electric wheel. It consists of piecing together coils, called *chutacos*, shaping a complete vessel by joining the *chutacos*, simultaneously erasing the traces of their junctures, smoothening the interior and exterior of the vessel with the hand. It implies therefore a special relationship with the material, the clay (cf. Bunn 1999). Although the movements through which assembling is executed are the same, every potter has their own way of doing it, which becomes a personal imprint of the potter on the pot and is often used to identify the authorship of a pot in workshops where there are several family members working together (see Chapter 3).

"Assembling is like writing, inscribing, but instead of using a pencil and a paper you use your fingers and clay," I thought during my first session as a pottery-making apprentice as I saw Yolanda's right hand assembling while moving in a very similar way to when people write. Her left hand was firmly holding what her right hand was actively shaping. Although my own bodily praxis and intellectual work made me recall writing as the best metaphor to think about assembling, this relationship between assembling and inscribing/writing was also suggested one day by Clotilde, as she passed by Yolanda's workshop and saw me assembling a vessel. She remarked how good assembling was in helping me to *soltar la mano*, make the hand loose, for the purpose of my writing. Like her, many other Aguabuena potters often saw me writing field notes and therefore rightly believed that my way of making a living was related to writing. It that first day of apprenticeship it also struck me that assembling also implied erasing the lines left by the junctures of the coiling of the *chutacos*, and in that way erased the marks of the construction process (see Figures 12 and 13). Such an act of effacement made me think of potters' deceiving manners to one

another and to other people (cf. Chapter 3) and triggered in my imagination the thought of a pot being an artifice (cf. Herzfeld 2004). Alongside these, what also fascinated me was that assembling involved shaping a malleable material which later on after firing, became an imperishable object, materialising the anatomy and body gestures of potters (Castellanos 2007).



Figure 12. *Armando*, assembling a pot.



Figure 13. The hand erases the lines of the junctures.

I would like to argue, however, that assembling is a process that transcends the locus of the activity of “making” itself, taking place beyond potters’ workshops. As much as it describes a bodily praxis and bodily engagement with materials, it can also convey a relationality between potters and people participating in and influencing the world of craft.⁶⁷ Hence, assembling not only describes a special relationship between artisans and the material world, but also brings to the fore relationships between potters and middlemen, between middlemen and Aguabuena vessels, and between clients and the state officials. The pots of Aguabuena are known as rustic vessels because of the assembling process through which they are manufactured. This recognition makes middlemen from different parts of Colombia or even from neighbouring countries come to the hill to buy pots and then advertise the vessels among their clients as good quality products. In the same way, state institutions promote Aguabuena pots inside

⁶⁷Inspired by Venkatesan (2009), I understand “world of craft” as a field in which not only potters, but also institutions (state or private) related to the commerce or promotion of handcrafts, middlemen and consumers are enmeshed.

and outside Colombia via their rustic quality, seen as representing a folk tradition of pre-Hispanic roots. However, this same rustic quality is also turned into a negative and low aesthetic value when comparing Aguabuena pots with handcrafts within the market of culturally-valued objects consumed by elites. Moreover, it is by this same means of assembling that potters often deceive middlemen, giving them broken or *güire*, raw, badly fired pots,⁶⁸ and in turn middlemen mislead clients by selling them bad quality vessels. Hence, potters, middlemen, craft buyers and state officials assemble their own ways of relating through pots, using contrasting discourses around the category of being “rustic.”

Rather than presenting the act of assembling simply as a process exclusively addressing pots and potters’ relationships, it is possible to render it a relevant category to address the ways in which different actors relate to pots, offering an alternative point of departure to contribute to discussions on artisans and crafts in general.⁶⁹ Moreover, borrowing from potters the concept of assembling as a lens to look into contrasting and multivalent articulations, and the agency interconnecting people and things, it constitutes an analytical choice that allows me to highlight the role of other actors, like middlemen, and the way they also contribute to shaping the larger landscape of the circulation and consumption of Aguabuena pottery. Finally, Aguabuena and its world of craft bring to consideration other aspects of envy at work, whilst expanding the analysis by means of elements which are related to envy and yet are not reducible to envy. In this way, assembling is a key device to complement my exploration on envy, as much as the connection between envy and assembling is a fruitful relationship to explore further both theoretically and ethnographically (see Conclusion).

Assembling relationships between pots and potters

Armar is a standardised procedure performed in the very same way by all potters and on all types of vessels. Potters follow standard rules of shaping their objects and there are a limited number of types (with slight variations from workshop to workshop) that all are

⁶⁸When a pot is badly assembled, it is likely to have *chitiaduras*, fractures, that sometimes follow old erased *chutacos*’ jointures.

⁶⁹These thoughts resonate alongside other authors’ ideas, such as Herzfeld’s argument on artisan/artificers’ artifices (2004) or Venkatesan’s exploration on the heterotopia of “traditional Indian craft” (2009).

capable of making. Looked on as a whole, and compared to the remainder of pottery made by other artisans from rural areas of Ráquira or Colombia in general, Aguabuena pottery constitutes a uniform group recognisable for its style and ceramic technology. This type of pottery is called by potters, middlemen and state officials dealing with crafts, *loza rústica*, rustic craft (cf. Introduction).

Despite this uniformity in manufacture and product, pots have important differences that make them stand as unique and individual objects. Pots are characterised by bodies that have different shapes and ways of performing movements and gestures (just think about the whole variety of shapes of hands). The size of certain types of vessels, theoretically uniform across workshops vary, depending on the amount of clay potters use. This amount is never scaled but is yet standardised through measurement categories such as *lo que los dedos alcanzan a pellizcar del barro*, whatever the fingers are able to pinch from a lump of clay. These anatomical differences are well recognised by potters themselves and by middlemen, most of whom are also potters. For example, the general shape of a pot or, in a more detailed way, the form of the *bordo*, rim, or the *oreja*, handle (if they have it), are some of the anatomical details of the pot on which the anatomy of the potter is imprinted as they reflect the movement of the fingers and their length and width. Additionally, what contributes to this variety within standardised vessel forms is the character of the clay, which has agency independent from potters (see Chapter 1).

The following narrative, recorded at Flor's workshop, depicts the relationship between a pot's style and the potter's anatomy:

Here we all do the same craft. Though it is the same, it is also different. Everyone has their own style. The pots I make will never be the same as the ones that my brother makes, though we both saw it (learned it) from our mother. We make pots in the same way, yet our pots are always different. Let's say my brother and I make the same type of pot. Well, in the end it will not be the same pot as his is higher and mine is wider. Everyone has his own manner. His hands are thicker than mine. I have thin fingers. He is taller, I am smaller and chubbier. You start by making the base of the pot, so the pot can sit. After assembling a pot, it needs then some peace, and some rest. You also must allow it to cool down (...) as it keeps the heat from one's body, and also the sweat, so you'd better leave it so it rests and

your heat will come out from it. That is the only way in which you can continue crafting and finish the vessel.

Thus, Aguabuena pots become copies, or utterances of potters' bodies, like sizes of body parts and body traces. They are an extension of the potter's body, in a way, its mould. A pot turns out to be a trace of its creator, or as Helí Valero said, *su huella dactilar*, its fingerprint. Moreover, while assembling potters' "fingerprints," artisans' performances upon pots do not undermine the skill of the artisans and provide Aguabuena with a formal scale conveying hierarchies of assembling and rusticity, differentiating workshops and potters.

The following monologue by Clotilde shows how specific objects and practices become anchors for narratives about identity (cf. Armstrong-Fumero 2011: 63). Also, it shows how differences among the potters themselves are made by means of assembling. The narrative brings into the picture the official discourses and how they come into play in local discourses on craft.

The Government does not want this craft to end. The new generations, they just want to do what's easier for them. They don't want to learn how to assemble or to make a big effort. No one from here wants to continue doing what I do. They just want easy money. They do not have the patience or the intelligence to make the craft like once upon a time our parents and grandparents taught us. But fortunately the Government and other nations do not want this to finish. Even the patrón (the main middleman of Ráquira), he wants us to keep on doing crafts as we do. They (the Government) are paying people to get trained. The other day a group of people from Tolima (a region of Colombia) came to my workshop and they observed me working. I taught a few of them how to make pots the way I do. In this craft you have to kneel and get dirty and your hair gets dirty as well, your hands, your face, and your whole body (she signalled her genitalia). It's not like in other workshops were people just sit on a chair and they do not have to kneel, and they are clean and with a nice hairstyle.

Clotilde often questioned the ways of assembling performed by younger generations of potters, emphasising her greater skills as recognised by the state and middlemen. As much as she criticised other potters for assembling badly, younger artisans also criticised her using the same claims. For example, Marina portrayed the old lady's work as backward and

talked about Clotilde as a “rustic” person. She judged Clotilde’s craft to be “ugly” saying that *así como tiene de fea la jeta tiene las ollas*, her craft is as ugly as she has her face, establishing an anatomical parallel between a pot’s shape and a potter’s face.

However, as much as pots embody their artificer, both the material and the craft have an agency independent from the artisan’s life that makes the clay and the pot affect the potter as much as the latter affects them. Hence, the relationship of the creator with its creation is a blurred one, as both the creator and creation hold exchangeable positions.⁷⁰ Within this scenario of exchangeable positions, the potter occupies a more vulnerable place than the pot itself, as there is a tyrannical agency operating from the pot towards its potter, imposing work obligations and time constraints. For example, while being shaped, a pot cannot be left without attention or it will turn into a stiff object, impossible to be worked on. *Dan guerra*, they make you struggle, a potter would say about their pots, meaning that they intentionally cause trouble as if they were resisting its assembler.

Armar and also other steps involved in crafting a vessel need to be done in *buen tiempo*, with good timing. The clay should be “not too soft, not too hard” as potters say. Those potters who interrupt their work due to medical conditions, short trips or “too many parties,” always emphasise how difficult it is to return to the crafting. The following narrative of Teresa Valero touches upon these aspects:

When you start a pot, you need to complete it before leaving it aside. Some people think that after shaping a vessel, because you see the pot shaped, then you can leave it for some

⁷⁰Following a phenomenological approach, some authors emphasised the relations between the experiences and meanings of work, understood as an embodied activity as well as the intersubjective relations which humans establish with things or materials (cf. Leitch 1996, 2010; Jackson 2002). The study of miners played an important role within this field. Nash (1979) and Leicht (1996), for example, explored different ethnographic cases of how miners talked about their work and their relation to the mines, mountains and materials they extract, and used anthropomorphic metaphors in discourse concerning their work and how these elements connect to ideas of personhood, sex, gender, and skill. Similarly, Jackson in his essay “On the Work of Humans’ Hands” asked about the lived relationship between miners, the material and anthropomorphic images (2002: 69) and developed – following Marx’s ideas on the nature of ownership – a notion of labour as an experience of intersubjective relationship that simultaneously transforms both the object worked and the worker himself (2002: 71).

My approach to the intersubjective relationship between materials or objects and the potter tackles, among others, anthropomorphic images displayed in potters’ work narratives. My main concern lies in the artificiality of their language, which I find paradoxical, and the imprinted envy on their fabricated world. It is this oscillatory rapport to materiality, from empowering to submissive, that is the subject of my exploration.

time before scratching⁷¹ it. This is wrong. You assemble it, then you dry it, and later you scratch it, this is how things need to be done. After doing this, you can then put it aside and finally take some rest at least for a while, or until the *hornada* is ready. Everything has to be done in proper time. This is a must in our craft. You may not leave the pot unattended. Otherwise, the material or even the pot will not allow you to assemble it. Marina, for example, loves partying. Every now and then she goes to the village and then she leaves her craft alone. It could be raining, or stormy. It doesn't matter, that woman goes to the village, sometimes on foot. Then, when she fires the pots, some of them break and she blames the kiln-man who helped her, or the clay they sold her, and does not think that it is her own fault for leaving her crafts alone for so long.

In the same way as when being crafted, pots need to be looked after once the firing is done to prevent any breakage or damage.⁷² Once fired, pots are piled according to their type and size in a corner of the workshop. From this moment, the pots are said by the potters to *esperar*, wait, alongside them for the middleman to collect them. In their wait, pots also *envejecen*, age. The wait is an active stage for both potters and pots. Potters ignore the precise time when their pots will be picked, and so they continue working, and crafting more vessels to complete a new *hornada*. The new *hornada* is fired and then stored next to the previous one, regardless of the fact that the workshop could already be filled with objects.

Moreover, while waiting, vessels stored in the workshop became a sign of the passage of time, and also of the surrounding envy. Thus, having too many pots at a workshop had for potters a twofold explanation. On the one hand, it was seen as others' envy, acting as a force preventing outsiders to reach potters. On the other hand, it related to the envy of

⁷¹*Raspar*, scratching, is the final stage of the crafting process prior to firing. The technical term to describe the action would be scraping, but potters literally refer to it as to scratching. Interestingly, scratching gives the vessel a coarse look due to the stripes left by tiny stones and quartz from the sand, which, while being removed, leaves traces on the clay. This step reinforces the rustic character of the craft.

⁷²Not even a raw pot that is finished can be dismissed as it will need to be fired soon. Wind, rain, or heat can cause unexpected *chitiaduras*, small fractures, in the walls of a raw vessel, so the risk of loss even at this stage is very high. Whilst being fired, pots are also vulnerable to other kinds of risks related to drastic temperature changes inside the kiln and the quality of the clay. But these difficulties do not only have a technical source as there is a whole social realm surrounding explanations for the loss of pots. For example, the skill of the kiln-man is questioned as much as the skills of the potter. In the case of the former, the firing is considered to be a test of manhood and pride for a kiln man, as the firing process is understood in terms of a struggle between a man and a "beast", the kiln. In the struggle the kiln-man is expected to successfully "tame" the kiln whilst systematically "nurturing" its heat over a period of 36 hours.

people, who compulsively crafted vessels. As much as this second explanation could be taken as ambition, potters explicitly referred to envy, believing it to be an inner force that constrained people's own actions and lives. Marina's words below expand on these ideas touching upon the reciprocal invigilation of potters (see Chapter 3).

People are delighted to see my workshop full of pots, whenever they pass next to mine (workshop), they don't know how to look inside, enlarging their pescuezo⁷³ (neck) and even taking out their eyes from their face just to see how many pots there are (...). One of these days I will surprise them. I will pretend to go to the village. As they see me going, I will hide in the curve of the road. I will go back to my house by a different path. I will climb higher so as to see them from above and catch them while they are inspecting my things. That day I will laugh at them so much, as much as they think they are laughing at me now. Whenever I come back from the village, I always see traces of steps coming from the road into my workshop. I can't stand this any longer! They are so glad and proud because they think they are preventing all the middlemen from coming to my workshop. They think they'll screw me. My "beautiful" nephew (she was being ironic) is one of the ones that told the Ecuatoriano⁷⁴ not to stop by my workshop, not even to look from the window of his truck. Whenever they pass uphill in their truck, they even speed up not to let him see. I have all these pots because they are envious (...) What they don't know is that in the meantime I will try to make as much hornadas as I can so maybe when they run out of pots, I will have so many that the middlemen will have no other choice but to come and get them from me!

Carmen and Hector they don't go anywhere, all day long, every day of the year and every year they are just assembling pots. Envy does not let them go anywhere. They never stop working, not even on Sundays. They think that if they stop, they will lose money. They rarely go out and if they do, they leave their son in charge, crafting pots. They just want to have their workshop full of pots all the time. They don't enjoy leisure or family life. What kind of life can a person have if they are always assembling (pots) and only stop to take a shit and hurry back again because in that second that is lost they could have made another vuelta (coil) or could have glued a handle or made the rim?

⁷³The long neck of chickens and hens and also of people.

⁷⁴Nickname of one of the middlemen coming to Aguabuena who is from Ecuador and who distributes the pots in that country.

Despite the risks that piles of pots in the workshops represent in terms of being a sign of envy, potters like to see their workshops full of pots, because as they say: “You never know when somebody will show up to buy or take some vessels.” They like to picture the rather implausible possibility of selling all their pots of accumulated *hornadas* in a single day. Their imagination is also nourished by the alternative possibility of getting an occasional client, for example a tourist, who would take a small number of pots, followed by visits by other tourists that liked their first purchase, who would also buy more vessels. In either case, they need to *estar preparados*, be prepared.

The waiting pots also stand for potential money upon which potters craft dreams or contest their relation to the middlemen, as the following narration by Helí Valero shows:

At the moment (December 2009) I have here with me six million Colombian pesos (£ 2,000) roughly speaking. But I’m not selling. This business is once again going down. Usually October and November used to be good months, like March and April. But this year has been different. I’m still waiting for someone to appear on the road asking for my crafts, someone willing to buy my goods, but no one has come so far. It’s been like this for several months. You see now I’m living on illusions, waiting for someone to appear while I’m still making pots and that is how time is passing by... but (there is) nothing. I’ll finish the clay I’ve got, will make this last firing and then I’ll see what path to follow (...) For the moment I’m rich, but in clay and pots that are accumulating dust! However, I’d rather see my goods here in my workshop than to give them to the middlemen without any payment and see how they fly away from me. Once I told to one of these guys that I preferred to sit on my craft and start crying about my misery than calling out to him so he’d pay me my money.

Helí’s narrative adds a paradoxical turn to the waiting and circulation of pots. While waiting is both risky for pots and potters, movement of objects endangers potters’ lives due to the exploitative character of relations with middlemen.

On the other hand, most potters see their craft as empowering, as it allows them to be the owners of their workshop and of their outputs. For potters (especially men) this is the crucial difference between ceramic craft and other types of physical jobs performed in the area, for example, mining, harvesting potatoes, tomatoes or onions, or even other ceramic

production systems outside Aguabuena, mainly the more industrial pottery-making found in Ráquira. The hill is a place of *reyes pobres*, poor kings, as heard in a *carranga*⁷⁵ song, which was popular among potters at the time of my fieldwork. They are kings, but their sovereignty is questioned by the tyranny of their material world. Mono expressed that to me one afternoon in his workshop.

In this craft I own my own work and time, if today I don't want to do anything, no one can say a thing to me, I am my own boss, I don't have any other boss and I don't have a schedule (...) Besides, for me, this is not proper work but it is more a *mamadera de gallo*, mockery. Hard work is what those ladies harvesting potatoes do, those who plant onions, all day long these poor ladies cope with all the sun rays and kneel, getting a very low payment. One of these days I'll take you to the valley where they always work, so you can see their knees full of calluses and their hands almost destroyed. But this here, this is not work, besides, here you have to keep on learning new things, doing new shapes, new vessels, to put it another way, studying.

The ease of pottery making claimed by Mono and some other young males, who, before becoming potters, worked as miners or farmers, is contested by women, always anchored at home. They are mainly responsible for ceramic production, and for them ceramics is often seen as a hard job, a craft which *acaba a la persona*, finishes a person (see Introduction). Yolanda, in her early twenties, married and with two children, was working at the time of my fieldwork in Mono's workshop. Listening to Mono from a corner where she sat, she rejected his version, saying the following:

You cannot say this, Mono. Pottery-making is a very tough thing to do, you are not taking into account that one needs to wake up very early, make breakfast and lunch for the children and husband, send the kids to school, come to work, make pots all day and then at night wash clothes (done by hand in Aguabuena), prepare dinner, clean the house. We work like beasts!

Mono and Yolanda disagreed and, a few days after, talking behind Mono's back about his lack of care towards his pots and work, Yolanda said:

⁷⁵See footnote number 27.

Sometimes Mono acts as if he doesn't care at all about his craft. One day he preferred to go hunting for armadillo and left the kiln (unattended) and so the pots ended up being güires, raw. When he deshornó, took the pots out of the kiln, he found out that all were chitiadas, fractured or broken. Only a few survived. He had to sell them as second-hand crafts (this is how pots with defects are referred to). That day that man was laughing so loud, yelling, oh my God, swearing, dancing on the shreds, enjoying as if it was so funny that he lost all his work and his family's work too, the work of one month and half. If that happened to me, I would be lamenting and crying instead of mocking. You can't leave the kiln or the pots whenever you want, you must keep on watching them all the time.

This preference for not stopping crafting pots on a regular basis sometimes forces potters to borrow the materials or the money to buy them, disregarding the fluxes of the market. The rainy season (March to April and September to November) is said to be the time when the middlemen collect the highest number of vessels. Potters explain this by referring to how people prefer the wet season to plant plants. The rest of the year, middlemen come more randomly, sometimes even unexpectedly. However, potters' vague interest in the local crafts market contrasts with their explicit curiosity related to macro-economics. Potters are keen to follow the news about Free Trade Agreements which the Colombian Government is trying to secure in the arena of international politics, as they see such agreements as increasing the demand for clay objects. Therefore, on the one hand, informed potters speculated about the macro-level of international politics, but were less engaged with the microeconomics of their crafts.

Middlemen and potters

Middlemen collect Aguabuena pots and distribute them across different regions in Colombia and neighbouring countries such as Ecuador or Venezuela. They put Aguabuena crafts into motion. They are seen as a bridge between Aguabuena and the outside world, connecting the potters to craft buyers. This mediation role, highlighted in their self-portrayals (see Chapter 5), place them as connecting agents, indispensable for potters, whilst also grants them power over potters whom they do not pay on time or sometimes do not pay at all. Hence, middleman never pay the agreed price for the pots when they collect them, but just a small percentage, or not even that. The rest of the money (or the entire

amount) will not be given to the potter until the buyer pays the middleman. On many occasions, I witnessed and even mediated (see Chapter 5) fights over money between angry potters and defensive middlemen. Just as frequently, I heard the complaints of middlemen claiming the cunningness of potters who had given them broken or raw vessels.

Thus, middlemen discourses stated their powerless and almost hopeless situation vis-à-vis the clients, equating their position to that of potters. Just like potters, they always had to wait for the clients to pay. Although potters share the idea that clients are responsible for paying both the middlemen and them, they often speculate on how far in advance and how much middlemen are paid. Potters complain referring to the *explotación*, exploitation by the middlemen in the same way that middlemen often grumble about being exploited by their clients. However, the exploitation to which both of them claimed, was characterised by a blurred relationship between the victim and victimiser and therefore undermined the deliberation of the action exerted. It was an oscillating concept disclosing a grey zone of inequality in which powerless characters deceive each other, at times creating alliances against the powerful.

This was the case of Marina, a potter from Aguabuena, and Gonzalo, a potter and middleman living in Ráquira, but born in Aguabuena, who were also cousins. Their complex relationships and the shifting representations of Gonzalo, oscillating between exploitative and benefactive person, are a small window into the ways in which potters and middlemen assemble their relations. Gonzalo collected pots from Marina and distributed them to different clients in western Colombia. On one of his trips, he managed to secure a new client. He gave his phone number to this new customer, as well as Marina's number in case his phone stopped working (a frequent occurrence due to bad reception or loss). Gonzalo called his cousin to notify her about the man's possible call. He advised her to give the man, in case he asked, a higher price than the one both cousins agreed for the value of her pots. And just as Gonzalo anticipated, the man called Marina trying to find out if Gonzalo was inflating the prices of the vessels. Marina followed Gonzalo's advice, fearing that if she did not do as he said, he would stop buying from her workshop. However, the man decided to hire a truck and go to Aguabuena himself "to buy from the producers directly" as he told me one afternoon when I was interviewing him in his hotel room in

Ráquira. On his first visit to this part of the country, he used Gonzalo to make contacts with Aguabuena potters. He visited several workshops, to which Gonzalo took him, including Gonzalo's own workshop and the one of his cousin Marina. The client chose what he wanted to buy. Marina suggested to him that she could replace Gonzalo and advise him against the tricks of other potters, who would try to take advantage of his ignorance on the *cosas del oficio*, craft matter. In the meantime, she went to visit Gonzalo to claim the money that he still owed her from previous trips. I went with her. Sitting at his dining table, after a late lunch, Gonzalo told her that he was deliberately making the man wait before giving him the pots. Additionally, he said that he would give him mostly broken pots. He explained that by making him wait longer, the middleman would have to spend more on accommodation and travel expenses, and in the end, the profit that he thought he would get by coming directly himself would not be as big. Both Marina and Gonzalo laughed, cheering the alliance of the *pobres*, poor ones. Later on, during a second visit by the man, Marina replaced Gonzalo and started making deals with other potters, mediating between them and the man. She bought pots from her neighbours or relatives and then sold them to him as if they were hers, at a higher price.

As the story demonstrates, in Aguabuena the role of the potter, middleman, and client are continuously changing. A potter can turn into a middleman negotiating deals on behalf of other potters, or even become a client by paying money to a relative for pots in order to re-sell them (such fluidity and changing directionalities of social relations are explored further in Chapter 6). In the same way, some middlemen, specifically the ones who come from Ráquira, are also potters, although their workshops are more industrial than the ones in Aguabuena. The lives of potters and middlemen are intertwined in various ways and they do not relate only through commercial exchanges: they have kin and *compadrazgo* relations, as well as sexual and affective interactions. Stories of love and sex between potter women and middlemen are often celebrated and praised as a sign of the craftiness of both sides (see Gafa's story in Chapter 5).

Just as there is ferocious competition among potters to acquire middlemen and to prevent them from making deals with other potters, middlemen also experience conflict and constant struggles to secure or steal clients from one another. These conflicts are often

phrased in terms of envy, although they are not reduced simply to that. Stories about middlemen visiting the same clients, giving them lower prices or broken pots, or postponing their repayments are often the subject of gossip on the hill and are perceived as proof of greed, ambition, and also of middlemen's envy. Driven by envy, middlemen are said to deceive clients and delude other middlemen. Moreover, middlemen born in Aguabuena like Gonzalo or Agustin (who is Marina's brother) often blamed the craftiness of potters, relating it to Aguabuena peoples' envy. "Potters often try to deceive me by giving me old and broken pots that I then have to resell at half price. I'm always watchful when I make deals with them, otherwise their envy can end up screwing me too," said Agustin one afternoon when I visited him at his workshop in Ráquira.

On the other hand, the clients of middlemen are mainly the owners of flower shops or nurseries across Colombia, where plants and flower vessels are displayed. Others are food shops owners at food markets where pots are advertised as cooking-ware. Moreover, these clients resell the pots to final buyers who purchase small number of vessels at these shops. In the numerous visits which middlemen pay to their clients, pots are advertised as *vasijas armadas*, assembled pots or *objetos rústicos*, rustic objects, and therefore promoted as special vessels, distinctive from other clay objects of its type. Repeating what potters often tell middlemen at their workshops, middlemen tell their clients that the *assembling* of coils guarantees the vessel – and for whatever it contains (liquids, plants or food) – will last longer. Also, clients engage with this discourse, promoting Aguabuena pots as *objetos armados que preservan por más tiempo y mejor*, assembled goods, lasting longer and in a better way, with better taste in the case of cooking pots, or life for flowerpots.

State relationships to pots

Aguabuena crafts are highly valued by officials at the municipality of Ráquira, and some Colombian institutions dealing with the promotion of handicrafts and their commerce, such as Artesanías de Colombia, an institution that since the mid-twentieth century has been conducting development programmes among artisans from the entire Ráquira and its rural

districts.⁷⁶ For official authorities (municipal civil servants and officials from Artesanías), the pots made in the hill represent a cultural heritage rooted in a pre-Hispanic past and its archaeological record,⁷⁷ which is portrayed as a source of regional pride and even advertised on the municipal website as a tourist attraction. Pictured as a souvenir from the past in the official discourse, Aguabuena potters become guardians of a tradition represented in their way of crafting vessels or their assembling techniques. However, such pride also creates a risk for the people inhabiting the area. Programmes to implement environmentally-friendly firing techniques and improve potters' health have been launched by the municipality with the support of the national government and international organisations. Aguabuena potters are under pressure to stop using local kilns and have been obliged to avoid firing during the weekends, as the smoke and pollution are seen as preventing tourists from visiting the village. "Tradition" is thus seen as a risk, something that endangers the well-being of the inhabitants of Aguabuena and Ráquira at large. Hence, discourses on tradition employed by municipal authorities or officials from Artesanías are far from consistent.

Parallel to such environmental policies, Artesanías officials have tried to raise the standards of Aguabuena crafts and Ráquira ceramics in general, making potters follow international handcraft procedures of quality and design. As a result, programmes run by professionals in the field of industrial design and management were implemented, and international consultants from Japan and China visited the area, encouraging potters to create cooperatives and become more active in the field of international handcraft commerce as well as to embrace environmentally-friendly firing techniques.

Aguabuena artisans, however, have not fully engaged in these programmes as the officials expected, partly because of the threats of some middlemen. Since they also have workshops in the village, they also benefitted from Artesanías programmes, partly because of the

⁷⁶*Artesanías de Colombia* is a semi-private semi-governmental institution in charge of the promotion and commerce of Colombian handcrafts. One of its main roles is to create and maintain a network of artisans, and to legally advise them on matters such as exporting handcrafts. To a certain extent, it was the *Artesanías*' presence in Ráquira which made the region visible, legitimising it as a key place in ceramic production, reviving the label of *pueblo de olleros*, potters' village, that was given to the region in the 18th century.

⁷⁷Stylistic and technological similarities were established between the "lozarústica" and the archaeological ceramics manufactured in the colonial and late conquest periods (cf. Broadbent 1974; Falchetti 1974; Therrien 1991).

mistrust that characterises relations between state and non-state officials and potters. Many municipality officials, including the mayor, are potters themselves with workshops in the village, while others are middlemen, or have close relationships with them. Potters blame these officials for being envious, “always seeking their own interests” and “being against the powerless.” “We (potters) have always been bearing the difficulties of this craft, undermined by the government and the middlemen, begging for what is ours. If only we were united, we could stand stronger in front of them and overcome these (difficulties),” said Helí to me on one occasion. Puzzled by his self-critique, I asked him what was the factor preventing potters from being united, to which he replied: “Unity is one thing we lack and we will never achieve it because we are a bunch of *envidiosos*, envious ones.”

Potters’ envy also appeared to be an important factor impeding the cooperative initiative launched by Artesanías. At the beginning of 2000, potters founded their own cooperative called AsoAguabuena with a small grant given by the national government. The association founded by 16 members, elected a president, a secretary, and a treasurer as main leaders of the cooperative. The president was a progressive and ambitious woman interested in politics, born in Aguabuena but living in the village, whose father, Manuel, worked in the Artesanías centre until he retired. The other two leaders were artisans living on the hill. The cooperative functioned as such for less than a year until its members started to drop out, partly because of the monthly instalment payments involved as there were rumours that the money was actually being used by the president for her own benefit. Other people argued that the cooperative was not making any money for them and so they did not want to pay for a service that they were not receiving.

In 2009, potters threatened to take legal action against the president and her parents. AsoAguabuena’s secretary, Marina, took the initiative and accused the president of stealing money and receiving state benefits on behalf of the association. The president responded that she would sue the members for not following the rules of the association as they owed the *cooperativa* several million COP of unpaid instalments since the foundation of AsoAguabuena. No legal action was taken by either side; only threats were exchanged. The confrontation ended in a violent physical fight between the president and the secretary one Sunday afternoon in Ráquira. As the people were cheering, I heard somebody saying:

“Envy flies here.” There was no doubt for the potters that envy was the reason why the *cooperativismo* programmes launched by the government and implemented or inspired by Artesanías de Colombia had failed.⁷⁸

On rustic assemblages

Aguabuena crafts and their national recognition as rustic objects convey an important aspect of the agency of both the artisans and their vessels. Moreover, they influence the relationships between artisans and middlemen, as well as middlemen and clients. As I have shown, potters differentiate between themselves according to the degrees of rusticity of their craft. Middlemen also acknowledge the rustic nature of Aguabuena pots as their foremost quality, and involve the buyers of crafts in the recognition of pots as assembled objects. State officials, on the other hand, praise this rustic style as traditional whilst also combating the environmental and health risks that such “tradition” entails. Thus, rustic becomes an assemblage in itself, standing for the technology, aesthetics, position, practices (good and bad) and value (high and low) of handicrafts and craftsmen on different scales, ranging from the local to global.

Rustic has an ambivalent meaning, placing Aguabuena pots as objects between values of *tradicional*, traditional and *burdo*, rough, between handcraft and ordinary objects. Thus, while for state officials the vessels from the hill embrace the past, perpetuating a pre-Hispanic knowledge, consumers deny a high cultural value to these objects and see them as merely *materas*, flower vessels and never *artesanías*, handicrafts. Potters and middlemen are placed between these extremes, valuing rustic as oscillating between tradition and roughness, without interpreting them as mutually exclusive or contradictory terms. In this sense, for both potters and middlemen vessels are *materas* and *artesanías*.

The following example points to this ambivalence in which Aguabuena pots are located. While in the field, I tried to help Marina find an alternative to middlemen as a way of

⁷⁸In his inspiring study of Cretan artisans, Herzfeld (2004) points out how the lack of cooperation and the individualism of the craftsmen also serves the State in shaping an image of the authenticity and originality of Greek products and the Greek nation, in comparison to the industrialised handicrafts of Asian countries. The nonexistent cooperative artisanship is nationally celebrated as a mechanism whereby state officials reinforce their own position within the “global hierarchy of value” (2004: 168).

distributing her crafts. I designed a catalogue of her pots with colourful labels and wrote a short story about the woman who made them, outlining the manufacture techniques employed, linking these techniques to pre-Hispanic modes of production (as the official discourse does). I went to Bogotá and contacted the owners of a few handcraft shops located in shopping malls and tried to promote these goods as “handcrafts.” Despite my efforts, none of the owners were willing to accept the vessels. They judged them to be cheap and with no taste, in no way comparable to the fine pottery produced in Peru, Bolivia or other parts of Colombia. They advised me to go to downtown where some nurseries were located or try the food markets of different Bogotá neighbourhoods. For them the rustic quality of the crafts was also an aspect of their low aesthetic value.⁷⁹

In the context of the quality of being rustic and its different values, Aguabuena people are communities located amid cultural heritage and backwardness. On the one hand, they are *orgullosos artesanos salvaguardas del pasado*, proud artisans and the guardians of tradition, according to the national discourse employed by institutions like Artesanías, and on the other hand, they are self-empowered persons by means of the skills they know or by owning their labour force and outputs, as exemplified in Clotilde and Mono’s narratives. At the same time, this privileged position also transforms them into low-wage workers entrapped in craft-making as their way of securing a living (as young artisans often referred to their work), which they would gladly change for other type of activity.

This rustic imprint of Aguabuena craft, a sign of its distinctiveness, both in a whole universe of ceramic crafts and within the microcosm of Aguabuena pottery, is first and foremost a sign of its marginality. As state officials try to legitimise Aguabuena pots as national handcrafts, elevating their symbolic and economic status, pots’ rustic value becomes redefined within the handcraft market, becoming a double-edged sword, reinforcing their character of ordinary objects and products of a non environmentally-friendly technology. The local politics of the place, interestingly, constitutes an additional feature of this “assemblage,” where Aguabuena potters are governed by more powerful Ráquira potters or middlemen, some of whom are also local politicians or civil servants.

⁷⁹In March 2011, after giving a paper at a seminar I was exposed to the same assumption (handcraft as a luxurious or high aesthetic value good) by one of the professors attending the seminar, who was surprised at the ugliness of the objects which I was (daringly) calling handcrafts!

Within this context, the oscillation between modern and traditional, addressed by scholars working on craft communities, is an important point to consider. Often, potter communities have been represented as isolated and static communities, survivors and repositories of tradition (cf. Mora de Jaramillo 1974, Vasco 1987). Through this lens, crafts have been portrayed as nationalised and commodified folklore phenomena, symbolising ancient skills and knowledge. As Herzfeld (2004) points out, this process created a no-win situation, exalting artisans as repositories of the national past while also marginalising them through the very same logic of othering and denial of coevalness (Fabian 1993, Carrier 1995). Within this scenario the category of traditional craft coincides with a “deliberate [task of] bringing marginalized people and things to the centre of social space, re-creating them as valued objects of attention”, a process that Venkatesan, following Foucault, labelled “heterotopia” (2009: 78).⁸⁰

The category of rustic in Aguabuena leads us to reconsider the shifting status of Aguabuena objects as they circulate through different actors and spheres interrelated in this world of craft. Hence, the rustic quality condenses different values and aesthetics, desires and affects, bringing pots and potters to the centre of the nation whilst simultaneously excluding them.⁸¹ As a category, the rustic becomes a currency across different settings. For example, outside Aguabuena and far from the influence of middlemen, the rustic value of pots is the factor delegitimising the symbolic prestige of Aguabuena handmade vessels, which also renders their artificers invisible.⁸² Additionally, what further contributes to the

⁸⁰ “Foucault defines the heterotopia as a space in which to socially realize utopia, which is an ‘imagined perfect place or state of things’” (Venkatesan 2009: 78).

⁸¹ *Artesanías de Colombia* officially recognises the status of a craftsman by issuing “Artisan ID cards” to its members and by certifying their different crafts with a “guarantee label”, standing for “excellence”, “good design”, “long lasting materials,” among other formal criteria which fit the standards of industrial design and internationally high quality products. It also promotes the qualification of artisans by organising seminars and courses related to technological improvements, new designs, accounting, business portfolios, and legal advice on how to export. The institution works with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, designing, implementing and articulating policies and programmes dealing with new and sustainable means of increasing incomes to Colombian citizens by promoting the economic and cultural value of handicrafts within the nation and abroad while trying to transform the sector of handicrafts as a leading sector within the Colombian economy. The institution runs several craft shops as well as organising national handcraft fairs in Colombia and abroad as well as awarding a prize called *Medalla a la Maestría Artesanal*, Medal for the Mastery of Crafts, among other prizes and recognitions. Although Artesanías has a strong influence in Ráquira, Aguabuena potters are not engaged in the programmes or activities run by them.

⁸² This case is a reverse of the one discussed by Venkatesan about Indian mat weavers. Pattamadai artisans moved from mat weaving to traditional craft production, becoming a centre of attention and national pride within a larger field of Indian utopias out of which the craft world is being shaped. The placement of objects

differentiation of the Aguabuena case from other artisan communities (cf. Howes 1996, Chaves and Nova 2012) is the minor role played by tourism in relation to the consumption of Aguabuena crafts. For scholars there is an important relationship between tourism and handcrafts circulation, taking the former as a phenomenon contributing to the activation of handcrafts and their gaining a symbolic and economic value (cf. Howes 1996, Chaves and Nova 2012). Aguabuena pots are, instead, put into motion by middlemen, figures importantly shaping the channels through which these objects are consumed and valued.

Aguabuena potters assemble their own fingerprints, inscribing their shape on rustic and fragile frames that cross different physical and symbolical boundaries. Pots' uniqueness vanishes in their circulation, as they become ordinary objects, *materas*, but also stands stronger as pots are seen as *artesanías*, handcrafts. In this field of tension, both rustic and traditional values acknowledge the assembled nature of pots. Thus, the initial assemblage of potters that begun at their workshop transcends other fields, involving more actors that become a part of this assemblage, taking contrasting or complementary positions. The interactions between Aguabuena potters, pots, middlemen, clients, and state officials "point to inequality, hierarchy, unequal access to resources and the consequent strategic practices of the marginalized" (Venkatesan 2009: 78). Moreover, and within this field of power relations underpinning the world of craft, articulations of different kinds convey a relationality deluding and blurring the tracks of their construction.

moved from the periphery to the centre, by state and non-state elites, contributing to the increase in the prestige and social status of its craftsmen within the Indian nation and the elitist handcraft world. Aguabuena potters experience something different, as their prestige decreases, rendering them invisible, while the rustic value is shifted under the rubric of tradition which these objects represent.

CHAPTER 5

Mirrored Lives and the Ethnography of Deception

During fieldwork, I was constantly surprised by the potters' capacity to tell stories, a capacity very much linked to their visual appetite for the lives of others (cf. Chapter 3). Often, I found myself facing conflicting versions of the same tale or stories about a single person. I felt confused and started to wonder about the veracity of the narrators and the facts they were narrating, as well as about the potters' moral values as expressed in their stories. However, I also felt delighted, thrilled, and moved by the potters' stories, as much by the performances that accompanied them, which engaged the imaginative participation of their listeners.

The expressions and voices of narrators, rising quickly from whisper to dramatic reported speech, together with their body movements, turned fragments of people's lives into entertainment for their audience. Cruelty, violence and a prominent taste for visceral details were mixed with irony as well as humour and elicited laughter among both narrator and listeners, making them complicit in the transformation of someone's life tragedy into a comedy.⁸³

Narratives about potters revolved around the lives of contemporaneous and proximate others placed in a local time and narrated through their deeds or relationships. Stories were told in the intimacy of households or workshops, at no specific time, and for a small audience, mainly household members, relatives, neighbours, and the ethnographer.⁸⁴ Narrators always asked their audiences to keep the story secret, to keep it to themselves, often saying "I will tell you this, but do not share it with anyone else." And yet, all artisans engaged in telling stories and listening to them. They highlighted people's vices, their immorality, and their hardships. Sometimes narrators put themselves in the story to reveal and magnify the harm that the character of the story had caused them. Then the narrator

⁸³ Jackson refers to this narrative device as a technique of contrived ambiguity (1982: 2).

⁸⁴ The Aguabuena case is different to that of other communities for whom storytelling also plays a main role in social life. Jackson's study of Kuranko's narratives in Sierra Leone and their storytelling sessions highlight the public and formal context within which stories were told and the linguistic devices used by the narrators to engage their audiences. Told at night, Kuranko stories employed generic characters placed in a temporal frame (Jackson 1982).

became a character in someone else's story, as all potters were engaged in an unfinished "living portrait," in which "everybody (was) portrayed and everybody portray(ed)" (Berger 1979: 9 my brackets).

Like *puntos*, locations, used to spot fractions of the world (see Introduction), narratives about potters served the purpose of looking in detail at the quality of someone's relationships and their moral condition. Stories often focused on the violence of individuals (among the same gender and between genders, domestic violence and symbolic violence) or on their immorality. Moreover, narratives never built up coherent or complete characters; on the contrary, they presented fragmented and atomised persons.



Figure 14. Walking along ceramic shards across an Aguabuena path.

To start with, I began gathering the potters' stories spread across the hill as accounts of the shards of persons and their deeds (just like the ceramic shreds of different ages, lying on the surface of Aguabuena fields), following potters' "istorias"⁸⁵ whilst tracking and tracing individual lives (cf. Jackson 2002b), which I soon learnt were distorted versions of the artisans' existences (see Figure 14).⁸⁶ Tracing threads of potters' relationships

proved to be a good method of studying as people often avoided talking about themselves and instead always talked about others. Hence, I built an individual's life from fragments of

⁸⁵Following Jackson, I am alluding to Herodotus' notion of "istorias" as the trackings and tracings of individual stories (Jackson 2002b: 32).

⁸⁶I cannot find a better reason than to recall my own archaeological training as a way of explaining this methodological choice.

others' tales, assembling facts in a bigger frame, composed in turn by multiple assembled stories. Such a strategy, however, at times, made me doubt my own analytical capacities and increased my feelings of being deceived. When compared, different stories about the same individual and their actions appeared fantastical or contradictory, or overlapped with other narratives, containing the same actions, but performed this time by different individuals.

This situation made me search for alternative ways of approaching potters' stories. Instead of seeing their narratives as accounts of actual events as they happened or portrayals of individuals as they were, or reducing them to mere gossip, I understood them as complex and multilayered images of the narrators' selves,⁸⁷ informing us of the self-fashioning processes and possibilities of being in Aguabuena (cf. Ochs and Capps 1996). Moreover, the flows and echoes of the narratives seemed to me to establish a play of mirrors, through which the fragmented images of potters were reflected and refracted in the interplay of their simultaneous and overlapping stories. Within this context, a pan-Aguabuena phantasmagoria was crafted by means of dialogic narratives and the act of telling stories. Potters told their stories in the intimacy of their workshops, and their narratives created and maintained a fragmented and yet continuous dialogue, through which potters actively reworked events and characters (cf. Jackson 2002b: 15).

This chapter is my attempt to reflect on the potters' narratives, their reverberations and effects, including the uncertainty of my own ethnographic endeavour, which was often undermined by my doubts about my informants and my feelings of entrapment in the potters' deceiving manners. I suggest that stories mirror Aguabuena potters through distorted images, creating selves by means of appearances in a continuous fabrication whilst negotiating the relationship between self and other. This active process lies at the core of the experience of envy in Aguabuena, placing potters in a dynamic but surreptitious conversation, where subjects are crafted by means of "borrowed skins."⁸⁸

⁸⁷I follow Gredys Harris' definition of self as a locus of experience (1989: 601-2). As argued by Ochs and Capps (1996) and Van Vleet (2010), narratives are special arenas for the production and expression of self.

⁸⁸*Cueros di otros*, which literally means the leathery skin of others, referring to potters' hardened skin, was a saying often used by narrators in their stories about Aguabuena peoples' lives. Instead of the exact translation, I have decided to employ the term "borrowed skins," inspired by Aguabuena potters' use of language, which I

In the following pages I focus on the dialogical narratives of three potters, Delfina and Manuel (a married couple), and Clotilde, their neighbour, as a way of exemplifying the production and circulation of stories among Aguabuena potters. Later on, I include other people as a way of extending potters' imbrications and to illustrate the connections, developments, and unfolding of the narratives. Although told in apparent isolation, the narratives share common themes and events, repetitions, overlaps, replies or continuations with one another.

Clotilde and Delfina: an inverted narrative

Clotilde, at almost 86, and one of the oldest potters of the hill, shared a fence over a grass field with her neighbour and relative Delfina, who was my landlady at the time, and who was 70 years old. Both women kept their own cattle in that field, Delfina having more cows and bulls than Clotilde. One morning, while we walked towards a cow, Delfina started talking about Clotilde.

It is so late in the morning (around 9 a.m.) and you see she's only woken up now and is going to watch over her cow (Delfina deduces that from the smoke coming through the kitchen's roof). She is so lazy, she hardly works... and you look at her and she looks so fragile and tiny but what she is missing in body she makes up for in bad manners! That lady is so mean and disgusting. She has plenty of lovers. She has no shame. She had a husband, but never cared about him. She often left him alone when she went to see her lovers. Her lovers are all young! Two years ago she had a young boy who used to visit her, he was a relative of mine, and his name is Dago. And this guy was glued to her. We all thought that he was under a spell. He told us that he wanted to leave her but he could not. Now she has another lover and he is 15 years old. They make love through her small (kitchen) window. She screams "quickly quickly!" from the inside, sticking her ass out the window while the guy is standing outside next to it! (Both Delfina and I burst into laughter as she imitated the

consider a better translation into English. By "borrowed skins" I refer to potters' device of fabricating – through *bricolage* – individual lives, placing selves in a moral universe. Borrowing the skin of his opponent and thereby focusing on the life of others, the narrator grounds himself in the world by means of his envisioned relationships with others. It is interesting to recall here Jackson's story of Mohammed, the man who could turn into an elephant, as it also talks about "borrowed bodies" and "second skins" as a means of "assist(ing) a sense of adequacy, amplitude, and solidity in a painfully unstable world" (1989: 117). Unlike Jackson's informant, who claimed to experience a metamorphosis transforming his human shape into an animal one, potters did not transform into other potters, but instead they distortedly mirrored them. In this process, they borrowed other potters' *cueros*, hardened skins, crafting a sense of viable selves.

woman's moves). One day one of my bulls broke through her fence and made her cow pregnant. She complained. She was thinking about suing me. But the worst thing she did was to mess with my nephews. The old bitch accused them of robbing her land. She said that one of my nephews broke into her house and raped her. The police came, but there was no proof. Then, as revenge, my nephews came and waited for her at the creek. They stripped her naked, put chilli into her ass, and beat her up with a branch. The old bitch went home and never ever messed with my family again (Delfina laughed and I followed her, although I pitied Clotilde for what I considered a bizarre and cruel punishment!). I have compassion for her because she is an old lady, and she lives by herself. I used to bring her some food and she used to come to my house to ask me some favours. Every time I could, I helped her.

The day after I recorded this story, I went to visit Clotilde. Knowing that I could not hide my visit from my all-knowing landlady, I told her that I was planning to visit Clotilde.

“On you go to *Pajarita!*”(“Little Bird” is Clotilde’s nickname), said Delfina, as if encouraging me to go and see her. Then she continued, laughing, “Let’s see what she is going to come up with this time! That old devil!” Delfina’s husband, Manuel, added in turn, “Please tell that good lady that I love her very, very much! Ha, she is the Devil himself!”

On this day, Clotilde started (or – I imagined – continued) a monologue about Delfina. Similarly to Delfina’s story, Clotilde’s narrative took place while we were walking towards her cow.

Delfina is insolent and a thief. She has killed about four women. She kills them like this: first she strips them naked, second she pushes them to the ground, and then puts her knee on their chest, lastly she strangles them (Clotilde imitates some of what could be Delfina’s moves). Later, she drops them into the creek, thinking that there will be no proof. She is so ignorant! She tried to do that to Nieves. But Nieves was able to scream and the old bitch got scared. Nieves died afterwards because of how badly Delfina had beaten her up. I’ve done Delfina and Manuel so many favours. They don’t appreciate my help. I helped them to watch over their cattle, I gave them massage. One day I yelled at Delfina from the fence, “So come and strangle me here in my own house!” And from that day on, she didn’t dare to mess with me anymore.

Both Clotilde and I laughed at her story although for different reasons. She laughed at her courage in front of a brutal woman, while I laughed at the image of Delfina coming to strangle a cute, tiny old lady like her!

These cruel, yet playful accounts were triggered by the women's act of walking towards a cow. For me, the stories mirrored their selves through their "performative verbal art" (cf. Bauman 1979), conjoining and separating in a cow. Thus, each woman highlighted her own virtues and her compassion towards the other, whilst recounting the vices of the other woman's fabricated image. The deep implication of each woman in the other woman's action seemed to me to reinforce their own existence by means of their long standing relationship. The stories revolved around violence, brutality and savagery, and occurred in contexts where boundaries were put into play: the creek and the fence. Moreover, in the stories neither woman left any proof of their immoral behaviour. This skill in erasing traces, and the awareness of future attempts to track them made me wonder about the potters' evil capacities as represented in the stories. But this invisibility and anonymity were circumvented by each narrator, who was able to recall the other woman's acts in great detail!

A mirror for you... a mirror!

One day in 2009, while trying to imitate Clotilde in shaping my pot, I recorded the following story about Delfina and her relationship with Manuel, her husband.

I will tell you a story because we are friends, also because it can be useful to you. The neighbour over there (Delfina) has suffered a lot. I pity her. She has a bad temper and is rude, but I still pity her. She is a hardworking lady. Her husband cheated on her (le puso los cuernos, lit. put horns on her) several times while she was working and suffering (because she was doing all household work by herself). I came to massage her regularly... but don't tell anyone because if they (Delfina and Manuel) find out, they will sue me. This (story) is for you, a mirror for you... a mirror! I came to give her massage every time she was badly beaten because of her husband's lovers. Oh God! All you see in this world are life's deceits and still you need to bear them, otherwise you will end up alone, with no children, no husband, and it is far worse to end up alone. This is what life is supposed to be like for a woman. With those shoes, with those boots (Manuel's boots) Manuel would kick and hit

Delfina until she was black and blue all over. Sometimes he even used his machete. How dare he slap his own woman, when he did not even have the strength to work! He has children outside (with other women). Delfina was jealous. Whenever he came back, he used to beat her up. People say, though I didn't see, but I am sure it is true, that she did not leave any of his lovers alive... She used a sorcerer to kill a woman with whom he had a child. Please don't tell this to anyone. Before the lover died, the lover's own husband used to tell Manuel (Clotilde changed her voice into a man's voice): "Go and take care of your woman, hold her and prevent her from doing evil" and afterwards Manuel went home and kicked Delfina and beat her up. It was such a great story! (Clotilde finished and burst into laughter. I joined her and started to laugh while imagining the ambiguous situation of the lover's husband giving advice to Manuel.) And the old man in return replied (Clotilde then faked Manuel's hoarse voice): "It is not my fault! I hit her, I try to stop her, and I warn her. It is not my fault what she does!" And Manuel was not able to stop his own wife. Some of us (women) suffer because we allow men to govern us, other women because... (Clotilde laughed and left the sentence unfinished). He was too permissive to his wife, he did not hit her hard enough, and so the lover's husband continued to blame Manuel. So the lover lived, but the next day she went to sleep and never woke up and her husband died too.

When I visit Delfina and Manuel it is because we are fine, but if we are fighting, I avoid stopping at their place. God protect me from Delfina! She borrowed money from some neighbours, paid first for the lover to be killed, secondly, for the lover's husband to die. The former lover used to live metres above me, and she used to buy Delfina's pots, paying her a fair price. Delfina, in return, used to buy her chocolate and meat as a sign of her gratitude.

When the lover was still alive, Delfina used to fight with her. The lover was taller and stronger than Delfina. They fought a lot, many times, and they beat each other like the Devil but Delfina always tripped her and made her fall... Manuel is a *bojón* (tall, fat person). Holy Mary! When he beat Delfina, it was so bad! He is a *corrompido*, (morally corrupted man), though he pretends to be a saint. As if people here wouldn't know who he is!

Victoria was the lover's name. They (Victoria and Delfina) hit each other, and hit each other, and thank God that Manuel also appeared and hit and beat Delfina in return. But Delfina was right to hit the other lady, wasn't she? The lover did something to Manuel (implying witchcraft: Manuel had a problem with his knees and he could not walk much; although he claimed the problem was in his joint, people commented that it was the

consequence of the spell). The lover's husband also used sorcery on Manuel. They were also in the right to do it. Weren't they?

Clotilde and I laughed together in complicity.

I used to tell Delfina: "Go and do your job, beat him up, and if he goes and sues you, well you don't have anything to lose." But she never managed to do it, although she claimed she tried... Manuel and Delfina, they were so funny! Delfina fought the lover, but Manuel never stopped seeing her. Delfina continued beating up the woman, whilst the lover informed Manuel how Delfina had hit and punched her. Later on Manuel also beat Delfina up on behalf of his fragile lover. He sued Delfina, in return Delfina sued the lover and the woman sued her.

Clotilde erupted into a burst of contagious laughter, causing the two of us to laugh at Delfina's miserable life and the chain of infinite and – for me – paradoxical lawsuits.

That same day, after crafting five small pots, I went back to Delfina's, where I was staying at that time. Before leaving Clotilde's place, she only asked me not to tell Manuel and Delfina that she was still *hacienda ojicio*, making craft. "And what about the story that you just told me about them?" I thought to myself, "should I tell them what I just heard from you?" Clotilde's request surprised me as I thought that she would insist once more, as at the beginning of her story, on my keeping the story secret. However, she seemed more worried about the fact that Delfina and Manuel would find out that she, despite her old age, was still making pots.

When I arrived at their house, Manuel and Delfina asked for news about Clotilde. They wanted to know what I had eaten at Clotilde's, and about our conversation. I tried to answer in a general way. Manuel asked me, laughing along with his wife, if Clotilde had sent him any regards. Then he briefly said something that he used to repeat when talking about Clotilde, hinting at her voracious sexual appetite: "Once, that old lady told me here in my own house that she might be old but her heart was still beating for me!" After hearing him, I could not help myself and began laughing too!

That night, while eating dinner with Delfina and Manuel, I started to wonder about the habits of my host family. Delfina's careful and graceful movements while serving the food

made me wonder about Clotilde's veracity. Manuel's tentativeness and fragile body did not match Clotilde's depiction. "Has Delfina strangled the other women at the creek? Has she paid a sorcerer to kill people? And what about Manuel?" I asked myself while watching them. That night I locked my bedroom door and continued locking it until the end of my stay with them. I also started to avoid walking by the creek after dark.

A woman's punch

Not long after listening to Clotilde's story about Delfina, I heard (this time from Delfina) a small vignette about Clotilde's hard life. Manuel was taking a nap while we were sitting in the kitchen, separating the corn kernels from the cobs. As Delfina began her story, it appeared to me to be a continuation of – or perhaps a reply to – the story Clotilde had earlier told me.

Her husband hit her a lot, hit her with his machete. In the lowlands and hot places men beat women with machetes, here in cold areas men beat women with a stick. During that time, Clotilde was in Huila and then in the Llanos (Plains). She moved there after her husband found a job on a coffee plantation. Over there, men hit the women so hard with their machetes that they even cut them! On Thursday of Easter Week, people used to visit Clotilde and Bonifacio (Clotilde's husband). Clotilde is a very talkative person and she has a lot of friends... Only once did she dare to hit her husband. She thought he would kill her in return, but she did not care and hit him at her own risk. On that Holy Thursday there were many people coming for lunch at their place. She was preparing a big lunch. She asked the husband to go and get vegetables for lunch and drinks for the guests. In the meantime, she started to prepare the hens, because on that day you are supposed to eat a hen. The guests were helping her with the manioc while she killed the hens. It was getting late and the husband hadn't come back. She started to get angry (le empezó a dar cólera) because he was so late. Yes! Don Bonifacio was delayed and she couldn't go and search for him, otherwise he would get angry. That afternoon he showed up late, totally drunk. She was upset so she said to him, "This is no time to come here with the things for lunch! People are fucking hungry and things were missing (for lunch)!" (Delfina imitated Clotilde's voice). He suddenly took his machete out and they started to argue inside the kitchen. The man wanted to take her head off with his machete. He threatened her, saying (Delfina imitated a man's voice): "Today you are not eating any corn." To which she replied, "What

are you saying? Am I not eating? Or did you mean we are not eating corn?” He was quicker than her and hit her first. The crowd stepped in between them, but nevertheless she managed to punch him, knocking him down and breaking one of his front teeth. He only managed to kick her back. People took his machete away from him and then separated them. She only hit him once. From then on the man knew how hard a woman’s hand can hit!

He lived his last days here (in Aguabuena) with her. She had to help him to walk, to go to the kitchen, to put him to bed, as he couldn’t walk. All day long he was sitting on a rock outside on the patio as he could not stand on his feet (through the years I was visiting Aguabuena, I also saw Bonifacio in this position). One day, she was filling the tank with water. Suddenly, she heard his quick steps on the ground. It was him, with his machete, wanting to cut her head off! And he told her, “I will kill you in your sleep, you have not allowed me to kill you yet, but one of these days I will take your head off with one machete cut” She replied, “A soldier who has been warned is not to die in battle.” For many days she wouldn’t help him into the kitchen so he had to crawl in and beg her for food (Delfina and I laughed while she imitated the man on his knees). Crawling, ha! But if he was to kill her then he could run! What you need to do (as a woman) is not to let them (men) get together with their friends in the bars, you need to be with them all day long, and go out with them. And when you have children they should work at home, make them stay at home. You can’t even have a sirvienta (maid) because they will sleep with her and make her their mistress.

And what did Clotilde do to her husband after he had told her that he would take her head off? She didn’t sleep with him, and made him suffer. That asshole! ‘You swear to me you would kill me while asleep, so I am not sleeping with you anymore. God will forgive me, you are old and so am I, don’t bother me (meaning try to be sexually close) because you are old, I won’t bother you, we already made our children so... you aren’t going to kill me and I am not going to have any more children and I can’t sleep anymore with you, why? Well, because you’d like to kill me! Let’s see if you are going to miss me!’ (Delfina mimicked Clotilde once more. Again – and despite the tremendous violence of the story – I ended up laughing at Delfina’s great performance).

I never dared to ask Clotilde if her story, as Delfina had just narrated it to me in full detail, was true. Neither did I dare to ask Delfina about her violent treatment of Manuel’s lover. Both stories overwhelmed me with the histrionic skills of the narrators and the richness and

aesthetic violence of their details. I was also surprised at the complicit situation in which I ended up, laughing, like the narrator, at both women's tragedies. However, I felt there was certain compassion behind our shared laughter at the tragic stories. And, somehow, the violence that both women experienced in the stories, and the parodies of each other's misery performed by the two rivals, seemed to me an indication of great empathy between them.

Aguabuena as a reversal, or "Here is the opposite"

During the month that I stayed at Manuel's and Delfina's house, Manuel often commented on relations between men and women in Aguabuena. On one occasion, he made a remark on the violence and domination that women had over men. His declaration seemed out of place to me given his celebrated violence against his wife, at least in the stories told by Clotilde and other women. Manuel said:

Here it is not like they say, that men beat up women. Here it is the opposite! Here, the women are outrageous, treacherous, and crafty. They are the Devil! My sister-in-law Elbia, the one living up the hill, she wore her own husband out, she used to beat him up, and she killed him by stress and anger. That guy, oh well, he used to smoke and drink. At the end of his life, he preferred to go to the village and stay over there than to be at home with her. He looked like a beggar.

Another lady is Rosa, living downhill. She was the wife of the late Adriano.⁸⁹ She used to treat that man so badly, and he was so hard-working. She used to say that she had a lot of money, and she took everything he earned from working or from pottery. She used to keep money in a bag (Manuel pointed at his own chest meaning that the woman used to keep the money between her breasts) and from time to time she pulled out bills from that bag. (Manuel mimics Rosa's gesture by pretending to pull out some bills from his imaginary breasts. I burst into laughter watching him.) She used to have a lot of chickens and hens, she was proud, and she would say, "Wherever there is shit there is money." (Manuel imitates a woman's voice.) But now, she is the one who is eating shit! (After the death of Rosa's husband the earnings of her household were reduced and she had to give a part of her land as payment for interest on different debts to other potters in Aguabuena).

⁸⁹ A fragment of Adriano's story is included in Chapter 3.

Another neighbour, the wife of Silvestre, (who retired with a pension of 1,200 COP - approximately £450 month, as he used to be a policeman), is the one who manages the money in that household. They have a shop (one of the two on the hill) and he likes to drink and smoke. But what he drinks he has to pay back to his wife, although it is his own money! (Manuel and I laughed).

Like her, Pureza likes to smuggle (*contrabandea*, meaning having sex) with Helí and Jorge González. Pureza likes to mess around with the neighbours because her husband is such an asshole and she dares to say, “My husband is as docile as a little ox.”

While he talked, Delfina listened from the kitchen and laughed at his remarks. She added other details, expanding her husband’s claims about the unfaithful characters and the crafty manners of Aguabuena women. Manuel went on with his comments, making a long list of cases of female moral corruption. At the end of his list, was Josefa, his cousin. He accused her of causing the death of her own son, and of *joder*, screwing up, Manuel and Delfina’s lives. He recalled the several times when Josefa was waiting for him, standing on a side of the road in the early morning, while he was coming back from his night shifts at the Artesanías office in Ráquira. As Manuel explained, she wanted to have proof to later sue him at the *Inspección*, arguing that he wanted to rape her!⁹⁰

Manuel’s monologue, only briefly interrupted by Delfina, seemed to me to reverse the situation that Clotilde and Delfina portrayed through their stories about men’s violence against women. Manuel’s words depicted a world of submissive, humiliated and powerless men who resigned themselves to their fate. Moreover, Manuel’s performance made him at times appear a woman as he was mimicking women’s bodies, gestures and voices.

After hearing Manuel and seeing Delfina being so supportive of his claims, perhaps through hypocrisy or moved by fear, I once more felt deceived and in a trap of appearances meshed with violence. Everyone presented the reversal of what others said, and gender issues seemed central to what was being conveyed (cf. Introduction). “What is going on here?” I asked myself many times, in the meantime feeling overwhelmed and helpless because of my ignorance. After Manuel shared his insight on women’s moral depravation, which

⁹⁰Indeed,rape is a recurrent accusation in legal actions that women take against men, and both men and women agreed that women who made up these stories, the“crafty” ones, used such device precisely because rape “was difficult to prove.”

stirred up my own fears as I was recalling women's violent acts, he finished with the following remark: "Well, you see, you need to be careful all the time. Although people are mean, Aguabuena is a nice, safe and enjoyable place!" Delfina and Manuel laughed knowingly. This time I did not join them. I felt confused and irritated by Manuel's apparent contradictions, first talking about violence, then praising the goodness of Aguabuena.

Two faces of usury

As with all the people I chatted to, I soon came to know Josefa's version of the life of others. I visited her on several occasions. She was ill, so I never lived with her and her husband Custodio. One afternoon, she told me a story about Manuel, which, together with Delfina and Clotilde's intertwined stories, seemed to be a reply to Manuel's previous story on her. This time the story was not about Manuel's infidelity, but about his sneakiness, cheapness and usury.

I don't like to mess around with anyone here in this place. This plague is like no other. You can't choose who is best because they are all equally bad. Let the Devil come and choose! (She laughed and so did I.) One of those is Manuel, though we have the same blood, because he is my legitimate cousin, he just stands out on his own. He provoked a fight between his son Carmelo and my brother Helí. Because of him both men were put in jail. Before the police came, he incited his son to stab my brother... Oh poor Helí, he had to hold his intestines in as he bellowed like a bull and his ruana (woollen poncho) was soaked in blood. Before they took him to the hospital he had lost almost all his blood. And in the meantime, Manuel simply stood there next to my brother, as if nothing had happened!

Listening to her, I remembered Manuel's words about how Josefa was complicit in the death of her own son. Then she continued:

He lends money with outrageous interest... While people work and Delfina works, he just sleeps and sits while the interest grows, gaining weight like a pig, and later on suing people for the interests of the interest on the debts, taking their land or belongings in exchange for the unpaid debts!

Although he is rich he doesn't enjoy his money and neither do his sons. Gonzalo (one of Manuel's sons) is always broke. He claims he is broke because the money that his father

gets is cursed. As for Manuel, one or both of his knees are screwed up and he can't go anywhere but always has to sit. This world is not a closed sack and someone is watching what we do (meaning that there is a God and divine justice).

Days after listening to Josefa's complaints against Manuel and her concerns for justice, I found out, through another woman's story that, just like Manuel, Josefa was also in the *negocio de la usura*, usury business. As the woman told me, Josefa would lend money at a very high interest rate, and sue people at the local inspection over unpaid interests.⁹¹ Yet again, I started to question Josefa's narrative and wondered how much of her own account was merged in Manuel's story as the image of the man constructed in the woman's narrative resembled Josefa's own self.

Narratives mirrored others through distorted images of potters in what seemed to me a play of mirrors in which the boundaries of self and other were blurred. As I became more aware of my own entrapment in this play of mirrors, I started to resign myself to the fragmented character of my own ethnographic material and to my ignorance. Mine was a world of appearances and deceptions to which I was also becoming complicit.

A distorting blindness

I came to know about Gafas, Glasses, a middleman who is also a potter from Ráquira, through Marina, an Aguabuena potter. At that time I was living with Marina and helping her in the workshop. Often I lent her my mobile phone and she used it to make calls to Gafas. As she would usually shout, I was able to overhear the threatening tone and insults she used when asking him for money for her pots. On several occasions, I accompanied Marina to Gafas' workshop in Ráquira and put on a show in front of him in complicity with Marina. One afternoon, I pretended to be a lawyer, trying to make him believe that I would take legal action against him if he did not pay Marina what he owed her within a couple of weeks. His poor eyesight and thick glasses became a material detail of our encounter, crystallising an important feature of my ethnographic experience among potters: the fabrication of images of self. Thus, I also became an apparition in Gafas' world, a distorted image of myself, one with a borrowed body.

⁹¹For more details about lending and legal accusations between potters see Chapter 6.

“Gafas recently dumped his wife,” said Marina to me one day at her workshop. She continued, “He wants to move in with me. The ex-wife is threatening to sue me because she thinks that I want him for myself! He lives with his daughter and that kid is worse than her mom. But I don’t know why his daughter also wants me to move in with him. I am sure they (Gafas and his daughter) want me to cook for them, clean the house and work hard as I do here at my own place.”

I interrupted Marina and asked her some general questions about Gafas as a way to understand better who he was. That day, I learned that Gafas was first a worker of “the patron,” Aristóbulo, the main middleman in Ráquira. He performed random tasks at the patron’s factory, from driving Aristóbulo’s trucks or using the electric wheel for crafting vessels, to being responsible for the firing. By observing Aristóbulo, Gafas learned how to become a middleman himself. He became almost blind as a consequence of constant exposure to the high temperatures of one of the factory’s kilns, or so I was told by Marina. After this brief interruption, Marina carried on with what truly mattered to her:

He has owed me money for over a year. Every time I call him or go to his workshop to ask for my money, he hangs up on me or insults me. He calls me names and kicks me out of his house. He always tells me how unfortunate he is because his clients don’t want to pay him and his ex wants to sue him and take away all his property. He mocks me and laughs in my face. Once he bet with the father of my son about which of them would sleep with me first! He has not paid me yet in revenge because I don’t want him. And I want to make him believe that I want him to see if that makes him pay me but, still, I think that this would be too low on my part, I don’t want to lower myself for such a piece of shit!

One Sunday afternoon at the *plaza*, I was introduced to Gafas, this time as my true self. Another middleman introduced us. Standing next to Gafas was his guide, a teenage boy who helped him with practical activities in and outside the workshop. I presented myself as a student from Bogotá who was interested in ceramics. I never mentioned to him that I was living among the potters of Aguabuena, nor did I tell him that I had previously been at his workshop as Marina’s “lawyer.” His blindness helped me to remain undiscovered. He invited me for a coffee and a chat. As was usually the case with my previous encounters in the field, he began a monologue:

This place interests many people who like crafts. Here, there are many skilful potters. Artisans use different techniques, and make different kinds of goods. I am a potter myself and I also help the poor potters, buying and distributing their goods on their behalf. I pity them because I know what it is like to survive from this work, especially for those potters living far away, like those living on the hill (Aguabuena potters). Although I am trying to help them, potters always want to trick me. Several times they tried to fool me, giving me broken pots or old vessels that they pretended were new and good. Sometimes they even want to give me raw pots or pots that are not fired well. If I hadn't been a potter, I would be broke by now. All those poor assholes (referring to middlemen coming from outside Ráquira) who go uphill not knowing about the craftiness of potters! They collect the pots and during the trip most of the vessels break because they are already damaged or raw. You watch out with them because I am sure they will try to fool you too, particularly the women. They seem so fragile. Ha! Some of them gossip about me wanting to marry them. (He laughed.) I am a modest guy who likes to do what is best for the people. Although people are ungrateful, I like to help those potters every time I can!

Gafas' monologue was loaded with moral motifs about the potters of Aguabuena and self-praising claims. From the many analytical possibilities that his narrative offers, I find particularly provocative a subtle but powerful detail: Gafas, like me, felt fooled by Aguabuena potters. That revelation made me, at times, identify with his discourse. And yet, I knew from potters that he also fooled them by delaying their payments with all sorts of excuses. As much as he was fooling me, I was also being deceitful towards him. Our encounter had an important degree of distortion.

Some time later, while at a different workshop belonging to a family who also had commercial dealings with Gafas, I heard some comments about a Bogotá lawyer that some potters had hired to sue him. From what people were saying it was clear that someone from that family had telephoned Gafas and threatened him in order to extract the money for the pots. Gafas had responded with a threat: he said that the lawyer from Bogotá would not be able to take anything away from him. He promised to use the lawyer to sue all the artisans in return. People speculated on who this lawyer was and who exactly had hired her. Potters asked me if I had ever seen her. Some others claimed to have met her and that she was willing to help them.

A borrowed skin

Thinking back about the veracity of what potters said about the lives of others, I always arrive at an unclear answer. I never witnessed any of the multiple crimes or corrupt acts described in their stories. I never saw Clotilde having sex through her small kitchen window with a young lover (an image that I still find very funny), despite my frequent, unannounced visits to her. I never saw Delfina's bruises or physical evidence of past violent fights. Nor did I catch Pureza *contrabandeando*, smuggling, with the neighbours, or a female potter beating up a male one. Despite my ignorance, however, I never dared to confront the potters about what the others had said about them. Perhaps my blindness was partly the result of their secret surveillance that somehow enabled them to anticipate my presence, or their great skill, often recalled in their narratives, in erasing any trace that would offer proof of their actions.

Regardless of what appeared to be a great deception, I felt that life was enjoyable in the devilish community of Aguabuena. And a sign of such joy was the fact that these stories inevitably led to laughter, no matter how brutal they were. The narrator and audience became complicit as the story progressed, making them witnesses and spectators to the vices and hardships of others. Moreover, the stories intertwined the characters, making tangling individuals among each other. Thus, Clotilde, for example, became Delfina, through her mimicry of her rival's voice, and direct quotation of her words,⁹² her reproduction of her bodily movements, and the full knowledge of her deeds. While doing so she, like the rest, "exploited the beliefs, sympathies and desires of others" (cf. Jackson 2002b: 25) for her own benefit, whilst also borrowing her rival's skin to the point of blurring their boundaries.⁹³ Moreover, potters were tricksters and their narratives were their tricks. They deployed a cunning form of intelligence and a grotesque, order-inverting form of body imagery (cf. Koepping 1985: 194).

⁹²Direct quotation in narrative is referred to as acts of embedded speech. The direct quotation of words, in this case of neighbours and relatives, has the pervasive effect of putting "in doubt the very possibility that a sentence might represent but a single subjectivity" (Irvine [1996: 151] in Van Vleet 2010: 208).

⁹³As Jackson states, following other scholars, stories – and the acts of telling them – "question, blur, transgress and even abolish boundaries" whilst creating indeterminist and ambiguous situations (2002b: 25). The examples provided in the chapter illustrate various ways in which this takes place in Aguabuena.

This “mirror play,” diverting the gaze to others, not only puts the potter’s vices up front however, but also demonstrates their great compassion and empathy towards one another. In a web of infamous characters performing evil deeds, the pity and capacity to “be” others complemented the great physical awareness of each other by means of their senses (see Chapter 3). It also fabricated a moral reasoning that entangled all the potters in a shared net of violence and infamy.⁹⁴ The effect of rendering the characters in the stories distinctive, by making them stand out through their evilness, paradoxically caused them to be ordinary beings. The infamy of a single man became the fame of all Aguabuena potters.

Borges (1954) celebrated the universal infamy of humankind in a collection of short stories entitled “A Universal History of Infamy,” which depicted all sorts of human infamy. An infamous Patagonian named Funes, one of the characters in the stories, towards the end of his life became all men. To render this particular phenomenon, Borges drew on his own infamy, just like he had done for the characters he portrayed through his writing, sublimating their poetic condition. Like Borges, potters also drew on each other’s infamy, transforming it into a poetic condition. Their stories echoed and articulated Aguabuena humanity by means of the infamy and violence of potters.

Potters appeared suspended in a tightly woven net of words whose fluxes came and went, ran or diverted, or became interrupted or sabotaged, like the water running through their complex rubber hoses system (see Chapter 6). Stories were assembled and re-assembled, transforming rapidly and shifting their course. At this point what was then left to my own ethnography? Should I move away from potters’ craftiness and their secretive lives, and make sense in a different way of what they told me? Should I step outside those beguiling manners to uncover their tricks? Should I abandon my uncomfortable ignorance and move towards a more comfortable sense of knowing? Or should I rather make this blurred and distorted world - as much as my ignorance - the aim of my research?⁹⁵

⁹⁴According to Jackson, it is precisely this empathetic understanding which is the source of every moral reasoning (1982: 61).

⁹⁵Visweswaran (1994) in her analysis of women’s betrayal raises similar issues regarding the relationship between ethnography, truth, and the role of the researcher. She reflects on the kind of knowledge that she was “policing” in her attempt of searching for hidden facts whilst hoping to fit together the pieces of a puzzle. She states: “‘Facts’ as we know, are compelling. And facts were compelling me. A will to knowledge had been set

Incompleteness, as a key aspect of anthropological understanding, has been highlighted within the project of the so-called mereological anthropology, privileging partial views over holistic representations. Under this intellectual agenda, gaps in the ethnographic data or in our informants' understandings, incoherencies, and limitations in the reach of our "ethnographic eye" are celebrated as opening a space for "other ontologies" to emerge whilst asserting the view of the world as processual or in permanent becoming (Zeitlyn 2009: 211). This partiality of the anthropological understanding makes rival interpretations no longer directly compete, but instead potentially complement one another, as meaning is a collective social achievement rather than an individual assertion (Zeytlin 2009: 211, 215).

Aguabuena was "a world of deception," as Clotilde had already told me.⁹⁶ Facing such a world, I found the lens of my "looking glass" (to recall Herzfeld's image of anthropology [1987]) break into pieces, reflecting, instead of a whole ethnographic truth, multiple and fragmented blurred sections of things and people. Aguabuena artisans also appeared refracted and distorted on the no-longer-shiny mirror of my ethnography, as much as my own figure started to become blurred within potters' assemblages. Excavating my own tunnel through this phantasmagoria, as a blind mole, I began to appreciate potters' aesthetics and existential qualities as expressed through their narratives, constructing selves by means of their borrowed skins. Thus, I gave up on the factuality or causal relations of what was being told, or my initial detective-like attempts to unmask potters. Instead, the enunciation and distorting echoes of such acts of telling seemed more appealing.

Fragmented speculations

Stories about potters and by potters raised ambiguous and oppositional situations, shaped by different forms of violence and grotesque bodily aesthetics.⁹⁷ Old ladies having sex through windows or ferociously knocking down other ladies and murdering them, women

into play, but whose will was it? It was a will that was at once alien to me, and one in which, with some shock, I felt myself sentient" (1994: 47).

⁹⁶ Clotilde's statement resonates with Bateson's ideas on "all phenomena [being] appearances" based on the recognition that "mental worlds of human beings concern maps, and maps of maps, and not things-in-themselves, all human phenomena can be said to be abstractions, their truth-value turning into appearances" (Bateson 1972 in Rapport 1999: 193).

⁹⁷ Visceral and sexual elements of potters' stories, including rape, are in consonance with a mode of imagery that Bakhtin calls "grotesque realism" and "grotesque body" (Bakhtin 1968), "revealing the bodily common ground of human existence" (cf. Jackson 2002b: 184).

beating up men, a mistress's husband complaining to his own wife's lover about the behaviour of the deceived woman, mothers or fathers complicit in the death of their close relatives, to name but a few, established situations in which social categories were blurred and ethical dissonances were created. As Bateson explained, here too stories conveyed the "reactions of individuals to the reactions of other individuals" (Bateson 1958: 177), presenting a situation of schismogenesis between different and complementary estates such as masculinity and femininity, age, kinship status, infidelity, etc.⁹⁸ However, those imbalances were never resolved or readdressed through the narrative or the interaction between orators and their listeners, but were further increased by being articulated or inverted underneath a different persona, making both narrator and audience complicit in the distorted and fragmented presentation of an individual. In this dynamic, individuals were "centres of orientation of the actions of others and they (were) centres of action in the affecting of others" (Rapport 1999: 211 my brackets).

In one way, potters' narratives could be perceived as gossip. From this perspective, Aguabuena stories could be seen in relation to individual catharsis, local social control, reassurance of community identity, communal values or leadership, transactional interests and information management (Gluckman 1963; Paine 1967). Taking a functionalist approach, gossip could be seen as a device regulating the equilibrium and unity of the Aguabuena community, helping to demarcate and perpetrate it (cf. Paine 1967: 279; Campbell 1964; Pitt-Rivers 1961), an assertion very similar to the regulating role of envy as seen from the "limited good" model (see Chapter 2). However, and as Paine pointed out, this view makes the community the centre of attention, and unity the paramount value, whilst neglecting the individual and their self-interests. Furthermore, other theoretical accounts on gossip, as well as envy, link it directly to competition and rivalry among individuals (cf. Colson 1953). This is the case of the transactionalist model, for which gossip is a means by which individuals manipulate cultural rules (Paine 1967; cf. Rapport

⁹⁸ As Wardle suggests in his analysis of Bateson's ideas, schismogenesis "emerged from this reverberative effect of reactions to reactions as a process of increasing cultural differentiation and disintegration" (1999: 384). Bateson distinguished two types of schismogenesis: symmetrical and complementary. The first one involved two parties reacting with assertiveness to each others' behaviour, while the second one involved the domination of one party and the submission of the other one (cf. Bateson 1958: 176-7; Wardle 1999: 384).

and Overing 2000).⁹⁹ Other accounts see gossip as a set of statements containing moral judgments (Haviland 1977). Its moral qualities, however, have been explained either as a reassertion of values (cf. Loudon 1961: 347), or information management embedded in a communication process, or as somewhere between these two (Rapport and Overing 2000).

To portray Aguabuena stories as gossip, however, undermines the narratives and their aesthetics, the role of the narrator and the audience, and, more importantly, the fragmented selves that they re-create and their existential possibilities. If Aguabuena potters had constant rivalries, tensions and competition among them, this would not make potters' stories into a device of equilibrating capacities, as the accounts on gossip tend to suggest. Moreover, beyond problems of self-interest, community values, or information exchange lying at the core of theories on gossip, there were potters' acts of describing the possibilities of the self by means of distorted images, which had an effect on how social relations were built. This is how my ethnography took shape, following the threads and relationships which those narratives gave account of, instead of focusing on the lives of others as realities.

The “symbolic-interactionist” (Rapport and Overing 2000) approach to gossip presents a more conciliatory view. Defining gossip as a means through which individuals “speculate together on their lives and world,” “align their actions,” and “examine and discuss together the rules and conventions by which they commonly live” (ibid: 154, cf. Van Vleet 2003), allows me to portray the Aguabuena case more accurately. Understanding the potters' stories as joint speculations unites two words with the same origin (speculation and speculum), bringing together ideas previously discussed in the chapter. If we consider potters' narratives as a pan-Aguabuena speculation (as the symbolic-interactionist approach to gossip suggests), then we also have to consider the specula through which such speculations are made possible as much as the person (or persons) who was (were) looking through them. Moreover, if a speculum is a tool shaping a technique to observe, then we might also think about the relationship between potters' speculum and their speculation and

⁹⁹ The transactionalist model has two key features: the degree to which individuals are engaged in contesting their own interests, and their use of gossip to regulate these tensions. Such a view was shared by a systemic conceptualisation of culture, which was held by the frames it was trying to challenge. Thus, the conscious individual and its instrumental behaviour always led to the prevalence of moral order and social bonding, which was – in the end – what mattered most (Rapport and Overing 2000).

their effects on social life on the one hand, and on ethnography, on the other. From this perspective, speculation acquires a heuristic value, an idea which so far has been underestimated in theory and writing.

Following this line of thought, one possible way to look at potters' narratives is from the point of view of the techniques¹⁰⁰ of their speculation(s), which in turn requires an acknowledgement of the manners in which their bodies' sense of themselves is externalised (cf. Rapport 1999).¹⁰¹ The narrator and their audience engaged in an assemblage fabricated with borrowed bodies, continuously being recomposed or re-assembled adventitiously by other orators/audiences, morally inquiring on selves and their agencies. Potters' knowledge of other potters and events is constituted by "externalizing, objectifying and then internalizing the multiple and instable effects of their own bodily selves" (Rapport 1993:201).

Furthermore, an agreement between the listeners and the orator is put into play as the imaginative engagement and reuse of the distorted images works as common existential grounds for potters.¹⁰² In this way, stories do not carry a transcendental meaning, but their effects are felt by lives being composed and recomposed through mixing social and individual experiences, social categories, and possibilities of being, which are contextualised in a mesh of intentions, desires and knowledge (cf. Ochs and Capps 1996).

Through stories, potters not only "rework(ed) and remodel(led) subject-object relations," altering "the balance between actor and acted upon" whilst also "being subjects for themselves and objects for – others" (Jackson 2002: 16, 180 my brackets), but also attained knowledge and control (cf. Rapport 1999). They also actively engaged with a disempowering world, transforming it by means of distorted images into a "bearable reality" (cf. Jackson 2002: 16). Thus, the factuality of a story or its meaning should not be measured against an "outside reality" or taken as "isomorphic with lives" (ibid: 17-8), as

¹⁰⁰ Technology (from the Greek *techne*), is the artistry, the expressiveness and the aestheticism inherent in crafting a world, and the bodily skills of practicing within it (Ingold 1993: passim).

¹⁰¹ Rapport suggests that the "body's sense of itself" is externalised as a trope or as a technology, affording "a ground against which to measure its own existence and movement, and a space in which to know and act" (1993: 189).

¹⁰² Such agreement is interrupted when other listeners, like me, enter such a dynamic, causing discomfort and raising doubts about the veracity of what is being told.

stories lacking a fixed or finite meanings. In the same way, their articulation is a making-meaning process, sustaining a sense of agency for individuals and their collectivity (cf. Jackson 2002b; Van Vleet 2010).

Moreover, narratives have a very important entertaining role by means of the fictions and imagination they put into play and through the narrator-listener bodily relationship. The latter is conceived of as a “lived relationship between personal and social bodies,” to which “mimicking, gestures, intimacy and phatic communication” contribute (Jackson 2002b: 28). Imagination is a “trickster” (Preston 1991: 74), installing a playful connection of subjective and intersubjective experience and its consciousness (cf. Brady 1991; Preston 1991), of unstable and fluid images that cannot be explained by the “same principles of causality normally applied to the physical world or exclusively to other orders of phenomena” (cf. Brady 1991: 70).¹⁰³ At the same time, such contra-factuality is lived and ensured through the “vital interaction” between the storyteller and his listeners, merged into Aguabuena laughter and a sense of joyful life.

Mirroring selves, a trope and a technology to “externalize and objectify” (Rapport 1999: 4) experiences of what being human entails in Aguabuena, emerged from and merged into an ongoing intersubjective dialogue “authored and authorized dialogically and collaboratively” (Jackson 2002: 22). This dialogue and collaboration among potters (and others such as middlemen, and the ethnographer), deployed a joint and fragmented speculation by means of distorted and partial selves, in turn collectively composing a distorted image of the whole Aguabuena. In the process, potters became “authors” of the lives of others, whilst blurring the boundaries between self and other. Such is the dialogic of envy, an assemblage of assembled others, and projections of selves by means of “borrowed skins.”

¹⁰³The “dynamic river of images,” through which Bachelard (1971) portrays imagination, connects to the flow, elusive, fluid and instable character of Aguabuena narratives. Moreover, these fictions are not opposed to reality; they themselves are the reality (c.f. Bachelard 1971; Brady 1991; Preston 1991).

CHAPTER 6

“Being *too* Close” or the Intricate Fluxes of Existence

People in Aguabuena described themselves as *muy individualistas*, very individualistic. *Gente egoísta*, selfish people, *gente siempre buscando el propio bien*, people who always seek their own well-being or *gente que no se compromete*, people who refuse to commit to others, were some of the expressions often used to refer to their tendency to privilege the individual over the communal. However, far from constituting an atomistic society of individuals as islands, potters had a strong sense of being together, of being tightly bound, to the point of saying that *están demasiado juntos*, they are too close.

This sense of closeness was not only related to the fact of inhabiting the same geographical space or performing the same economic activities for a living. More importantly, potters were related through kin and *compadrazgo* ties that created a dense and overlapping web of family and moral ties, which for them, reinforced their sense of being close. Moreover, land tenure and residential patterns, debts, legal actions, and the water distribution system were evidence of the interwoven nature of their multiple bonds, bonds that seemed to suspend them in a web of reciprocal obligations. Moreover, this overlapping kinship system and land properties imprisoned potters in their own social structure and sense of togetherness.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, their marginal location and sentiments of being in a powerless position within the economic, political and symbolic structure of the Colombian nation (see Chapter 4) created another way of bonding. Likewise, their bodies and their acute senses as well as the mirroring narratives of each other's lives were means that strengthened the awareness and reiteration of each other's co-presence (see Chapters 3 and 5).

Aguabuena was a saturated social and physical space. Moreover, this world was fragmented, for example in the form of smaller and smaller plots inherited from the parental residential compound, or ramified kin networks, or pieces of the others' "*istorias*,"¹⁰⁵ mirroring and distorting potters like ceramic shards, scattered across the hill (see Chapter 5). In such fragmented world, however, people lived with a sense of

¹⁰⁴ In the case of potters who have migrated elsewhere, a high percentage of them return. Others, even while away, continue to maintain *compadrazgo* ties with relatives from the hill.

¹⁰⁵ See footnote 85 in Chapter 5

completeness, knowing in detail everyone else's activities and having a strong sense of being together.

Thus, the forms of relatedness among Aguabuena potters faced a tension between artisans' sense of social and existential closeness and the fragmented condition of their world. Balancing between the pieces and wholes of the Aguabuena world was the potters' lived experience of envy. Within this context, the expression *estamos demasiado juntos* was a cultural idiom indexing an existential statement and depicting the sociability qualities of potters, their forms of belonging and their "intersubjective dramas" (cf. Jackson 1998: 2), aspects at the core of the artisans' envy.¹⁰⁶ The potters' closeness involved ideas of kinship, land tenure practices and forms of reciprocity oscillating between the negative, corrosive and infamous features of their humanity and the more caring and supportive ways of their life in the community. Moreover, I would like to argue that reciprocal actions were lived as open-ended relationships in which the flows and fluxes of existence and obligations between individuals were continuously shifting. Hence, potters, although individualistic, were far from being apathetic or listless with regard to social life, and their self-proclaimed individuality was inextricably bonded to and affected by others.

The appearance of a listless social life

Regardless of the age, Aguabuena people said that they were always *haciendo oficio*, doing craft.¹⁰⁷ As they explained, most of the time this prevented them from having *vida social*, social life. From Monday to Saturday people were mainly engaged with ceramics and claimed to interact very little with their neighbours or relatives outside their households.¹⁰⁸ Their other weekly activities included farming, rearing chickens, cows or mules and, to a lesser degree, sheep herding. Each household kept a small, cultivated field for their own needs, where they grew corn, peas, beans, squash, and aromatic herbs. Their crops and

¹⁰⁶ "Intersubjective dramas" refer to the struggle for the balance between being-for-one-self and being-for-others, upon which social existence is based (Jackson 1998: 16).

¹⁰⁷ Children begin making pottery at a very early age. From the age of two to three they are encouraged to play with clay and to try to imitate the ceramic shapes formed by adults. At the age of five some of them start making *chutacos*, coils, to facilitate the manufacturing for the adults. After they start school, at the age of 6, they are still expected to help their parents after the school day ends.

¹⁰⁸ As explored in Chapter 4, the different stages into which the whole ceramic process is divided organise potters' lives, establishing a routine and a life cycle (both for the persons and the materials/objects) which begins with the preparation of clay and ends with the firing of pots and their removal from the kiln.

animal holdings, however, were not substantial enough to ensure self-sufficiency. Thus, during the week, each household was busy in their own workshop and little social interaction occurred among the different workshops; visits were rare and more likely to happen in the early morning or late afternoon when some of the artisans went outside to watch over animals in the fields far from their houses, or to check on the water hoses.

On Sundays, potters descended from the hill to Ráquira's *plaza de mercado*, food market, to buy groceries for the week. This was their busiest social day, as they usually attended the Catholic mass and/or went to the municipality office to collect social benefits or renegotiate the payment of taxes, the hospital, the *Inspección*, Legal office, the cemetery, or tried to meet with middlemen to remind them about old debts regarding payment for their pots (see Chapter 4).



Figure 15. In the *enramada* a potter woman “scratches” a vessel while watching TV.

Despite the fact that each potter spent most of their time at their own household, people in Aguabuena did not live isolated lives, but engaged socially with members of the other workshops. In fact, potters liked to sit at the threshold of the *enramada*, the semi-open space where they kept their working tools for pottery-making when they were *armando*, assembling, or *raspando*, scratching their pots (See Figure 15). This working arrangement had a twofold effect. Firstly, it placed the individual execution of a task in the public domain, as people passing by were able to observe potters at work. Second, it had the parallel effect of not secluding the person doing

craft, providing them with opportunities to engage socially and through their senses with what was happening outside the workshop. A bridge between the outside world and the interior of the workshop was provided by means of the potter's acute bodily engagement with the social environment (see Chapter 3). Loud music coming from an old radio located in the interior of the *enramada* disguised the voices and chatter of potters in the workshop

to outsiders as well as the sounds of the tools. In sum, the *enramada* was a special space from where the sense of belonging of Aguabuena potters was being shaped. Moreover, while bringing together those who worked and lived in a single workshop and the rest of the Aguabuena community in a very particular way, the *enramada* also separated potters, confining them to individual ceramic workshops.

The special interest and care taken by individuals not to miss details of the social world outside their workshop kept potters vigilant while they worked. Most *enramadas* had small holes, called *puntos* by potters, through which they peered at what was going on outside their households. Spotting a middleman's truck full of pots in the back, for example, was considered a great success in this surveillance. In fact, this gave them valuable information about which potter's crafts were recently collected and lead them to start speculating about how much money that family was likely to get paid. A quick look at the pots stacked in the back of the truck was enough for the observer to recognise the potter who made them. Later on they would go to that potter to ask for money either as a loan or to remind them to pay back an old debt.

Other holes were located in the kitchen walls or in the doors of their bedroom. Thus, the veiled look was taken not only from inside to outside, for example from the interior of a household/workshop towards the road, but also came from outside in. Through the same holes a person passing by visually accessed the life of those inside without the latter noticing it. During my fieldwork people used to comment on the case of a 78-year-old woman who had a sexual relationship with a 42-year-old man, who was also her godson. The couple were said to have often been spied upon by children who watched them through a hole in the woman's dormitory door. The incident was recounted in a jocular way, as they imitated the woman's gestures and voice, and the way she screamed at the kids after she heard their laughter behind the door.¹⁰⁹

Surveillance also occurred outside households. When moving up or down the hill, potters frequently took a break from a demanding walk (since Aguabuena was on a steep slope),

¹⁰⁹Sexual intercourse between a godmother and her godson is considered an act of incest for many communities in the Andes (cf. Spedding 1998). Similarly, this case was disapproved of, for moral reasons, by the Aguabuena potters. The active sexuality of elder women is a common theme narrated in potters' stories (see Chapter 5), and an important aspect of women's gender construction (see Introduction).

curling up behind a bush or tree while carefully scrutinizing the lives of others (see Chapter 3). Potters divided the hill into three parts in spatial terms: *arriba*, the upper part, *la mitad*, the middle part, and *abajo*, the lower part. Potters living in both the upper and lower parts were more scattered. In contrast, the ones living in the middle part were very close to one other, to the point of being considered a *barrio*, neighbourhood (see Figure 16).¹¹⁰ This *barrio* also housed the Aguabuena primary school and two *tiendas*, shops,¹¹¹ belonging to two different workshops. In general, life in the middle part of the hill was more socially dense than in the other areas.¹¹² Potters who lived here often commented on how convivial and outgoing they were compared to those up or down the hill, whom they saw as bitter, older and more backward. On the other hand, the latter morally condemned the closeness of those in the middle comparing them to a *plaga*, plague, and also alluding to the high number of inhabitants and to their fertility rate. Nevertheless, the relative proximity of people in the middle part did not create more communal ways of working or living. There, as in the rest of Aguabuena, ceramic production was always a matter of a single household/workshop.

¹¹⁰The architecture of the houses located in *el barrio* resemble the class neighbourhoods of city suburbs and sharply contrast with the houses located on the upper or lower part of the slope of Aguabuena, which have a more traditional peasant design (i.e. adobe bricks or daub and wattlewalls, small wooden windows, shed roof).

¹¹¹The *tienda* sells alcohol and soft drinks, detergent, implements for personal care and some long-lasting foods such as beans, lentils, rice, chocolate bars, and tinned tuna or sardines. Additionally, one can find snacks and sweets for children or make a paid mobile telephone call.

¹¹²Parties, to which most of the Aguabuena potters are invited, often take place in one of the households in this area.



Figure 16. View of the Aguabuena *barrio* from Manuel and Delfina's house.

Everywhere in Aguabuena, interactions between households did not depend on the spatial proximity of workshops. When referring to how often potters went out of their workshops to the *vecindad*, neighbours, people living in the more isolated parts of Aguabuena and those living in the *barrio* claimed to have little time for visits. Daily activities such as pottery-making, animal herding, taking care of the house or children were said to be so time-consuming that they left little chance to meet potters from other workshops. Furthermore, potters often claimed that they preferred to be at home as a way of avoiding conflict. For example, Deolfina, an elderly woman who lived in the *abajo* part of Aguabuena, told me that she rarely went out of the house because she did not want to end up in *enriedos*, entanglements. By entanglements she meant gossip, quarrels and fights, as well as simply the possibility of being seen by someone who then would tell tales. Her definition of *enriedo* reminded me of potters' intertwined stories on other potters (Chapter 5).¹¹³ I heard similar statements from both elderly and younger potters, male and female.

¹¹³This is what she literally told me: "Cada vez que sale uno, eso es pa' problemas pues lo terminan metiendo a uno en cuento enriedo hay! Por eso a yo no me gusta salir al barrio, yo prejiero quedarme en la casa" (Every time one goes out, this brings problems. People end up putting you in all type of entanglements [meaning gossip]. That is why I don't like to go out to the neighbourhood, I prefer to be at home).

Other potters also pointed at ongoing fights with others to explain their unwillingness to leave their workshop.

On the other hand, potters who visited others often were criticised. *Comadre* Teresa, for example, used to talk about Marina a lot, disapproving of Marina's constant excursions. For Teresa, as she expressed to me on many occasions, although Marina was a hardworking woman, she did not work *con juicio*, wisely, because she left her house to see other potters regularly. By the same token, potters who went for visits were accused of *mirar demasiado*, looking too much, in their hosts' houses. Many times I heard a family complain about their visitors, claiming that they were inspecting their house. They accused them of wanting to know what was being cooked or what type of food was kept in the refrigerator, of trying to find out what kinds of clothes were in their wardrobes, or even of stealing. "Did you see how they were stretching their necks and opening their eyes to see what was inside the pot I had on the stove?" or "did you realise how hard they were trying to look inside the room to see what I have and I don't have?," my landlady asked me after her visitors left. Usually, the next day after a visit, I heard her complaining about something that was missing while blaming the visitors for the theft.¹¹⁴

At the same time, potters enjoyed spending the night at the homes of their neighbours and relatives, a practice that complicated the situation described above. After feasts taking place to celebrate baptisms, First Communions, New Year celebrations, or social gatherings, potters often stayed at the host's house even if their own house was not far. A *junco*¹¹⁵ or mat, also called *estera*, was put on the ground in the living room or in the dormitories, and several potters slept next to each other. If they did not sleep on the *estera*, they slept squeezed together in single beds, sometimes more than three adults to a bed, as I experienced it (to my regret) the night of one First Communion party I attended. The next day a big breakfast was cooked, usually by the women who attended the party, and served to all the guests. However, staying overnight did not take place only during ritual celebrations. For example, Josefa told me once how much she enjoyed going *arriba* to her

¹¹⁴At the beginning of my fieldwork I used to receive visits from people that I was getting to know. They seemed keen on coming to see me at my place. Soon, I learnt this was problematic and instead insisted that I would come and see them at their homes instead.

¹¹⁵*Junco*, (*Juncus*, L.), is a plant that grows in lagoons and swamps. It produces a special, resistant fibre and is used in the fabrication of mats and baskets.

relatives to spend the night there, remarking that this was one of her favourite ways of relaxing. And, to my surprise, she was not the only one who told me this: other women and men also shared the same opinion.

Una ralea, an infamous ilk

Potters liked to emphasize that they were one “big family”: *todos somos familia, pero aunque juntos, nadie revuelto*, all of us, we are a family, but although together, not scrambled up. This statement encapsulated some of the most dominant ideas about kinship in Aguabuena. In fact, potters differentiated between two principal units: *el taller* or workshop (also called *la casa*), the immediate nuclear household (cf. Gudeman & Rivera 1990), and *la familia*, the kindred. Ideally a *taller* was an autonomous unit, gaining its subsistence independently from the broader group of kin and *familia*, referred to the open-ended cognatic group in which affines were included.¹¹⁶ Crucially, potters referred to their kindred as a *ralea*, an infamous ilk, highlighting the negative moral qualities of their descent, sometimes equally referring to them as *mugrera*, the filthy ones, a term which also brought to the fore – in a playful way – the fact that their bodies were covered with clay most of the day.

During the period 2009-2010 there were 30 active workshops and approximately 130 people living in Aguabuena.¹¹⁷ There was a considerable variety in terms of household composition, organisation of labour and residence patterns. The oldest generation consisted of widows in their late seventies and early eighties, most of whom lived alone, although a small number of them lived with one of their married children. Despite their age, all but the seriously ill continued to engage in craft-making activities. These *abuelitas*, grannies, as they were called, constituted a specific type of household with a different ceramic

¹¹⁶Including affines in the category of kindred has been a subject of debate. In many Andean societies affines have no inheritance rights, but tend to be treated as full members of the kin group in specific moments of social life such as ceremonies and working parties (Lambert 1977: 2). In Aguabuena, marriages between affines have equated siblings and siblings-in-law relations; for example, by the marriage of several brothers from one family to several sisters from another or unions between siblings and cousins.

¹¹⁷The population varies occasionally through the years as a small number of potters migrate to cities (for example Bogotá). Among those that migrate are teenagers or families who do not sell their goods. In the case of the latter, these people tend to return to Aguabuena.

technique to the rest of the workshops.¹¹⁸ Clotilde and my landlady Teresa fitted into this category. Then there were couples in their sixties and fifties, whose children had either migrated to the village of Ráquira or other villages and cities across Colombia or lived scattered across the hill. Sometimes these couples had one of their married sons or daughters working alongside them in their workshops, although not usually living with them. It was also often the case that one of the grandchildren was sent to spend time with the old couple during school holidays or for longer periods of time, sometimes ending up being raised by them. Manuel and Delfina, Helí and Gloria and Josefa and Custodio are examples of this type of workshop. A third type of family-workshop was composed of nuclear families of younger couples (in their forties, thirties and twenties) or single mothers and their children.¹¹⁹ Both parents, or just the mother and children worked together until the sons or daughters found a partner (this was Marina's case). Finally, there were the newly formed couples who stayed with one side of the family – either the wife or the husband's parents – until they became economically independent and built their own kiln, starting their own workshop, like Yolanda and Dario, whose story appears in Chapter 4.

In Aguabuena, like in many Andean peasant communities, kinship was traced bilaterally (cf. Arnold [ed.] 1998; Bolton & Mayer, eds. 1977, Borda 1979a; Mayer 2002). The potters' kindred were regarded as consisting of *partes*, stocks,¹²⁰ descended from couples of great-grandparents who all resided at a *finca*, farm, named Aguabuena. *Todos salimos de Aguabuena*, we all came from Aguabuena, different elder potters used to tell me, explaining that *Aguabuena* was a piece of land that their great-parents and their siblings owned two generations back (see Introduction).¹²¹

Partes, stocks, were identified by last names and by family nicknames. The latter highlight a physical attribute, a moral condition or a feature relating potters' anatomy to the pots' anatomy, and had a mode of reckoning unilineal descent, following the male descent line

¹¹⁸They manufacture pots using a different technique and have small wooden kilns for firing the vessels. Their ceramic objects are used mainly for cooking and the rate of production of their workshops is very slow and sporadic.

¹¹⁹Couples usually have at least three children.

¹²⁰I follow Lambert's definition of stock as the framework for a cognatic descent group (1977: 2).

¹²¹In telling about their kin origins, potters recall only two previous generations. Before their great-grandparents and grandparents there were indigenous people, the Devil, monks and the Virgin. Interestingly, potters' historical narratives are not linear but consist of overlapping stories that do not establish clear connections between sequences of time and type of inhabitants (find more in Chapter 7).

for men and the female descent line for women. Thus, among some of the families constituting Aguabuena kindred there were *Los Caballos*, The Horses, named after their size, and *Las Cabras*, The She-Goats and *Las Conejas*, The She-Rabbits, both considered to be too voracious sexually. There were also *Los Diablos*, The He-Devils, and *Las Diablas*, The She-Devils, both known as such for being too cunning, and *Los Tinajos*, The Little Fat Pots, named for their physical similarity to the pots they made.

Three young sisters famously known across Aguabuena were part of *Las Cabras*. All of them had small babies at the time of my fieldwork and were single. For potters, this served as confirmation of their sexual appetite, which was claimed to be unlimited. I heard many stories about them having sex in the forest on all fours. One of them became more celebrated as she was said to be planning to elope with a young married man from *Los Tinajos*' side. What I found funny about the story was that people commented on the exact date and time of their elopement and meeting point chosen by the lovers, long before it actually happened, a situation which reminded me of the great exposure that everyone had in Aguabuena. In the end their plan was said to have been shattered by the woman's aunt who came to beat her up the night before she was supposed to elope.

Sometimes individuals claimed to belong to both their father's and mother's lines as a way to increase their social recognition and agency. For example, one of my closest friends and informants, Marina, claimed to be a *Diabla*, She-Devil, on her mother's side, but at the same time she also claimed to be a *Diablo*, He-Devil, on her father's side. As she confessed to me, bursting into laughter, "On my dad's side I come from the side of male devils and on my mum's side I'm part of the female devils, so I'm a double devil!" This sort of double devilness granted special characteristics to her personhood, such as cunningness and artfulness from her own perspective, and "huge envy," in the opinion of other potters.

Workshops were connected by sibling and cousin ties. Sometimes siblings formed residential units,¹²² like in the middle part of Aguabuena, where workshops of different brothers or sisters shared a kiln, compromising the autonomy of individual households and replacing it by a group of nuclear families living and working near each other. As argued

¹²²The sibling group as a residential unit is formed by married couples and their children rather than by individual brothers or sisters.

above, this residential proximity did not involve acts of generosity or generalised reciprocity (cf. Sahlins 1972, in Mayer 2002: 14) between the households. Across workshops, neither ties between cousins or between siblings were predominant. Also, as endogamy was a common practice, these ties were not affected by marriage or relationships to affines.

Cousin marriages and unions were very frequent and often involved first cousins. However, there was no formal rule of endogamy. Nowadays, younger generations still marry within the family although they follow this practice less and less (especially those who have migrated from Aguabuena). Endogamy resulted in a close bonding of ideas and sentiments perceived both from the potters' point of view as much as from the outsiders', such as middlemen or potters from the village of Ráquira. From that vantage point Aguabuena was a close-knit community or, as one middleman expressed it, "a bunch of people being much too close to one another" or "the same people".¹²³ Endogamy was only proscribed in relationships between godparents and godchildren or parents and children; however, incestuous relationships were said to occur frequently between fathers and daughters and godmothers and godsons (see the example of the old godmother and younger godson discussed above).

Among the older generations only few potters did not marry their first cousins. Most of these cases were marriages of an individual from Aguabuena with someone coming from a different rural district in Ráquira. Rarer was the marriage of a potter (male or female) to someone coming from another rural area outside Ráquira, or a different geographical region of Colombia (such as Huila and Tolima).

Until September 2010 (the end of my fieldwork) there were only three instances of this kind. One of them was the case of Elisa, a potter woman in her early forties, who, in her second marital union, married Mono, a displaced man¹²⁴ from the north coast, who was

¹²³Endogamy and territory have been the main aspects contributing to the differentiation of populations across the Andes. Matrimonial practices, such as multiple sibling group marriage, levirate and sororate have been studied in detail as a mechanism to guarantee the autonomy of communities where there are increasing demands over land (Skar 1984, 1998).

¹²⁴He left his region due to political and military persecution by right-wing groups or paramilitaries. Displacement is one of the main causes of migration within Colombia. According to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) at least 6% of the over 45-million-strong Colombian population

younger than her. She met him one day in the streets of the neighbouring city of Chiquinquirá where she went to buy goods that were not available in Ráquira, and – as Elisa’s mother used to say in a disapproving tone – saw him “begging in the streets”¹²⁵ and immediately invited him to come with her to Aguabuena and live with her and make pots.” As for Elisa, she just explained her encounter with Mono as “love at first sight..” Gloria and Villa Frader were the second case. She was from Aguabuena and her husband was from Huila. They met through one of Gloria’s brothers who migrated as an adolescent to Huila to work on rice and coffee plantations and married a local woman.¹²⁶ One of the woman’s brothers, in return, went to Aguabuena for a visit, accompanying his brother-in-law. There he met Gloria, who was an affine of his sister, and married her, in effect marrying his sister’s sister-in-law.¹²⁷ Helí and Gloria were the third case. Helí met Gloria in the region of Tolima, while he was working at a coffee plantation. “When there was no more work for me, we came back and started our own workshop. At the beginning, Gloria could not get used to the pottery-making or the people. Later on she learnt and started to craft better pots than some of the women who have always been here,” said Helí as he recounted some fragments of his life story to me. Interestingly, in all three cases, the newcomers learned the pottery-making from their spouses and were working alongside their families and with their partners in their workshops.

When Aguabuena women married men from outside their communities, their male partners became easily integrated into the larger family as brothers-in-law. Hence, Mono and Villa Frader seemed like just two more Aguabuena men, performing the same kind of tasks that males usually did in the workshop, and undertaking communal activities with other men, such as cutting wood, ploughing, or harvesting fields. For Gloria, however, as the newcomer to Helí’s extended family, the story was different. Gloria often felt distant from

has faced or is currently in a situation of displacement. Within this tendency, the village of Ráquira has a minimal percentage of displaced people (three cases). The man who ended up living in Aguabuena and became a potter is one of the rare instances of this phenomenon.

¹²⁵Mono begged in the streets like many other displaced people who, upon their arrival to bigger cities, use begging for money as their survival strategy.

¹²⁶Gloria’s brother’s migration to Huila to find better paid work reflects a common practice among young men from rural areas who leave their households in search of “adventure”, an important aspect of manhood (see Introduction).

¹²⁷Those marriages created a whole network of kin ties and movement of people between the two regions that have transcended the households involved. In fact, nowadays many potters go to Huila for vacation and some teenagers, nephews of the Aguabuena potter who lives in Huila, have been sent there for higher education.

Heli's relatives, especially from his sister Josefa, who was – according to Gloria – trying to take advantage of the latter's status as an outsider, with no family to back her up. Heli often claimed a sort of exclusion from his family as if his decision not to marry a cousin implied neglect of his social obligations, whilst also placing him and Gloria outside the bonds of family reciprocity. "I didn't marry as they like it here and that's why they put us aside, they look at us as if we're from a different planet, which is why they want to screw us even more. People are against us," he used to tell me while blaming his economic difficulties partly on his family's consequent ostracism of the couple. His feeling of exclusion regarding his nuclear family was nurtured by remaining outside the reciprocity practices at the base of Aguabuena kin relations. Being left out from his kindred ritual gatherings and not being considered for monetary *favores*, favours, were some of the things he usually listed as evidence of being cast out.

This differentiated inclusion and treatment of outsiders according to their gender deserves further consideration. Perhaps, the fact that potter women saw themselves and were seen by men as economically independent and hardworking (see Introduction) helped their male partners to be easily integrated into the Aguabuena extended family. For Gloria, on the other hand, the expectations were different. As a non-local, she lacked the skills to make pots, and consequently was unable to make a living from it, unlike most women in Aguabuena. Although she eventually learned the craft from her husband, and even began to "craft better pots" than many of the Aguabuena potters themselves, as her husband claimed, this skill was insufficient. She was expected to run the workshop, as many other women expressed to me when talking about Gloria. In this way, Heli's household was an exception, as he – and not she – was the one arranging deals with middlemen, charging them and receiving the money, that was mainly spent on alcohol. Gloria seemed powerless in front of the other Aguabuena female and male potters, and as women used to tell me, it was partly her fault because *nunca se atrevió a conjontarlo y mandar en el taller*, she never dared to confront him and take over the workshop.

Potters married at a relatively young age (before the age of 20) and maintained stable marital partnerships, since divorce was considered an amoral behaviour. A new couple was socially recognized when the girl became pregnant and the new parents began to live

together (usually when the pregnancy is advanced or when the baby is born). Nowadays, most of the couples do not have a church wedding and just start living in the households of one of the two sides of the family, working at their parents' workshops until they are able to build their own kiln or workshop/household.¹²⁸ There is no clear rule of residence in this case and new couples simply go to live with whichever side has offered first (not necessarily the wealthier side). In some cases the new family never leaves the parents' household, but constructs their home next to them.

Elisa, for example, was one of the few women I knew of that was married for the second time. Her decision to break up with her first partner, after she had had enough of the husband's physical violence was not well received, especially among her siblings and parents. In fact, her decision to move in with a man other than her first partner gained her the reputation of a morally loose woman. "So, what has she achieved in the end?" her mother asked rhetorically, continuing with her monologue, "well, nothing. Now she has another pig, a nobody with no family (meaning that his family is not from Aguabuena) and with whom she has to share all she has. And don't think this guy treats her any better, no sir, this one beats her up even worse!" she concluded, with tears in her eyes. From the point of view of Elisa's mother, her daughter had increased her own hardships by marrying someone who had no inheritance or relatives in the area, to whom Elisa had to teach pottery-making and with whom she had to share her workshop and possessions.

As is already evident from Elisa's mother's concerns, land was the most important possession for potters and as a shared patrimony constituting the most important jural link between adult siblings. An individual ideally inherited from both sides (maternal and paternal) and passed on their land, either previously inherited or acquired through their own means, to all the offspring, usually while they were still alive, although patrimony was also allocated after the death of the parents.¹²⁹

¹²⁸This is a major difference between the new couples and the old ones, as the latter tended to have a Catholic wedding.

¹²⁹Within this framework, the labelling of Mono as a "nobody" by his mother-in-law confirms and reinforces his condition of being a person with no kin networks and no land or inheritance and therefore a very bad choice for Elisa's future.

This landholding system, on the one hand, ensured that everyone in Aguabuena had a place to live and to build up a workshop. On the other hand, its egalitarian spirit was somehow contested by the fragmentation of the land as time passed. As plots of land became smaller and marriage practices among cousins became more frequent, it became more and more difficult to live off the inherited land, rendering it one of the key themes of potters' rivalries and social conflicts.¹³⁰ Additionally, younger generations found themselves with less capacity to acquire new lands than previous generations. In fact, many were forced to sell their inherited lands to family members or outsiders in order to pay debts. In general, potters were undergoing a process of impoverishment related to decreasing resources and their unequal links to the market of their goods, which had rendered them less autonomous in comparison to older generations of potters (see Chapter 4).

Another form of kinship analogous to and partially overlapping with the kin ties, was *compadrazgo*, godparenthood.¹³¹ A potter had five *madrinas* or *padrinos*¹³² who were usually members of their family. As a result, the existing consanguineal or affinal

¹³⁰As a general rule shared by other Andean peasant communities, the inherited properties of husband and wife are never brought under common ownership (cf. Lambert 1977: 14). Furthermore, a bilateral transmission of the land and a mixture of post-marital residence rules – both virilocal and uxorilocal – have been also frequently recorded in other parts of the Andes (cf. Arnold et al. 1998). However, this pattern has changed over the years as there has been an increase in population and demand for land has made patrilineal descent and virilocal residence the most common type (Arnold 1998: 28-29).

The situation of Aguabuena contrasts with other ethnographic cases in the Andes where endogamy and bilateral descent have thwarted the fragmentation of land and contribute to the increasing autonomy of the communities (Skar 1998).

¹³¹The importance of the institution of *compadrazgo* in structuring social relations has been attested to by many scholars working in Hispanic America (cf. Foster 1961; Gudeman 1972, 1975; Osborn 1968). *Compadrazgo* (literally: co-fatherhood [or co-parenthood]) is the Spanish form of ritual kinship established through rites of the Catholic Church between a person, his/her parents and his/her godparents (van der Berghe 2002). Arguing against the Spanish origin theory, some scholars have demonstrated the indigenous roots of this institution and its vital importance for Andean communities (see Spedding 1998). Godparents are responsible for giving moral advice to their godchildren and for economic and physical care if necessary. In turn, godchildren are expected to show obedience and respect to their godparents. The relationship between the two is, however, asymmetrical as in the course of a lifetime godparents have greater obligations toward their godchildren than the latter have toward them. The godparents and the godchild's parents become co-parents or *compadres* (*comadres* in case of women). Their relationship is meant to be more symmetrical as the obligations and expectations are usually equal in form and quantity (Foster 1961: 182).

¹³²Godparents are always married. They accompany the transformation of a child into an adult through different ceremonies, most of them of a religious character. Godparents are required to be present when a child is baptised, during his first communion, confirmation and marriage, and also when the child is "presented to the Virgin" in a Catholic ceremony that has no fixed date or age. Finally, he will get another *padrino* when he graduates from school. Of all these different *padrinos* the most important are those from the baptism, as the relationships and bonds between the families are meant to be long-lasting. The other *padrinos* will only have obligations toward their *ahijados* and *compadres* only for the day of the ceremony. Godparents do not necessarily need to be spouses, but can come from different couples.

relationship with them was transformed into one with a higher level of commitment. In addition, those five different godparent couples were considered to be *compadres* and *comadres* of one another. A web of extended co-godparenthood, reinforcing kinship ties placed potters in a frame of shared obligations.

In Aguabuena, godparenthood did not occur between individuals with a marked economic or symbolic difference and therefore forms of “vertical” godparenthood and the consequent patron-client relationships were almost non-existent between godparents and godchildren, creating a situation which contrasted with other peasant communities across the Andes (cf. Bolton & Meyer 1977). Furthermore, godparenthood was a condition to which individuals aspired less and less, as it was seen more as a family obligation, reinforcing or sometimes hindering social relations.

In order to be a godparent, a person had to be married in the Church. As there were fewer and fewer couples fulfilling this condition, there were fewer eligible godparents within Aguabuena community and more and more couples of godparents formed by single persons or two persons from different marriages. This saturation in the godparenthood network also made the obligations of godparents towards their *ahijado*, godson less observed these days. Moreover, and as with rivalries and tensions found among kin, it was also very common to have fights between *compadres* and *comadres* and between *padrinos* and *ahijados*.¹³³

In Aguabuena, the *padrinos* ideally asked the parents to be godparents, although sometimes the parents also asked the godparents. This last situation was more likely to happen when a family was marginal and did not have strong kin bonds. It was considered bad luck when the potential godparents or one of them refused to take part in such a commitment. This happened to Marina, a single mother, on the occasion of her child’s baptism. Instead of being asked by a potential *padrino*, Marina had to ask one of her nephews and a godson to be her child’s godparents. Shortly before the baptism, Marina’s child had only a *madrina*

¹³³ Aguabuena’s case stands in contrast to other ethnographic examples of *compadrazgo*, where the biological parents are always the ones who choose their child’s godparents with an eye to both the child’s and their own advantage. In fact, godparents are chosen to reinforce existing ties with other kin or with friends, or to establish a special relationship with a socially superior person who can be useful to the child or the parents. Preferably, only individuals of equal or higher status than oneself are chosen as co-parents (van der Bergher 2002). In Aguabuena, as demonstrated above, not only are the godparents the ones who need to ask the child’s parents, but also, and due to the limited number of eligible godparents, it is less probable that individuals with higher status will become *padrinos* of a child.

and no *padrino*. Although the godmother-to-be had a partner, he could not be the godfather because they were not officially married in the Catholic Church. Marina then turned to her brother's family for help, but his nephew refused her offer, arguing that *el era muy joven para semejante responsabilidad*, he was too young to take such a responsibility. This incident was proof for the rest of potters of Marina's precarious kin relations, as people often remarked after the baptism party.

In contrast to Marina's case was that of Teresa Valero, one of my landladies in the field and one of the potters with the most *ahijados* and consequently *compadres* in Aguabuena. Teresa, a widow in her late seventies, was related through family ties of various types (such as grandmother, aunt, cousin, sister, mother-in-law, sister-in-law) to her numerous godchildren. This multiple network of overlapping bonds of kinship and *compadrazgo* made her a prominent *matrona* on the hill with a high level of symbolic status and respectability among artisans, held by no other potter woman in Aguabuena. *Mi madrinita Teresa*, *mi comadre Teresa*, or *mi tía*¹³⁴ *Teresa* were some of the most common labels used when referring to her. People went to her for advice, for company, or to ask her for a loan. Despite Teresa's high status among Aguabuena people, she often lamented being neglected by most of her relatives, who only came to see her *cuando necesitan un favor*, when they needed a favour; she also complained about being the target of her relatives' envy. Like everyone from the hill, she was involved in numerous legal disputes (both as a plaintiff and defendant), caused by fights and debt-related disagreements with her relatives and godchildren. She confided to me that she had stopped taking on more godchildren few years ago, because *había tenido suficiente con su familia*, she had had enough of her family, since being *madrina* often involved her in fights with her *compadres* and *ahijados* as she was accused of doing them harm.

During one of my stays at Teresa's place, I learned about a fight between her, one of her godsons, and her *compadres*. The dispute started because of the timber that, according to Teresa, was cut in one of her plots without her permission by her godson, in complicity

¹³⁴Interestingly, the term *tía-tío*, aunt-uncle, is vaguely used in the Andes regardless of the real genealogical connection among people however, the term implies a hierarchical difference between the person using it and the one who is labelled as such. This usage contrasts with the term *primo-prima*, cousin, which implies a certain equality of the two sides (Spedding 1998: 123-124).

with his parents. Before starting a formal lawsuit at the local *Inspección* against her *compadres* and *ahijado*, Teresa preferred to talk first to them on a Sunday afternoon at the Ráquira food market. That day I was accompanying my landlady to the village and while she was buying some vegetables, she bumped into her *comadre* Lilia. The two women greeted each other very formally, addressing each other as *comadre*. “Good morning *comadre*”, said Teresa who spotted Lilia first, to which the latter replied “Hello *comadre*”. While observing the two women, what struck me was the ritualistic way in which they approached each other, always highlighting their *compadrazgo* ties above kin relations or proper names. In fact, Teresa and Lilia were also cousins. Teresa asked after the *compadre* and Lilia pointed at the corner shop where her husband was chatting with some other male friends and *compadres* while drinking beer. “Let’s go and grab some drinks too,” suggested Teresa, and Lilia followed her in the direction of the shop where her husband was. I went with them, carrying Teresa’s heavy basket. Inside the shop we sat at a table next to Lilia’s husband. As soon as he saw Teresa, he left his male companions and joined us, greeting Teresa first, calling her *comadre*. In return, she addressed him as *compadre*. After a second beer, Teresa raised the issue of the timber. She confronted her *compadres* and blamed their son for cutting trees and taking the timber without her permission. The *compadre* denied her accusation and tried to calm her down, arguing that the trees that the son had cut were in fact about to fall and what he did was to prevent them from ruining a granary that was next to one of the trees. At this point Lilia intervened. She said that the plan was to sell the timber and then give a percentage to *comadre* Teresa. She portrayed her son’s actions as motivated by care and respect for her *madrina*. Lilia and the husband became offended, or so they told Teresa, by her mistrust. Teresa made no comments afterwards, and after the third drink she paid the bill and said goodbye to Lilia and the husband, addressing them again as *compadre* and *comadre*. Teresa finished what was left of the food shopping and we took the first bus back to the hill. On the bus, she met one of her daughters and while retelling that day’s encounter she said she was going to sue her *compadres*. A few weeks after the incident, her godson came to see her. He brought her some fruits and candies. He arrived on his motorbike and honked the horn before turning off the engine. Teresa and I came out from the dormitory. “Good afternoon *madrina*”, he said. “Hello *ahijado*, it’s a special day today as you’ve come to visit me”, replied Teresa, implying that he never used

to visit her. He greeted me as well, I greeted him back. Teresa invited him to the kitchen and prepared hot chocolate for him and me. After drinking the chocolate, I left the two of them alone and went to my room. The visit did not last long. After 20 minutes, he was gone. In the evening, during supper, she told me that he came to try to persuade her to not go to the *Inspección* to sue him and his parents. I discovered later, through Teresa's daughter, that her *ahijado* also told Teresa that he was thinking of suing her in return. He accused her of "not maintaining her properties and endangering Aguabuena people's lives with trees that instead of cutting she preferred to see falling on people's heads," as I found out later from the inspector. Teresa, instead, sued her *compadres* and *ahijado* for robbery.

As the time passed, the conflict between Teresa, and Lilia, her husband, and son grew bigger, as more relatives became involved. In fact, one of Teresa's sons-in-law, who lived in a neighbouring city, came to Aguabuena to talk to the *compadres* and persuade them to pay his mother-in-law a *precio justo*, fair price, for the timber they took. Lilia's mother, who was Teresa's aunt, also stepped in between the two *comadres*, trying to convince Teresa to accept the money that Lilia and her family was offering her in compensation for the wood. Teresa often made comments on the envy of her *compadres* as *encegueciéndolos*, blinding them, or *enloqueciéndolos*, driving them mad. In turn, Lilia, who was keen to talk to me every time she spotted me in the village and asked me about Teresa's health, often remarked on the envy of her *comadre*, who preferred to see her trees rot from the inside out, instead of helping her godson by allowing him to benefit from the timber. For a while, Teresa and Lilia were *enemigas*, enemies, as Teresa used to remark to me. Interestingly, they continued to exchange greetings, addressing each other with their ritual kinship labels. In 2011, in a short visit I made to Aguabuena, I found out that the lawsuit had not been resolved, but despite their pending legal case, Teresa and Lilia were *amigas*, friends, again.

Reciprocity and individualism

The intensive family life in Aguabuena encouraged forms of assistance and reciprocity between households or kin members, entailing mutual obligations in an exchange system based on the desirability of receiving the same or greater amount than what was given. At the same time, family relations were lived in an antagonistic way as the fights and rivalries

described above show. Moreover, complaints of individuals of *haber tenido suficiente*, having had enough of their families, like Teresa, were reinforced by representations of kin and *compadres*' exchanges as agonistic relationships, where people often expressed feeling *saqueados*, plundered, by their relatives. The egalitarian spirit manifested through the inheritance system was precarious not only because of the saturation of spatial and social relations, but also because potters lacked forms of non-return cooperation despite the fact that household members were bound together to other household compounds and to cognatic landholding groups.¹³⁵

Most forms of assistance implied compensation in cash and, to a lesser degree, services or goods. Aguabuena potters expected monetary compensation when they performed tasks for others outside their household. Transporting someone on their motorbike, giving them water taken from their water hoses, cutting grass or helping to move the clay mill with mules, were all forms of labour through which artisans received extra income. Other forms of exchange did not involve money. *Compañía* or *sociedad* were among the most popular forms of exchanging labour for services or goods. For example, a potter who did not have a kiln was nevertheless entitled to work at the workshop of their kin or godparents, giving in exchange half of their pots as compensation for using the family's clay, working tools, coal and kiln. Other forms of *sociedad* involved two households planting and lifting potatoes, beans or corn on one of the sides' land. In such cases, the two families shared the work and the harvests were distributed in uneven percentages, with a larger amount for the owners of the field.

Prestar una mano, to lend a hand, was another form of exchanging labour between workshops. If a member of a household felt sick, had other duties to attend besides pottery making, or in the case of women, was in the last months of pregnancy, a member of one of their sibling's workshops (either his consaguineal or in-law) usually came to replace them. The household receiving help was expected to reciprocate this assistance by coming to work for the other's party. Other tasks involving heavy work such as ploughing fields,

¹³⁵ Within this context, cooperation becomes a form of transaction or exchange where the individual has room to manoeuvre and exercise choice, pursuing a personal interest. As Mayer puts it "Forms of cooperation become organised, institutionalised, and ritualised, (and) the cooperation becomes an issue of membership in groups of various kinds. In short, relations of cooperation become socialised and subject to rules, sanctions, and social pressures" (2002: 37).

cutting wood, and loading the kiln before firing, were also exchanged in this manner. Finally, other forms of assistance took place during festivities or ritual celebrations. Baptisms, first communion receptions, or funerals demanded forms of assistance which, although referred to as more informal than the ones already described, were equally formalised. If a household was helped by their kindred during a baptism reception, in tasks such as killing sheep, cooking for a large amount of guests, and preparing corn drink, it was expected that one member of this household helps their kin in a similar way. This was the case after Marina's child baptism party. At the party, Marina was helped by her sister-in-law Pureza and her husband José in the preparation of the food and drinks for the guests. The party lasted for two days, but the preparations started a week before the ceremony. During that week, Pureza helped Marina to negotiate the price for the goats, bring them to her workshop, and shortly before the ceremony, kill and clean them as well as have them ready to grill their meat. She also assisted Marina in preparing a large amount of *chicha*, corn drink, over three barrels. At the party Pureza and José were serving the guests and while doing so often made comments of how happy they were of being able to help Marina with all the baptism's preparations. A week after the party, Marina went to Pureza and José's workshop for consecutive five days to help them, mainly crafting vessels.

As shown, exchanges among Aguabuena people were more frequent than potters tend to acknowledge. In fact, although potters claimed not to have the time or disposition to visit others, or talk about their relatives' unwillingness to help them, potters never stayed isolated in their households and related to others on daily basis. This situation was contrasted by their constant reference of other people as *individualista*, individualistic, a local category conveying a moral construction of the person, understood as someone's agency outside kin obligations.

For example, Delfina's relatives living in a different household workshop considered her to be *individualista* whenever she did not want to share food with them, or when she avoided family and kin obligations, such as going to work at her sister's workshop after her sister came to help her collect some corn in the harvest season or after one of her cousins came to her house to do the cleaning while Delfina was sick and she did not go to their house to help her cousins with several tasks. As for Delfina, she also labelled her sister and cousin as

individualistas, because they always expected some compensation for doing what Delfina said were *buenas obras*, good deeds for others. In the same way, Helí was referred to as *individualista* by his sister Josefa, every time he and his family rejected an invitation to come over to Josefa's house for a meal. "I told him to come to have a meal later today, but he doesn't dare to send his wife in advance to help me to set up the fire (for the stove) and grind the corn for the soup. And he and his family are poor, but he is so *individualista* that he prefers them to starve," said Josefa while I was sitting next to her in the kitchen. I heard this same complaint on further occasions when Josefa was expecting Gloria, Helí's wife, to come to cook lunch at Josefa's house after she invited them. Once, I had the opportunity to ask Gloria and Helí at their place why they did not always accept Josefa's invitations. They replied that they did not intend to do Josefa's job, and that she was just looking for someone who would do all the tasks that she did not want to do at home.

Within this context of a strong sense of living among others and of being encapsulated in a dense web of human relationships and kin obligations, *individualista* was a category put into play when addressing kin relations and obligations and the potentiality of personhood. It targeted those who did not reciprocate in a desirable way.¹³⁶ Sharing food is one of the major aspects of potter's conviviality, (as in many other peasant communities across the Andes, cf. Van Vleet 2008), and those who did not share, like Delfina, or rejected an offer to share, like Helí and Gloria, were portrayed by their kin as individualistic. Collaboration in certain tasks related to the ceramic work, agriculture or cooking were other important aspects where potters' individualism was said to emerge. Potters who did not go to their relatives to compensate for the work that those relatives had put into their households, like Delfina, were always represented as *individualistas*. On the other hand, it is interesting to take into account the motivations of those labelled as *individualistas*. Delfina would use

¹³⁶In this sense the individualism of potters is different to the historical project to which the word refers and what it means in the broad sense, the pursuit of the individual rather than common or collective interests. Interestingly, the individual realisation seems to be in direct dependence with the rest of potters without whom a single person's life would be considered empty. However, from a more specific and informed anthropological and philosophical reading, the concept implies a "particular historic-cultural conceptualization of the person or self that includes notions of the ultimate value and dignity of the human individual, his moral and intellectual autonomy, his rationality and self-knowledge, spirituality, right to privacy, self-sovereignty and self-development, and his voluntary contracting into a society, market and polity" (Overing and Rapport 2000:178). Contrary to the trend in previous studies of traditional societies to focus on the lack of individualism (cf. Carrithers et al.1985), my ethnography attempts to show the relevance of the individual and his role in the shaping of social relations in Aguabuena.

moralising Christian discourse to talk about her sister and cousin expecting compensation for “good deeds,” while Helí and Gloria were determined to move away from a relationship that they felt was enslaving them, as Josefa was wealthier than Helí and often reaffirmed her power over her brother and her sister-in-law by boasting about her great generosity.

Other types of exchange, equally important for potters, included lawsuits, debts, and water connections. These formed a group of actions where reciprocity was put into play whilst reinforcing the relations and flows of obligations between Aguabuena people. Moreover, these were also interpreted as *hechos movidos por envidia*, acts driven by the envy of one another. In what follows, I present a brief description of each of these aspects, which importantly engage the whole Aguabuena community, reinforcing their closeness and sense of belonging.

Suing at the Inspección

The municipal inspection office, located behind the food market in the village, was a very popular place, highly attended by potters. It consisted of a one-room office divided into two working spaces by a fairly low wall: on one side there was the inspection office, and on the other the office for environmental issues of the Ráquira municipality where the villagers paid their taxes for water and litter services. A final year law student worked as the inspector behind an old wooden desk, and a recently graduated high school student was his secretary. The latter sat at a tiny desk with an old computer and printer next to him. Behind these two civil servants there were many shelves full of boxes containing documents with official records of charges of different kinds and attempts at conciliation between Ráquira villagers. The entrance to the building was guarded by a young policeman in a green and black uniform, who had also recently graduated from high school.

From 9 to 11 a.m. every Sunday to Thursday, the inspector was available to hear the accusations of people who came to his office, while his secretary typed out their charges. After declaring whatever that person had to say, the secretary wrote a citation to the person being accused, a letter that was delivered in the afternoon either by the inspector himself or via a courier on a motorbike. After the message reached its addressee, the person being charged had a week to come to the inspection and respond to the accusation. Sometimes the

police came to visit the accused person to find further evidence to support the charges. Once the inspector heard the two sides separately, he proceeded to cite them both for a conciliation session and encouraged them to reach an agreement. The agreement was typed on a separate sheet of paper, and attached to the same folder as the dispute. Most often, the agreement was a formality far from being fulfilled in practice. More tensions and disputes usually followed. As a result, more pages were added to the archives already on the shelves of the inspection while the files became unfinished texts, always in the process of being written. In some cases, the parties did not reach any agreement and the sides took *verdaderas*, true legal actions through private lawyers hired in the neighbouring towns. Often, the accused countersued the person who had commenced the legal action, exchanging the roles of plaintiff and defendant.

Descending from *El Cerro* to the inspection to accuse or charge someone was referred to as *demandar*, to sue. It was a ritualised practice in which all adult members of Aguabuena have been involved more than once in their lifetime. And likewise, with no exception, all the people I knew or heard about during my fieldwork, had themselves faced a *demanda*, lawsuit. People often joked about it, making clear that not being involved in legal actions was comparable to having no social recognition or social relations. I often heard the following remark in which the respectability of a person was scaled according to the number of legal actions that someone had faced or brought: *Aquí todos tenemos demandas y todos nos demandamos entre todos. ¡Persona del Cerro que se respete tiene que tener demandas!* Here, all of us, we're facing lawsuits and we all sue each other. A respectable person of the hill has to have suits!

Delfina and Manuel often visited the inspection. Every Sunday they went to see the inspector, either to start a law suit against other Aguabuena potters, to defend themselves from someone's accusation, or *para saludar*, just to say hi. Manuel liked to talk about how close he felt he was with the inspector, whom he considered a *buen amigo*, good friend. He used to tell me how he enjoyed warning him the about potters' cunningness and deceit. In a way, he saw himself as a defender of justice. Other potters, however, thought of Manuel as being a *lambón*, flatterer, always trying to bribe the inspector with presents or sweet talk. During the time I stayed at Manuel and Delfina's house, I heard much about the legal

lawsuits they had ongoing with other Aguabuena potters. In fact, one of Manuel's favourite themes was to recount the long list of lawsuits he had lodged or to which he had to respond. Likewise, people who knew that I was staying at Manuel's, often told me about how he or Delfina had just sued them. Wearing a woollen suit and patent leather shoes as a way to stand out from the rest of male potters, who wore more modest clothes, Manuel visited the inspection, in a ritual visit that seemed to be the highlight of his Sunday. Many times he waited outside the office gate unsuccessfully or tried to catch the inspector on his way out of his office. On one occasion, I was accompanying him, waiting outside the inspection when the inspector suddenly appeared. Manuel kindly greeted him asking how he was and wishing him a nice day. The inspector greeted him by name, a detail which later on Manuel would describe as an important success. Nothing else was said between the two, but Manuel was happy with their encounter, which he took as an event bringing them closer. As Manuel remarked in one of the afternoons we shared at his house, his relatives envied him, and he had to *ponerle el pecho*, bite the bullet, and face the envy of others by suing all those who envied him. As for the accusations against him, which were also numerous, he explained them as being a part of his relatives' attempts to harm him, as in a reciprocal game of quarrels. "What shall they do if I sue them (referring to his relatives), well, they have to go and sue me in return! If I sue them because they owe me money, they will sue me back arguing that they have already paid me," said Manuel during one of our chats. From Manuel's statement it was clear that legal actions bounced between the parties involved in an oscillating fashion that wove together reciprocal threats and envy. Just like Manuel, many other potters actively engaged in this game, and saw it as a part of their daily activities and as an important aspect of their life together.

Suing was always a part of expected and normal conduct of the people in Aguabuena and was a performance that required a great degree of competence.¹³⁷ The announcement of one's intentions was followed by threatening remarks, by which the individual's future action was made public to the accused and to the Aguabuena community at large. Perhaps this was one of the few occasions when potters were open about their intentions, as they usually preferred to keep their activities or thoughts secret. After announcing that they were

¹³⁷I have taken inspiration from the work of Gupta (1995) and his discussion of bribery and the discourses of corruption among peasants in India.

going to sue someone else, the person then went to the inspectorate and began a legal action. Usually, potters preferred to do it on Sundays, but some of them also went during the week as Sunday was considered to be the busiest day for the inspector and consequently a day in which he had less time to carefully listen to their problems. By suing, potters always involved a third party to solve their conflicts, the state, represented by the young law student; however, they were dismissive of the inspector's capacities in mediating or solving their problems, believing that he often took sides as a consequence of being bribed by one of the parties.

In the years 2009-2010 both the inspector and the potters coincided in quoting envy as the main factor in the charges made at the inspectorate. Of course, this coincidence had different interpretations for the two sides involved. The inspector agreed that envy was a recurrent accusation of the Aguabuena people and the potters did not hesitate to say that the *envidias*, envies, were the only cause that kept the inspectorate so busy. Through the use of the word *envidias*, potters referred to concrete actions such as the robbery of husbands, water tubes or timber, stealing ceramic designs, raw or fired pots, or even the names of pots, rape attempts, hand-to-hand fights, poisoning the water in the creek by disposing of dead cows in it, destroying the neighbours' fence or enlarging someone's property by moving the fence further or even failing to build a fence on time,¹³⁸ crossing in front of someone else's house (if they are "enemies") or passing the water hose through someone else's land, not paying debts, *negocios incompletos*, unfinished business such as being paid in advance and then not showing up for work in that workshop or not paying a potter the agreed amount of money for their work.¹³⁹ This usage of the noun "envies" in plural displayed a whole moral universe of deeds, as opposed to the singular use of the term, through which potters alluded to an unspecified realm, which was however, no less real.

"How is it possible that so many problems are going on in such a small place where, on top of it all, the people are relatives? What is going on there?" the puzzled inspector asked me during one of our chats. He then concluded his reflection, saying: "I came to know that

¹³⁸These fences are, however, fragile, not durable, and easily moved beyond the boundary of one's plot.

¹³⁹The most common – and easily solvable – transactions conducted in this office were related to adding or deleting a name on a land title, dividing a plot among brothers and sisters, or settling an argument over disputed farmland.

place through the people that kept on coming to my office and then, when I went to check on the map to find a precise location of the place for the legal accusation, I realised that the place didn't even exist (on the official map)! *Agua-buena*, Good-water, ha! What an irony... I told them they should change the name to *Agua-picha*, Rotten-water!" we both laughed at his remark and so did the Aguabuena people who retold the anecdote, as it highlighted the special character of the hill and its people.

Suits often lacked factuality and accusations remained unsolved most of the time, as they were never proven. This has a twofold explanation. On the one hand, the accused party claimed that the accusatory side had invented a story at the inspectorate with no other intention than to *joder*, screw others. On the other hand, the plaintiff claimed that the accused deceived the police by rapidly erasing any traces or proof of their actions. As a result, lawsuits rarely reached a conclusion, but were potential states, the effects and intensity of which expanded or contracted rapidly, changing or exchanging their directionality by means of shifting the roles of the agents involved.

I came to learn of an archetypical suit during my field study: one potter woman sued another, explicitly accusing her of envy. Teresa Bautista, a middle-aged woman living in Aguabuena's *barrio*, took legal action against her sister-in-law and neighbour Blanca, saying that she was "fed up with her relative's envy." To the inspector's surprise, as he confessed to me in an interview, she did not specify what the actions that Blanca had undertaken against her were, by giving a long list of aspects of Blanca's *envidias*, but instead she just summed up the woman's behaviour by using the powerful although nonspecific term, *envidia*. As her case was widely commented on among the rest of potters, and potters were open about suits, I decided to ask her why she had sued Blanca. Teresa recounted to me the many occasions when Blanca had taken advantage of her, by not giving back or reciprocating what she was given (money, goods, services), by copying ceramic designs from Teresa's workshop, or by making holes in her water hoses. For her (as well as for the rest of the Aguabuena potters) all these were envy-driven actions. However, instead of telling this to the inspector, she thought it was best to accuse Blanca directly of envy. Unlike Teresa, the inspector took her accusation as unfounded and although he registered the woman's accusation, he did not call Blanca to the inspectorate or try to collect

evidences in support of Teresa's charge. The suit never progressed and instead became a public joke for the rest of the Aguabuena people and a way of mocking Teresa: *Ay la gentecita de p'ua 'cá con lo que sale... si por eso fuera 'ton tendríamos que irnos todos p'a la inspección!* (What kind of things people here come up with... had it not been for that [envy] there'd be no room for all of us at the inspectorate!).

Debts

Potters usually borrowed money from each other. The lender charged an interest rate, ranging from 10% to 30% of the total amount. Most of the time the two sides signed an improvised agreement on a sheet of paper with the date of the transaction and the deadline for payment. On other occasions simply *la palabra*, the word, of the two sides was enough to make the contract happen. Debtors rarely paid on time, and seldom repaid their debt in full. Either a *demanda* or a fight followed, and then demands for the payment of interest over the interest from the original loan, in an infinite chain that made the debt effectively endless. Despite this tension, acts of lending and owing money always took place, even between the same people who had fought in the past over unpaid loans.

During my fieldwork I knew three of the potters who were claimed to be the main money-lenders: Manuel, Josefa, and Pureza. On several occasions, I heard complaints of potters accusing them of being usurers and of having made a business out of other people's necessity, including their relative's difficulties. This was also the case when one of them, for example Manuel, talked about Josefa (see Chapter 5). The three of them never acknowledged the fact that they were making extra income through money lending, although they would be open about some legal actions that they were facing or about to face with their relatives over unpaid interest. I came to know about their activities through others and their mirroring narratives. When narrating others' deeds, addressing the harm they had caused to the narrator, Manuel, Josefa, and Pureza always highlighted their altruism to me through a self-portrayal discourse that bore some similarities. A hardworking spirit, high moral and Christian values, and a good heart were elements that, in their opinion, showed what good persons they were, allowing them to gather savings and to give to others even if sometimes they did not have enough for themselves. Additionally,

they mentioned how others were trying to take advantage of their softness and great empathy by asking for loans that most of the time they did not pay back, or if they did, it was by returning an incomplete amount. In their descriptions, others were depicted as arrogant and dismissive, even at the time of asking for these *favores*, favours, as loans were usually called. The indebted potters, of course, had their own versions. According to some of them, the lenders were lazy people, working little and making a living from the high and unpayable interest rates that they asked in return.

Debts were an important theme and subgenre of stories about potters in which boundaries between the self and the other were blurred (see Chapter 5). Moreover, despite the different degrees to which potters involved themselves in money lending, most of the potters that I talked to had lent money on several occasions. This added another level to their being together. To my surprise, even those who claimed to be enormously indebted to others, would on some occasions lend money before even considering whether to first pay back their debts. Debts circulated like potters' stories, wrapping individuals in their own complementary exchanges. By not paying their debts and always being willing to lend money, potters actualised their social relations and moral bonds, entangling each other's lives even further.

Money was not the only thing being loaned. People lent goods and services as well. Thus, materials for pottery-making such as clay or coal used for the firing, their work on several tasks at other people's workshops, horses or mules for heavy work such as carrying wood or keeping the clay mill in motion, grass for other people's cattle, or even water with the promise of being returned or paid for in the future, were potentially lendable. This wide range of services as well as a comprehensive list of quantifiable items included as sources of debt expanded the ways in which potters were potential lenders and debtors to one another. As a consequence, everyone owed everyone, some more than others, but they were all enmeshed in a flow of *favores*, favours, waiting to be reciprocated.

Other forms of exchange and reciprocity, ethnographically documented in the Andes among rural communities, such as gifts (cf. Ferraro 2004), were not as crucial to Aguabuena potters as debts. In Aguabuena people always exchanged things with the idea of returning them, by means of paying or reciprocating with an equal amount of what was

taken. A situation of someone receiving something without the need to pay it back was seen as strange by potters. After short trips that I made to Bogotá, I usually brought back gifts for my host family or several of my informants. The gifts for the kids were happily received; however, in the case of the adults, their response was less enthusiastic and usually followed up by the remark: *¿qué le debo?*, how much do I owe you? I always made clear that I did not expect any payment in return, to which people usually replied: *¡qué Dios le pague!* May God pay you back!

As a system of exchange, debt importantly tightened the web of social relationships between people (Ferraro 2004).¹⁴⁰ The dyadic transactional qualities of debt have been challenged by approaches in which exchanges between creditors and debtors are highlighted as much as the moral, spiritual and social meanings of their interactions (cf. Ferraro 2004, Mayer 2002). As Ferraro tells us, among the Pesillanos of Andean Ecuador, every year at the celebration of *San Juan*, Saint John, all community members became debtors to one another through the practice of *el Castillo*, the castle. People indebted themselves to sponsor the saint's festivities, promising to pay back next year twice as much as what they had been given. Thus, exchanges implied, on the one hand, mutual trust, and on the other, a strong and moral obligation involving a third party, *San Juan*, who was the guarantor of the morality of the exchange (Ferraro 2004).

Unlike the debt system of the Pesillanos, in Aguabuena debts did not occur in a ritualistic context and neither did potters feel a moral or spiritual obligation to pay them back. Debts were more an open-ended relationship, like lawsuits, always causing tension among potters while renewing their bonds by means of the fluxes of *favores*, favours. Hence, they were more than transactional or financial exchanges and, similarly to the case reported by Ferraro, they connected the entirety of the Aguabuena community, reinforcing their sense of belonging. Moreover, debts involved reciprocity, making contractual aspects between people even more complex. On several occasions and to my surprise, I found out about people who lent money to potters with whom they were having legal disputes at the

¹⁴⁰Debt played the main role in classical anthropological conceptualisations of peasantry. Wolf, for example, saw debt as a key aspect distinguishing peasants from other independent cultivators like tribespeople. For him, debt made peasants a subordinated group within a hierarchical social order, politically controlled by a dominant group of rulers (1966: 10).

inspectorate. I could not understand why would they give them money, even if they knew that most likely they were not going to get it back or if they were, they would first have to undergo a long and sometimes expensive legal process. I never received clear or straightforward answers to my queries.

The mistrust towards their kin that potters usually expressed in other spheres of their daily lives was not taken into account when it came to lending money, goods or services. In fact, potters rarely rejected a plea to lend to other Aguabuena artisans; if they could not lend themselves, they directed the person who has asked to someone who they knew had money, or interceded on their behalf. Sometimes a potter who was asked and did not have the money, would ask others for the money requested and would lend it to the requester. They liked to lend because it was *como tener ahorros*, like having savings as Marina once told me, hinting at something that would be returned in one way or another. Additionally, she also said that one could not escape people as they always knew what one had or did not have, highlighting Aguabuena's people exposure to one another (see Chapter 3). However, most of the time, potters did not retrieve the whole amount of what they had loaned, but only a part. Instead, what seemed more important was the oscillating dynamic which debts (like lawsuits) opened up between parties and which contributed to rendering potters' closeness effective.

Within this context it was interesting to see how people liked to recall the *favores* that other people owed them by tracking back the occasions, amounts or things that they had given to others, and calculating how much money they would receive while crafting dreams with all the things they could buy when people paid them back. Potters talked about their mutual debts, collectively reminding themselves about their commitments to one another, sometimes even in writing. This was the case of a family who sent one of their children to their cousin's workshop with a sheet of paper listing some of the things which that family owed them. The total amount of the debt came to the equivalent of £1,000, as the letter stated. The child returned later with £5, which the cousin sent and the letter with a clarification note. A red cross was put on the amount and a new total was written with a sentence: "We owe you £100 and not £1,000!" The misunderstanding made the family burst into laughter. As for me, it was the first time I had seen potters exchanging letters of

any kind. Sometimes, however, the reminder of a debt was not as friendly, and ended in fights and confrontation at the inspection office.

Water hoses

Potters had their own ways of acquiring and transporting water from the creeks¹⁴¹ to their houses by means of thick, very long (up to 70 m), black rubber hoses joined in a system. On their journeys hoses passed through various physical spaces. Thus, a single hose was put in the air, like electricity cables, then buried deep, several metres away from the meadow or road, like giant snakes or worms, and was fixed to the mountain wall that runs parallel to the dusty road which crosses the hill, until it finally reached the end of its journey: the tank of a household.

On their way, hoses met numerous bifurcations of more hoses that were waiting to be connected as a way to change the flux of the water and transport it in different directions. An extended family had one main hose from the creek until a point where it was near the households of all the relatives that agreed on being a part of the connection system. At this point there were more hoses eventually connected by family members, according to their needs. This action of connecting different hoses to the main one in order to change the flux of the water was called *pasar el agua*, passing on the water.

The composition of the net of water hoses was always changing, as there were continuous fights among the members of a hose compound. Many of these fights were disputes about who should pass on the water and to whom it should be passed on and when and how often to pass it on. It was a common practice that one family would *ilegalmente*, illegally, connect their hose to a different main hose than the usual or *permitido*, permitted one, an act considered to be *robo de agua*, water robbery. Potters usually found out about this robbery because the water did not reach them. They then started a journey towards the creek, following the course of their hose until they found the illegal connection. After discovering to whom the illegal hose belonged, they sued the *ladrón del agua*, water thief,

¹⁴¹These are two creeks. One is called Furca and is located up in the mountain in the district known as Candelaria Occidente. The other one, the creek of Pueblo Viejo, runs on the other side of the mountain through the district of the same name. Few potters have their own springs of water. In this case they also need hoses to carry the water into their houses and share their water with some of their relatives.

at the inspectorate in the village. But the water did not reach its owner also because their hose was disconnected or cut. In this case, the water *se está perdiendo*, is being lost, as it was running to no human destination. Stealing water, cutting the hose and altering the flux of water were clear actions of envy for the potters.

Potters detected very easily when the water was escaping from a rubber hose because of its characteristic sound. In the same way, they knew when the water was running in their direction or, as they said, *les llegaba*, reached them. On several occasions, I accompanied my different host families to track a problem in their water system and to try to find the person responsible for disturbing or damaging it. Usually, those excursions took place at night, and therefore hearing became more crucial than vision in finding signs of a water leakage. Carrying pliers, a few metres of wire, tape, and a torch (which was sparingly used) the potters and I walked up the slope in direction of the creek where the whole water system begun. Walking in silence, also to prevent neighbours from hearing us, the potters (and I, while following them) leaned over every once in a while to listen to the flux and velocity of the water running through the rubber channels. This sound was meant to be *transparente y continuo*, transparent and continuous, and any modification in these criteria was a sign that the system had been altered. Inflections in the road and consequently in the hoses were points of attention, as hoses were vulnerable to getting twisted, slowing down the speed of the water. Potters knew the linear, but not always straight, trajectory of the metres and metres of their hoses. In places where they remembered that the hoses were buried, they would touch the soil to make sure that there was no humidity on the ground. Finally, the interrupted flux of water would be noticed by a sound described as a *escupida*, spit, or *tos*, cough, on the side of the hose. The causes of such a sound included cuts or a hole in a hose, disunited joints of hoses, or an “illegal connection.” Once the spot and cause of damage were identified, a potter usually repaired the connecting system while speculating on who was behind the sabotage.

Besides money or materials needed for pottery-making process such as clay, coal or timber, water was one of the key resources that came up in disputes among potters. Some of the potters had natural water wells on their properties, and consequently portrayed themselves as more fortunate than the rest. However, the water levels rising from the underground

varied and in the dry season the wells became shallow puddles. Thus, all potters had their own water connection systems *conectados*, linked to one of the two creeks, a condition that made the access to water equal and free.

In the final stage of my fieldwork the Colombian state began an attempt to standardise and formalise potters' access to water. Environmental authorities from the regional and national government came to Ráquira and to the rural areas to make a survey of the population who could not access aqueducts. The initiative sought to regulate the use of natural resources considered as national goods. The officials granted each household an individual permission to have only one line of hose transporting water. No modifications were approved. The inspectors left the place without realising the complexity and entanglement of the hose system and its multiple ramifications.

These black rubber *culebras*, snakes, as potters referred to the hoses, constituted a complex system of water supply that somehow resembled the social relations of Aguabuena potters, their changing fluxes and their envy. In fact, if lost, one could find (or avoid) the way to a household by following the hoses. Moreover, like the circulation of water through the potters' interconnected hoses (and to the same extent as the lawsuits and debts discussed above, or stories on and about potters quoted in Chapter 5), envy was also a dynamic process, drawing on the continuous changes and re-compositions of the interconnected social networks and their fluxes of various directionalities.¹⁴²

A reciprocal envy

Among potters, exchanges did not have a mere dyadic and transactional frame. Moreover, potters were enmeshed in a close-knit web of relationships, whose flows, speeds, and channels blurred and changed the sides and roles of the people involved. Thus, the transitive character of social exchanges – like debts – was challenged by being and becoming a debtor to one another. Sometimes this overlap reached the point of making a debtor a creditor of his creditor, making the latter a debtor. At the same time, potters did not

¹⁴²This water use contrasts with other ethnographic examples from the Andes where anthropologists have described a more equitable and transparent use of the irrigation system, increasing social cooperation (cf. Trawick 2001).

exchange gifts but debts, lawsuits and even water, a resource to which, in principle, all of them had access, and yet they still transformed it into a quantifiable good. Paradoxically, they called these exchanges “favours”, highlighting the self-interest of getting back what was given. If, on the one hand, the so-called *individualistas*, individualistic attitudes of potters contested the more idyllic picture of communal and egalitarian rural life, on the other hand, potters’ forms of reciprocity involved lending money to the relatives or neighbours whom they had previously sued or with whom they were involved in a legal action. In this way, there was a mutual trust potentially becoming a mutual mistrust on one side, and a social and moral obligation on the other.

Classic anthropological accounts pointed out conflict and rivalries as well as the prevalence of the individual as main features of the social structure of peasant societies (cf. Friedl 1963; Foster 1961; Lopreato 1962), a social type in which potters were also included. The so-called “mentality of mutual distrust” (Friedman 1958: 24 in Foster 1965: 302) defined a set of attitudes held by peasants toward the world and human beings (Foster 1961, Friedl 1963: 280; Lopreato 1962) and made unquestionable the fact that the interactions of persons (beyond the nuclear family) occurred in a contractual manner – in an infinite exchange of favours – rather than in a prescribed way.¹⁴³ Interestingly, in the absence of corporate units and given the prevalence of “centrifugal forces” (Gregory 1975: 75) in interpersonal relations, this theoretical account posed the problem of the “centripetal forces” (ibid) or integrative factors, counterbalancing the disuniting factors, making it a crucial enquiry. If a society is torn by “fear, envy and distrust” then how is it possible to live together? In other words, what were the possibilities for communal life in peasant societies?

Classic portrayals of peasant societies built a continuum in which conflict and cooperation were opposite ends of such an oscillation (cf. Whyte 1973, Foster 1961, Bolton and Mayer 1977). Within this picture, reciprocity was seen to prevail as a means to maintain the

¹⁴³More recent anthropological literature and research on peasants after the 1970s is no longer interested in the question of a specific type of consciousness or a peasant mind through which the social structure, economic behaviour and worldview of rural groups could be explained. Likewise, ethos as a theoretical construct, has been heavily criticised as standing for a globalised and homogeneous view of societies rendering individuals invisible and privileging the realm of the ideal, contributing to the deepening of the division between culture and praxis (cf. Gregory 2009).

homeostasis of society conceived as a closed system.¹⁴⁴ The reciprocity discussed in these early works was goal-oriented and defined as a culturally sanctioned general orientation toward sharing (cf. Foster 1961; 1972; Gregory 1975). On the one hand, it reinforced the nature of selective interactions between individuals and, on the other hand, the instrumental means of maintaining the equilibrium of society in the same way as suspicion, envy, gossip or quarrels do.¹⁴⁵

And yet, reciprocity was also described as one of the main features activating and maintaining kinship relations among Andean communities (cf. Bolton & Mayer 1977; Mayer 2002). Under an “equilibrium-reciprocity pattern” (Foster 1975: 87), socio-economic relationships in the Andes were defined as transactions of giving-receiving and reciprocity was conceptualised as a “mechanism through which the flow of labour, goods and services between the institutions of production, distribution and consumption is regulated” (Ferraro 2004: 79). Within this framework, a negotiation of time, a sense of duty and owing, and a strong moral obligation were the main features of reciprocity (ibid). Additionally, it was the obligation to reciprocate rather than the content of the exchange that mattered the most, “tying the parties involved to each other through a contract that oblige(d) them to fulfil their mutual obligations” (cf. Ferraro 2004: 80; Alberti & Mayer 1974).¹⁴⁶

Moreover, the obligation “to give back” made it necessary to reciprocate a favour with a similar one, or “produce with produce and misfortunes with misfortunes” (Bastien 1978:

¹⁴⁴The conceptualisation of peasant societies as closed systems mainly served analytical purposes (cf. Harris 2005). “Peasants perceive their system to be closed” (Foster 1972: 62) was the assumption underpinning the idea of goods being “limited” in peasants’ milieu. However, the status of “closed” did not mean that peasant societies were understood as isolated. On the contrary, early works recognised that peasants were related to units of a larger scale (i.e. villages, urban centres, markets, states) and did not ignore the multiple connections and influences forged through migration or exchange, which influenced peasants from the outside (see Foster 1960, 1961, 1965; Redfield 1960). Some research even highlighted their exploitation and marginality vis-à-vis other groups (cf. Bennett 1966; Kennedy 1966; Duncan 1975) or the patron-client ties established through *compadrazgo* (cf. Osborn 1968; van der Berghe 2002).

¹⁴⁵ Foster explains how reciprocity functions within equilibrium models such as that of the “limited good”: “Social health is thought [of] based on relatively equal possessions of the good things in life. In [peasant] communities the attempt is made to realize this ideal through real and symbolic sharing, the exchange of goods and services and the redistributive mechanism of the *fiesta*” (1975: 86; cf. Foster 1965).

¹⁴⁶Mayer’s popular definition of reciprocity reads: “Reciprocity is the continuous, normative exchange of services and goods between known persons, in which some time must elapse between an initial prestation and its return. The negotiating process between the parties, instead of being an open discussion, is covered up by ceremonial forms of behaviour. It is a social relationship that ties an individual to other individuals, an individual to social groups, producers to producers, and producers to consumers” (2002: 105).

164 in Ferraro 2004: 80). This dimension of reciprocity adds a thought-provoking aspect, contesting the romantic ideal of equilibrium in peasant societies. Along those same lines, Aguabuena constitutes a good example against the ideal and harmonious cooperation disclosing a context where conflicting exchanges and envy are complemented by more supportive practices like the land-giving system or co-*compadrazgo* ties. At the same time, the manner in which reciprocity was lived in Aguabuena entailed open-ended relations of changing fluxes, entangling individuals through the circulation of favours. Within this mesh, envy contributed to bringing potters together, providing them with a means to live lives for others and yet being for oneself.

Aguabuena kinship relations and reciprocity involved a saturated system of obligations that made potters “too close” one to another. This closeness was seen by potters as the ultimate expression of their reciprocated envy. It clearly emerges from the following delivery by Marina, which she shared with me one afternoon as she was enumerating a long list of aggressive behaviours towards her from other potters:

Look, here (in Aguabuena) sometimes I feel like I’m suffocating, sometimes I’d like to run away from this place! People are always looking at me, observing me. No one minds their own business; people’s delight is in the life of others. At the same time I don’t want to go anywhere, because they will win over me. I have so many debts and the ones who owe me are not paying me back so then I can’t pay back my creditors. I’ve lawsuits to face at the inspectorate, and I’ve sued in return because I’m not a stupid woman. One of the neighbours tried to steal my land, moving the fence and another took some of my timber. Then I forbade the neighbour to cross the communal path that leads to her workshop as it’s officially mine (she laughed). She sued me in return for this. My godmother and my sister up there are always cutting my water hose and they do it every time I’m in great need of water! My compadre threatened that he wouldn’t help me with the middleman. There’s so much envy around that one can’t live in peace. They want to drive me crazy with so much envy!

Her testimony was not the only one I heard in this regard. Other men and women attested to me that they were tired of Aguabuena’s envy and that they were thinking of abandoning the place, but that they could not do so because it would mean that “the others had won” over them.

The centripetal forces amidst centrifugal forces (brought up by the debates of the 1970s in rural and peasant studies [cf. Gregory 1975]) as forces or vectors, pulling individuals towards their own interests, whilst placing them in a conflicting web of social relations, seem an accurate way of grounding Marina's depiction. This idea of centripetal and centrifugal forces as constructive and destructive extremes of life echoes the anthropological project and its general understanding of intersubjectivity as the inter-existence and inter-corporeity situated between people (cf. Jackson 1998: 3-4). Looking at Marina's words from another analytical level, it seems possible to think that envy may keep potters together by means of reciprocating their social and moral obligations.¹⁴⁷ Thus, potters' "suffocating" closeness underlies the intricate flows of communication and existence.

Enmeshed in a web of multilayered bonds that placed artisans too close to one another, the reciprocating envy, which, just like the rubber hose water system, had multiple directionalities and velocities, enclosed the potters to the extent of losing their own selves (for example, by driving them to madness) and at the same time reconciled them by locating them in a net of shared sense of life. Thus, on the one hand, the potters' closeness made them existentially smothered, and on the other, it prevented them from moving away from each other. Through this lens, a corrosive trait of envy became simultaneously a *forma de cuidar*, way of caring, nurturing the exacerbated sense of being and reciprocity among others and the inter-subjective qualities of life.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷Here is a thought-provoking idea: envy as kinship system (using a phenomenological perspective to complement other approaches which highlighted the character of kinship as a way of compassion, see e.g. Toren [1999]).

¹⁴⁸Along those same lines Jackson (1998: 4) argues that compassion and conflict can be complementary poles of intersubjectivity, "the first affirming identity, the second confirming difference." His call for an intersubjective understanding of violence sheds light on my exploration of envy in the sense of rejecting a single reading of envy (in his case – violence) as a "pathological aberration."

CHAPTER 7

Envy and the Sacred. Digression

El Desierto de la Candelaria, The Desert of Candelaria, despite its name, is a fertile valley located in the rural district of Candelaria Occidente, 2 km from Aguabuena. There, the monastery of Our Lady of Candelaria was constructed by the Augustinian monks who, inspired by the anchorite and monastic way of life of the Middle Ages, arrived in the area in the late 1500s, building one of the most influential monasteries in the Americas, from where the evangelisation of pre-Hispanic indigenous populations was orchestrated (Ayape 1935, 1950). Throughout their history, the Augustinians have used the category *desierto* to refer to the sacred condition of the valley where the monastery was built, representing it as a spiritual and isolated location appropriate for meditation and self-enclosure (Moreno 1994). Also, Aguabuena potters and the rest of villagers from Ráquira have historically viewed the *desierto* as a special place, whose sacred qualities affect peoples' lives. For example, potters believe that those marrying in the desert will have a long-lasting marriage and that children baptised there will be free from illness. Moreover, the desert and its Virgin are both referential elements shaping the local mythology of potters and their religious beliefs (cf. Chapter 1).

Aguabuena potters are the monks and the monastery's closest neighbours. The monastery is visible from the hill, so potters are able to follow the daily activities of the monks and friars (see Figure 17). Also, the sound of the bells coming from the chapel's tower, dictating the rhythm of monks' lives, is audible from inside the potters' homes. Moreover, potters maintain important relationships with the monks on a daily basis. For example, Aguabuena children, after finishing elementary school, are sent to the monastery's secondary school, and monks come regularly to the hill to celebrate Mass (see Chapter 1), evangelise potters, visit the ill, and bring food and clothes collected through charity programs. In advance of Our Lady of Candelaria Day (2nd of February), potters collaborate with monks bringing a replica of the Virgin's original image to the hill. On that day they also participate in processions in which most of the Aguabuena potters get involved. However, the relationship between the potters and the monks, is not an easy one. On many occasions I heard complaints on the monks' side regarding Aguabuena people's lack of

cooperation or interest in religion, and I heard the artisans bickering about the clerics and their charity programs.



Figure 17. A lateral view of the Monastery. In the back, the Aguabuena cerro from where potters observe Augustinian monks.

Now, whereas the *desierto* is considered a sacred place, Aguabuena is considered an envious world. Furthermore, both the desert and the hill and their respectively sacred and envious conditions appear to be inextricably linked, as far as potters' stories are concerned. In fact, it was because the Virgin and the monks arrived in the desert that the Devil was

expelled and hid in the hill, bringing envy to the potters, making envy a metaphysical condition of the Aguabuena area. On the other hand, monks relate to Aguabuena peoples' envy, preaching to them about it. What is this relationship between the sacred and envy telling us about envy in general and more specifically about the history and ethnography of the Desert of Candelaria and the Aguabuena potters? How can it be explored? Is the Aguabuena world of envy competing, reinforcing or subverting the sacredness of the desert? How should monks and potters' relationships be addressed?

I will explore the relationship between envy and the sacred, joining potters and Augustinian monks and their mutual influences via a digression. Using ethnohistorical and historical data, local narratives and ethnographic observations of daily interactions between Aguabuena people and clerics, as well as potters' gender performances, revolving around the Virgin and the Devil, I build a non-linear account that aims to enrich the exploration of envy, providing a larger context for the considerations raised throughout the thesis. By showing the ubiquity of the category of sacred and its complementarity to potters' lived experience of envy, I unravel contexts where envy is also present or juxtaposed. By

digression, I mean an excursion or “wandering from the main path of a journey” (Word Web dictionary), or stepping aside while keeping in mind the grade “designating that from which the deviation is made” (Kavanagh 1984: 150). Such a device is meant to provoke analogical mechanisms in the reader (cf. Pupo-Walker 1982) or to “[harness] the flow of discourse in such a way that both conveys a given sequence of events and, while doing so, sustains the reader’s interest along the entire course of the flow” (Kavanagh 1984: 150).¹⁴⁹ In other words, by opening a vista into the sacred and its relationship to envy, I address their possible historical and ethnographic connections, drawing on their effects in the lives of Aguabuena people.

Indios desidiosos *and the arrival of the Augustinian monks*

In the 16th century, what is today the village of Ráquira and the rural area of Aguabuena constituted a part of the socio-political system of the Muisca ethnic group, formed by a confederation of chiefdoms of different sizes and hierarchical importance (Falchetti 1973). In this territory there were at least three independent Muisca chiefdoms: Taquira, Mocatiba and Uranchá (Orbell 1995: 33-39). At the turn of the 16th century, the chiefdom of Mocatiba was incorporated into Taquira, the biggest chiefdom,¹⁵⁰ and both were entrusted to the Portuguese captain Alonso Martín Cobo and his son-in-law Diego Alonso. The chiefdom of Uranchá remained independent until its integration into the indigenous reservation of Ráquira (*resguardo indígena de Ráquira*) in 1600 (Orbell 1995: 56). This chiefdom included the slopes of the hill of Furca and the neighbouring lands of Candelaria valley, overlapping with what today is the current location of Aguabuena (cf. Moreno 2001).¹⁵¹

Ethnohistorical works on Ráquira describe an unstable social environment in the indigenous villages of the area as well as numerous rivalries over land rights and secession

¹⁴⁹Thinking of digression in these terms allows us to create a simile between the act of stepping aside from my narrative and the consequent alteration in the flow of the discourse as well as the change in the flow of water made by ways of connecting rubber hoses in the Aguabuena water circulation system.

¹⁵⁰Later known as Ráquira.

¹⁵¹Some of the Aguabuena potters, especially the more literate among them or those connected with politics, have become more aware of their pre-Hispanic roots. It is often the case that men play the guitar and compose folk songs. The male string band is precisely called “Uranchá” “because – as they say – our ancestors were named that way.” As I was told, they picked up the name after reading Orbell’s book, which is the only published ethnohistorical work on the region.

lines among their inhabitants and between the indigenous people and the Spanish colonisers during the 16th, 17th and 18th century (Falchetti 1973, 1975; Orbell 1995). During the 16th century, for example, conflicts were related to the presence of too many chiefs and captains in a single chiefdom, causing a clash of power interests between the aborigines and Spaniards. In 1613, for example, the brother of Juan López de Poveda, the *encomendero*¹⁵² of Uranchá, a Spanish man named Sebastián, claimed the land which belonged to his father and which was granted by the Spanish Crown (Orbell 1995: 57). Despite the claim, the indigenous chief of Uranchá, *don*¹⁵³ Pedro, and the indigenous captains *don* Luis and *don* Juan, did not allow the Spanish to occupy the land, declaring that they were using the grass for their animals (ibid. 57).

Despite the resistance of the indigenous people, Augustinian monks began arriving to the area at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries when a large portion of land of the Uranchá chiefdom was already under Spanish rule. As an indulgence, the *encomendero* donated a large extension of land in the Candelaria valley to the monks for the construction of the monastery of Our Lady of Candelaria (Ayape 1935). This, in turn, contributed to the decrease in the number of Indians living locally and the indigenous ownership of land (Orbell 1995).

In the 18th century, the indigenes of Uranchá were also involved in several legal disputes over land. Some of them tried to take over lands they had lost. Others attempted to give up their land rather than pay the tribute they owed to the Catholic Church (cf. Orbell 1995: 60-61). The documents studied by Orbell in his ethnohistorical research of Ráquira suggest that these indigenous groups did not cultivate the land and instead preferred to leave it fallow. In 1778 an official census was conducted, which registered 16 indigenous persons in total (three men, five women, and eight girls), all very poor and with very few cultivated fields (ibid.). The scant population and an apparent lack of interest in growing food was

¹⁵²*Encomendero* was the Spanish official in charge of the *encomienda*. The *encomienda* was a Spanish medieval institution consisting of a merced or grant given by the Crown to Spanish conquerors deemed to be of enough merit to deserve it, whereby they had the subrogated right to collect the tribute (tributo) paid by their *indios encomendados* (indigenous people placed under the *encomendero*'s tutelage), and the duties of evangelizing and taking care of them, and inhabiting and defending the colonized territory (Tell 2010: 3).

¹⁵³*Don* is used as a courtesy title before the name of a man in Spanish-speaking areas. Initially, in the New World, it was used only for the Spanish, but later on, it began to be used by indigenous chiefs as well as merchants or people of mixed origin who paid the Crown for their nobility title.

taken as an excuse by the Spaniards or chiefs from other chiefdoms to try and take more land from the Uranchá people.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, the main cause for this lack of attendance towards the land was, according to the religious and administrative officers from the Spanish Crown, the indigenous people's *desidia*, idleness.

Despite the frequent incursions of Spanish colonial officers to the region during the 16th century, it was not until the 18th century that the first reports of Indian ceramic production appeared. During an official visit in 1778, Antonio Moreno y Escandón, the *fiscal*, judge from the *Real Audiencia*, Royal Court¹⁵⁵ wrote that “the *indios* live in deep poverty, and are reduced to working on ceramics, and [in this way] they try to satisfy the tribute that they owe” (Orbell 1995: 20, my translation).

The 18th century official documents therefore state that, on the one hand, the *indios* from Uranchá (part of Aguabuena) were *desidiosos*, people with idle, whereas the indigenous population of Ráquira (which includes the Uranchá people) were producing ceramics as their main way of surviving albeit remaining tremendously poor. Their abject poverty partly explained the scarce attention that these indigenes received from the Spanish officers who made few reports on them, as their tribute was considered insignificant in comparison to other regions where aboriginals were said to be wealthier.

A declaration by the priest of Ráquira, inscribed in an official document in 1764, is one of the oldest testimonies about the amoral qualities of the indigenous people inhabiting what is today Aguabuena. Rafael del Pulgar declared the indigenes of Uranchá to be “poor, rebellious and disobedient” towards the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown, but, above all, they were *desidiosos* (cf. Orbell 1995: 62).¹⁵⁶ His testimony was part of a lawsuit against these same indigenes, and was used to support the land claims of Pedro Semita, an

¹⁵⁴ Uranchá existed as a partly independent chiefdom until the beginning of the 19th century. After the year 1804 there are no references to the place or its inhabitants in official documents (Orbell 1995: 56).

¹⁵⁵ The Royal Court was the highest court in the Spanish colonies.

¹⁵⁶ The priest gave his testimony in an *oficio*, office addressed to the *oidores*, judges from the *Real Audiencia*, Royal Court. In that document he declared: “[These indigenes] with all right reason, are called the side of the stirred up, they have not been indoctrinated, they do not attend Mass, they do not pay tribute to his Majesty, do not give alms to the priest and for their plenty of *desidia* they failed to plant their lands” (Orbell 1995: 62, my translation).

indigenous chief from a neighbouring area (Orbell 1995: 60-61).¹⁵⁷ The “enormous *desidia*” of these people, according to the priest, explained why they did not cultivate the land and kept it in a state of abandonment. It also excused the desire of the Spanish officers to take over the indigenous territories and grant the land to the Church. The document reports that the land was ultimately granted to Semita in the presence of the four *indios* to whom it belonged: Mateo Rodríguez, Andrés Rodríguez, Francisco Rodríguez and Pablo Rodríguez (ibid).

The term *indios desidiosos* was not only used when referring to the Uranchá people, but was also commonly used to describe the life of indigenous people in general and their attitudes towards work and their lack of commitment towards the Catholic Church or Spanish authorities during the colonial and post-colonial times across the Americas. In fact, the representations of indigenes created primarily by priests who were also the first chroniclers trying to write a cohesive and coherent history of the New World, portrayed them as primitive, barbaric and inhuman beings, the incarnations of moral vice and sin (Bolaños 1994). This, in turn, allowed the Spaniards to legitimise the colonisation of the aboriginals, the extirpation of their lands or wealth, and their Christianisation (cf. Langebaek 2009, Ramos 2010). These depictions contrasted with alternative attempts by some other clerics who highlighted the moral qualities of the *indios*, their condition as descendants of Adam and creatures of God and, therefore, their ultimate humanity.¹⁵⁸

In the case of the local populations of Nueva Granada (present-day Colombia), for example, the *Historia General de las Conquistas del Nuevo Reino de Granada* authored by the cleric Lucas Fernández de Piedrahíta in the 17th century, presents idolatry, distrust, lies, drunkenness and *desidia* as features shared by indigenous groups across the territory (1986 [1881]: 1, 49-50). A contemporary of Fernández de Piedrahíta, Fray Pedro Simón, in his *Noticias Historiales* (1981 [1882-1982]) described monstrous men (for example giants, men with enormous ears that covered the rest of their bodies) and exotic races without government, reminiscent of Herodotus, and Pliny’s writings (Bolaños 1994: 64-68;

¹⁵⁷ Don Pedro Semita was relying on an order given by the royal *visitadores*, inspectors who allowed an *indio*, indigene to claim the land of another *indio* if one of them was not cultivating it (Orbell 1995: 62).

¹⁵⁸ Fray Bartolomé de las Casas is probably the most well-known author of such an account (Ramos 2010).

Langebaek 2009b).¹⁵⁹ The chaotic and savage nature of the indigenes stood in sharp contrast to the moral qualities and humanity of the Spaniards, as well as their great effort in light of the difficulty they faced in enlightening the aborigines of the Americas (Bolaños 1994).

Although *desidia* appeared to be a common feature related to the inhumanity of the indigenes of the New World, this trait was interestingly a theme of rich exploration in Europe during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, especially in the work of theologians like Aquinas who speculated on the nature of humankind and on the humanity of monks (cf. Agamben 2001).¹⁶⁰ During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, monks were the first to be considered *desidiosos*, although later on other types of persons, especially craftsmen, were included as well (see below). The conquest of the New World brought a reversal of this category, which was transferred from the Western world and the monks themselves to the colonised and Christianised indigenes encountered.

Monks as desidiosos, both sinful and virtuous men

Acedia (sloth), *tristitia* (sorrow), *taedium vitae* (weariness, loathing of life) and *desidia* (idleness) were the names given by the Fathers of the Church to “death of the soul,” the deadliest of the deadly sins (Agamben 2001: 24). In the early patristic tradition there were not seven but eight capital sins, with *Tristitia* and *Acedia* in place of what today is listed as *Invidia* (later *Envidia*), envy. Later on (following Gregory the Great around 600 B.C), the eight deadly sins became seven, as *Tristitia* and *Acedia* were merged into one (ibid.).

According to Agamben, in the Middle Ages *acedia* was considered a “noonday demon” attacking the mind and fantasy of *hominess religiosi* when the sun went down (2001: 24). A feeling of horror and annoyance towards one’s environment, disgust towards the people around one, a listless attitude towards social life or action, deep unhappiness, and feelings of being stuck were part of the phenomenology of the *acedioso* (ibid., my

¹⁵⁹Interestingly, sociological, legal and psychiatric works of the 20th century on the mestizo populations also portrayed them as impoverished and slack, linking their vices to the amoral qualities of their ancestors, the aboriginal populations (cf. López de Mesa 1939; Mejía Gutiérrez 1973; Rosselli 1968).

¹⁶⁰In Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*, sloth is defined as a “kind of sorrow” regarding the “essential spiritual good of man, that is the particular spiritual dignity that had been conferred on him by God” (Agamben 2001: 26).

translation).¹⁶¹ *Acediosos* suffered because they wanted to be elsewhere, they tormented themselves with the imagination of a different place, with the fiction created in their own mind, with their own “ruthless psychological insight” (Agamben 2001: 24). This capability to imagine a distorted reality and the unhappiness or sorrow that arose from an unfulfilled desire, as Agamben phrases it, and the “distressing sadness and despair,” perhaps transformed the *envidioso* and the *acedioso* into humans of the same kind. The source of the *acedioso*’s despair was the withdrawal (*recessus*) from the gifts of God and spiritual life, which was, however, not synonymous with abandonment of the divine goals. As Agamben explains, the *acedioso* desired a spiritual life but deplored the means to reach it (2001: 31). Thomas Aquinas captures this ambivalence between desire and despair in his *Summa Theologica*, stating the close relationship between *acidia* and *sollicitudo* (desire and care/attention) (*Summa Theologica* II, 2.35). This exacerbation of desire is a recurrent characteristic of the *envidioso*, who gives special *sollicitudo* to the object/target of their envy (see Chapter 3). Thus, for both the *acidioso* and the *envidioso*, the contemplation of a goal becomes both an illusion and an obsession that is impossible to reach. In such a paradox lies the dilemma of the *acidioso* and *envidioso*: it is “impossible [for them] to escape from what is impossible to reach” (Agamben 2001: 32).

A later understanding of the term *acidia* associated it with the somnolence (*somnolentia*) of being lazy to the extent of blurring and confusing the limits between the two (Agamben 2001: 33; cf. Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 1991 [1964]).¹⁶² In the late Middle Ages, *acidia* and *melancholia* were fused into a single entity, perhaps as a consequence of their association with laziness. Melancholy became the secular heir to the monks’ sadness, a popular disease of the so-called “Saturn sons,” a category of people including – apart from monks – the envious, thieves, beggars, criminals and poor peasants, among others considered to be among the most miserable of human beings (cf. Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 1991 [1964], Suárez-Guava 2008).

¹⁶¹ For detailed phenomenology of the *acidioso* see Agamben 2001: 24-26.

¹⁶² Such an association is difficult to trace back to a specific time period (Agamben 2001: 41). Before this association crystallised, doctors of the church placed sloth under the rubric of anguished sadness and desperation and not under laziness (Agamben 2001: 26).

Acidia, however, did not always carry a negative connotation. As much as a vice, it was also considered a virtue. In fact, *tristitia salutifera* (“healthy sadness”) was conceived as the reason for the pursuit of a spiritual life, as a “stimulus of the soul” (Agamben 2001: 35).¹⁶³

Hermits and The Desert

The monks who arrived at the end of the 1500s to the Candelaria valley were inspired by the anchorite and monastic way of life of the Middle Ages. Even today, monks and potters refer to the founding fathers of the monastery as hermits who withdrew from the world and lived in caves, gathering fruits, covering themselves with animal furs, and pursuing a regime of strict spiritual discipline. These first hermits are celebrated and reinforced in today’s local imaginary of the place through different devices. *La cueva del hermitaño*, the hermit’s cave, for example, is now a tourist attraction at the present-day monastery, consisting of an underground tunnel, with inner chambers, in which the lifestyle of the first monks/hermits is recreated and exhibited to the public, explained by a young friar, the guide. In the same way, the iconography of the Virgin of Candelaria highlights the role of the hermits in the creation of her cult: the first two monks/hermits who arrived to Candelaria region are depicted at the bottom of a painting of the Virgin, in positions of worship. The reproduction of the painting, sold in the form of religious booklets, calendars, or postcards, is usually accompanied by a commentary in which this information is explicitly mentioned. Other sources contributing to the re-creation of this strong relationship between the place of Candelaria and the hermits may be found in various texts.

One of the first novels of Colombian and Hispano-American literature, *El Desierto Prodigioso y Prodigio del Desierto* (The Prodigious Desert and the Prodigy of the Desert), written by the priest Pedro Soliz de Valenzuela in the mid-17th century but only published in the 20th century, describes the monks’ abandonment of material preoccupations and the pursuit of a hermitic way of life. Following the lives of five young men who retired to caves in the surroundings of the Candelaria Desert, Soliz de Valenzuela explored the

¹⁶³In the same way, it is useful here to recall the distinction between good and bad envy. ‘Good’ envy is not morally condemned, as it is perceived as a good feeling, arising from a sincere sentiment that one person has over the achievements of the other person, also seen as a source of inspiration for the envier to achieve the same or higher goals than the person he/she is envying.

psychological tensions rooted in the battle between the flesh and spirit, echoing the existential dramas of the monks in the Middle Ages (Soliz de Valenzuela 1984 [1977]). Another influential book, based on historical archives, depicts the life of Joseph Ximénez, a Spanish soldier who fled his country after killing an opponent in a fight and ended up a hermit in the *Desierto de la Candelaria*, the Candelaria Desert, renouncing the worldly life he had led in Europe and pursuing spiritual goals instead. However, he was accused by the Inquisition of Cartagena de Indias, captured and brought to Cartagena where he was burned at the stake for heresy. For the author of the book, the historian Patricia Enciso, the fact that Ximénez ended up in the Candelaria Desert highlighted the vast fame of the place (Enciso 1995).

Despite the historical influence of monks and hermits in the area of my research, I have not come across any reference to the role of *acidia/desidia* in the life of the Augustinian clerics. However, the monks who came to this territory and followed a strict and disciplined regime of fasting, renouncing the mundane through reclusion and even flagellation (cf. Ayape 1935), could also have been vulnerable to the states of mind caused by *desidia*, which Agamben described as a recurrent condition of monks in Europe. More interesting but equally untraceable, is the question of how *desidia* – initially a feature of the monks – went on to become a trait of the indigenes that these same monks were evangelising and submitting to Spanish rule and furthermore, how *desidia* merged with or transformed into (if at all) the envy of potters of today.

I am aware that such an endeavour exceeds the reach of this thesis and requires complementary historical data and methods of analysis. Similarly, it is not my intention to demonstrate the historical continuity of these constructs, arguing that the *indios desidiosos* of the official documents were somehow transformed into the envious potters of Aguabuena, or to hypothesise about the colonial relationships that may or may not animated such processes. However, the strong presence of envy in the world of potters seems to me to have a counterpart in the sacredness of the Desert of Candelaria, through a relationship that has been fused over time.

Indios, ceramics and monks: a palimpsest

Aguabuena potters do not recognise any relationship they may have with previous inhabitants. Moreover, they do not acknowledge any legacy from indigenous people despite their awareness that *indios* inhabited this same area. The discourse promoted by Colombian institutions, such as *Artesanías de Colombia*, however, slightly changed this view. Influenced by official discourses, some potters have started to claim their crafts as a *herencia*, legacy, from the *indios*, albeit without a consistent historical account to explain such continuity.

“*Indios* made things out of stone or gold, whereas us, we use clay” was a frequent explanation offered by potters, especially at the beginning of my fieldwork. This clear-cut differentiation between them and the *indios* by means of their material culture seemed interesting to me and at the same time, paradoxical. “Long ago, I read in one of the school booklets that the *Chibcha*¹⁶⁴ inhabited this region. But I think all of them were killed or died or they just moved somewhere else, right?” Marina once said to me as we were working on some crafts at her workshop. Later on that week she received a visit from a small group of teachers from a neighbouring city. A tourist guide from the municipality of Ráquira, to whom she was close, arranged a deal with this group of secondary school teachers, presenting it as an extracurricular activity consisting of a day trip to Marina’s workshop. The man hired a bus and asked for a fixed amount of money from each of the teachers. In return,



Figure 18. A group of teachers photographing Marina.

Marina was tipped for her demonstration of manufacturing techniques, while the teachers

¹⁶⁴Chibcha is the linguistic family to which the Muisca belonged. Muisca and Chibcha are used as synonyms.

photographed her (see Figure 18). Later on she was also able to sell some of her pots to the visitors. While performing for the teachers, she explicitly mentioned that her craft was a tradition, passed from generation to generation that came from “our ancestors, the indigenes.” Her statement was clearly in contradiction to what she had told me before and to what most of the potters told me they believed. However, she saw it as a way of benefitting economically from the teachers, inspired by the crafty attitude of the tourist guide himself. “If he can make business from the tourists and me, why can’t I do the same?” she said to her family and I once the bus had left the workshop, while she was complaining about the cheapness of the tourist guide, mentally calculating how much money he had earned thanks to her.

While the potters’ relationship to *indios* was an instrumental discourse for them, seen as a means to improve their income, some potters related their craft to the first hermits or monks who came to the region in the late 1500s. However, although potters stated that *indios* inhabited this area, they also said that potters *siempre han estado aquí*, have been always here, meaning in Aguabuena. This contradiction showed to me how potters seemed to have no concerns about their past or the origin of their craft. (I wonder how envy shapes social memory, or if there is such a thing as an envious historical memory?).

There were very few occasions when I heard more consistent narratives about the first people to inhabit the area and their relation to present-day potters. One of these was Clotilde’s story, which she told me in 2009. In her account she explained the history of the Candelaria region and the origins of ceramic production, while establishing an interesting palimpsest placing the *indios*, monks, hermits, the Virgin, the Devil and the current potters in juxtaposed temporal layers.

Indios worked differently to us, this style (of Aguabuena pottery) came from what they did. During time of the indios everything was changing just like now, and a war was about to take place and they knew that they were going to get killed and they did not know where to go. At that time indios lived out of this (pottery-making) and they lived in Candelaria. Then, Candelaria was called a desert, there was no monastery still, there was nothing and they were alone and they survived thanks to the locita (craft) that they made. The indios were numerous and there were also women and children and they taught each other how to work

and there was no (Candelaria) Virgin and it was still the desert. They were aware that they were going to get killed, that there was going to be a war, so the indios buried themselves and their work and kept working on their craft underground for a long, long time. (Before the war happened) they knew that there was going to be a change so they started to work hard and over many years they made a tunnel big enough to fit the whole family and their work and (brought with them) things to eat and to drink. (They stayed there) underground until they died and never came above ground again. They buried themselves with all their belongings, their women and their children. They buried themselves in the Candelaria valley, on the east side of the river, and that is where they died. All these [pots] came from them. They took the sand from the river and took the best clay from the soil and they worked it and made loza, craft, but it was very different to these ones (current pots) because now the style is different. But it was from there (Candelaria) that the shapes of our pots came from. Nowadays, everyone makes pots as they want but it was from there, it wasn't from Ráquira, it wasn't from Bogotá, it wasn't from Unites States; it was there in the Candelaria desert where (ceramics) started.

Then other people started to become more civilized, they weren't indios, and they also started to make loza, thick and ugly [pots] but they were still doing it and so the craft was formed, and the Virgin was also there and the river grew and there was a neighbourhood and it was no longer the desert, but a monastery, not of nuns but of priests, the most Catholic in Colombia or anywhere in the world. These priests were the holiest priests of them all! And the big loza continued and now everybody wanted to build their kiln, not like the indios, who made a hole in the ground and filled it with wood and on top they put the loza and on top they added another layer of wood and then more pots on top ¹⁶⁵... Then it happened that they saw a light in the mountain and the fathers came and the sacred came and the priests were puzzled by the light and the indios weren't there and the priests wanted to know what the light on the mountain was. They discovered it was the Virgin, standing between two saints, and they (the monks) started to preach and came to be called hermits, because there was nothing there. Then the priests started to build a monastery for the Virgin and because it was a lonely land, a desert, the Devil wanted to do as he pleased, because it was a lonely place, because there were no bells and there was nothing and the indios had buried themselves and it was empty and the Devil wanted to spoil the work of the fathers

¹⁶⁵This firing technique that Clotilde is referring to was archaeologically documented in the area (see Falchetti 1974).

but he was defeated by the chief monk¹⁶⁶ (...). The priests took the Virgin (from the mountain) and over time the Virgin became bigger until she reached her current size, and she has two saints on each side of her, and these saints are hermits.¹⁶⁷

We were born here in the desert. Because our parents were very old when they died, everybody made loza and the old ones made pots with four ears [handles] and they improved the craft because the indios made an indiecita loza [indigenous craft]. Because of our parents and grandparents it was much improved and from that craft came all our current designs. Our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, they taught us how to work. Everybody looks for a way to survive and to live off their work. Here the old ones lived to be a very old age and they showed us how the craft was supposed to be done.

Clotilde's narrative highlights three moments marked by the presence of different kinds of people and their crafts, that are not sequential but are juxtaposed: the first period of the *indios*, the second period of the monks and civilized people, and the third period of the current potters. In the first era, *indios* were present in the region and lived off the pots they made. They decided to bury themselves because of a war that was about to happen, but continued to make pots underground until they died. During the second period, monks arrived in Candelaria and built a monastery. In this period there were also other people that she describes as "more civilized and different from the *indios*," who also produced ceramics, albeit different to those made by the *indios*. This ceramic was "ugly" and "thick." During this period "the craft was formed." Finally, the third period saw the appearance of the present-day potters, with their two preceding generations (grandparents and great-grandparents), whose craft was different to that of the *indios*, with improved designs and shapes. Between the first two periods an "emptiness" arose. In her narrative, a war was supposed to take place during the first period, that resulted in voluntary disappearance and consequent "emptiness" as the *indios* decided to bury themselves underground with all their belongings, their crafts and their families. At that time Candelaria was referred to as a "desert," because there was nothing there. In the second period, it was still a lonely place, so the monks who arrived were designated hermits. The Devil appeared, wanting to take

¹⁶⁶ A variation of the story of the Devil, the monks and the Virgin can be found in Chapter 2.

¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, the Virgin is discovered and brought by the monks. Michael Taussig (2002) presents a different picture in his ethnography on the Cauca valley of the south west of Colombia where the Virgin was first found by indigenes and then taken to the Spaniards.

advantage of them and the loneliness of the place. The Virgin was also there, although hidden in a mountain. After the monks found her and built a monastery in her honour, Candelaria stopped being a desert and became a monastery. This change in the status of the place also coincides with a major change in ceramic technology, as kilns were introduced to fire pots. Lastly, into this picture came the current potters and the legacy of their grandparents and parents who were born in the desert and lived until they were very old, teaching their children (the current potters) how to make the pots they make today. Moreover, they improved the pots once made by the *indios*, although it is also the case that the pots that they made and the ones that the *indios* made, were of a different kind.

Clotilde's story left many points unconnected and even included some contradictions. One of the main problems was the organisation of events in a sequential temporal framework. In this sense, although Clotilde referred to events, her narrative was not historiographical. Her extravagant story, while comprehensive, simultaneously left open spaces and gaps, and showed great imagination in conveying changes and ruptures in a heterogeneous universe in constant subversion. Her story ran through events which overlapped or transgressed one other, leaving little clarity as to what came first and how it happened.

In 2008, during a short visit I paid to Clotilde, she informed me, as she was making pots, that her craft came from the hermits of Candelaria. She made clear to me that the hermits were the first to make pottery and that they later passed it on to the potters.¹⁶⁸ Drawing on this remark, we could infer that the "civilized people" who "shaped the craft," according to her initial story, were the same monks who were present at the time when Candelaria was a desert, a fact that would not contradict her statement that the first Aguabuena people also came from the desert. From Clotilde's account, it seems possible that a connection existed between the craft, the hermits-monks and the sacred. As she tells us, the hermits were/are also saints, and their arrival also meant the arrival of the sacred. If hermits were indeed the ones to start ceramic production (continued by the potters), there is also an aspect of sacredness in the ceramic craft, which corresponds to the sacredness of the place. However, at the same time, the Candelaria area was full of envy, according to the religious booklet

¹⁶⁸ According to the religious booklet of the Monastery of Our Lady of Candelaria, Ezequiel Moreno, one of the founding fathers of the monastery, made *oficios de manufactura*, crafts. Although it is not specified what kind of craft he made, it is not difficult to imagine that the quote refers to pottery-making.

sold at the entrance to the monastery. It became a permanent quality of the place through the works of the Devil who hid in the hill, cursing its dwellers.

Clotilde's palimpsest, a multitemporal, discontinuous and open-ended story interestingly expands and challenges the traditional and monolithic visions of Andean culture (or more Cusco-centric versions of it), in which continuities from the pre-Hispanic to the colonial and the actual times are presupposed via the representations of local communities of the past and their uses of memory (cf. Rappaport 1994).

Monks and potters

Potters are particularly close to young friars, who spend one year at the monastery as part of their educational and missionary training. After completing a year, the friars become priests. The young friars (no more than eight in total, who come from different areas of Colombia and Latin America) are responsible for catechism programs, visits to the workshops and processions. Every year a small number of friars, however, do not complete their training, and abandon the religious order. Potter women, young and mature, are said to be responsible for the friars' loss of their spiritual calling (see Figure 19).



Figure 19. A group of young friars posing for the picture on the Candelaria Virgin's Day.

Children, who are instructed by the friars, often call them by nicknames and like to tease them. In 2012 I made a short visit to the field. During that time my host family was hosting special guests, a family visiting from a neighbouring city, and they thought it a good idea to show them the monastery. A big group of people, including the visitors, *compadres*, *comadres*, their children and I descended from the hill to the valley. Luckily, the tourist guide who took us around the monastery was also the friar who was catechising the potters' children, so he allowed us all to enter the monastery without charging us. As he was guiding us through the corridors and cells of previous monks, the children started to misbehave and call him names. *Besitos*, Kisses, one of the kids shouted at him, while he, in a very patient manner, explained that he was asked by the children in one of his lessons if he enjoyed being kissed. Adults laughed at the irony of the kids' remarks while approving of this sign of their children's artfulness. I did not enjoy the visit to the monastery as I was irritated by the kids' behaviour, as the constantly disobeyed the rules of the place.

To my surprise, envy was also a recurrent trope in the interactions between the monks and the artisans and in clerical messages targeting the potters. During my fieldwork, I recorded

various formal speeches by the priest of Ráquira or the monks from the Candelaria Monastery on the theme of envy (for an example see Chapter 1) and many informal conversations and ways of relating between the clerics and artisans revolving around the same topic. Surprisingly, from the potters' point of view, envy was also a characteristic of the Augustinian clerics. Similarly, envy was still prevailing during Catholic celebrations as the main way of relating.¹⁶⁹

The following two short ethnographic stories draw on envy and the sacred through concrete encounters or interactions between the potters and the monks.

2nd of February, The Virgin of Candelaria Day

Every 2nd of February the celebration of the Candelaria Virgin's Day takes place. Many preparations precede that important date. A week before, the monks would bring a replica of the original painting of the Virgin and with the voluntary help of the potters they carried the huge, heavy picture all over the slope of Aguabuena in a sort of procession, *poniéndola a dormir*, putting the Virgin to sleep at night at local the school on the hill. Thus, during the day, the Virgin was hoisted on the shoulders of the potters, mostly men but also women, who pride themselves on taking such an important and active role during this time. At night, just like the potters, *la Virgen descansa*, the Virgin rested.

The Virgin of Candelaria Day of 2010 was a religious celebration widely attended by peasants and pilgrims from Ráquira and different regions in Boyacá as well as other rural parts of Colombia. The night of the 1st of February, a *verbena*, a big party with live folk music and an abundance of food, drinks and fireworks entertained the potters and the pilgrims. The latter spent the night, some of them in vigil, in the back of the trucks they brought with them to the Desert. Some of the pilgrims also had commercial goals, as they brought candies, toys and religious souvenirs to sell during the festivities.

During this night the Virgin was taken out again (the same replica that a few days before had been exhibited on the shoulders of potters all over Aguabuena) and by candlelight a

¹⁶⁹Such a situation stands in sharp contrast to other places in the Andes where, for example, rivalry is put aside during Catholic festivities (cf. Ferraro 2004).

procession circled the unfinished square next to the monastery, the cemetery, a few houses, taking no more than half an hour.

Es María la blanca paloma que ha venido a América a traer la paz/

en el centro de una blanca nube se vino volando desde Portugal/

y es por eso que los Colombianos la llamamos madre de bondad.¹⁷⁰

This is what potters and pilgrims sang, whilst walking round the square of Candelaria, vocalising the national sentiment mixed with religion and reminding me of the colonial order established via the monks' evangelisation efforts shortly after the Spanish conquest. After the procession and the fireworks, potters usually went back to the hill, squeezing into the car or truck of a family member.

The next day people got ready in the early morning. At 5 a.m. the religious celebration began. Only the most devoted of the potters made it so early. The rest (a large majority) arrived at 9 a.m. to say the rosary and then waited until 11 a.m. for the main religious celebration to begin. Usually a delegation of priests and the bishop from a neighbouring city celebrated the Mass outside the entrance to the monastery whilst the visiting priests and the local principal monks prayed from a roof of the annex building of the chapel, talking to the crowd through a microphone. The crowd was mixed. Potters from Aguabuena, people from Ráquira and other rural areas, pilgrims from different regions and nuns, priests and religious from afar merged into a faithful multitude. On the ground, on one side of the entrance to the chapel lay the Virgin, covered by the Colombian flag and decorated on each side with floral ornaments.

To avoid the scorching sun blazing on the day of February 2nd, 2010 people were covering their heads with their sweaters, the more fortunate ones using colourful umbrellas. The space was packed to the point that I was drawn by the movement of the great mass of people. Everybody was standing, looking up to the roof at the priests dressed in red and white or purple and white, while young friars were holding up an umbrella for each important visitor. The first one to speak was the abbot in charge of the monastery. He

¹⁷⁰ Mary is the white dove who came to America to bring peace/ She came flying from Portugal in the centre of a white cloud/And that is why we, Colombians, call her the mother of goodness.

welcomed by name the other clerics and opened the religious celebration, later passing the microphone to a cleric from Chiquinquirá, a small city in the Boyacá region, considered the religious capital of Colombia and Bogotá. Most of the potters were there, scattered among the multitude. The abbot began to say Mass, referring to a story already told to me by the potters: “In the beginning there was nothing but envy in this place and the Devil had his kingdom in these lands, until the beloved Virgin, the Mother of God, came with the first hermits and threw him away! Let us pray, brothers and sisters, giving thanks to our Lord for sending our beloved Mother to save us.” After this opening speech (which raised my interest in the development of the ceremony) he went on to commemorate the anniversary of the Virgin of Candelaria and the importance of her cult. He highlighted the importance of the day, the miracles performed by the Virgin and the need to renew the faith towards her. At this point, people were getting tired and hot, and there was nowhere to sit or even take the chance to move or stretch their legs or arms. However, they stood still for the entire hour and half that the Mass lasted, as a sign of their devotion, a sacrifice to honour the Virgin. When the time for Communion came, the friars and young monks started to elbow their way through the crowd, giving Communion to the people, although not in a very orderly way. The final blessing followed and the people raised their pictures of the Virgin, calendars for the year that had recently begun, as well as rosaries, to be officially blessed, before taking them home again. When the celebration finished, the picture of the Virgin was quickly lifted by a mixed group of believers and the routine of the night before was followed while a diminished crowd started to chant religious songs and prayers. One of my potter friends, Marina, hurried up to take her place among the select group of women carrying the Virgin on their shoulders. As she explained to me later, in the past only young women and virgins were allowed to carry the Virgin on their shoulders, but now anyone could do it.

After the Mass and the procession were over, people took pictures in front of the portrait of the Virgin, which had returned to its spot on the ground at the entrance to the chapel. Later, the potters gathered together with their extended families to have lunch or drinks. The whole Candelaria area outside the monastery was transformed into a fair as many peddlers displayed all kind of religious commodities in their small wooden stands. Dispersed among the religious stalls there were food sellers, grilling meat in the open space and selling beer;

as well as some beggars. Some indigenes from the south west of Colombia and Ecuador were also selling their goods.

As I was about to go and have lunch with the family I was accompanying, I bought myself a copy of the *Novenas a la Virgen* Novenas to the Virgin, as a souvenir of the whole celebration. Later on, in the quiet of one of those Aguabuena nights, while lying in my bed, I would come to read (this time not just to hear but in fact to read!) the same quote about envy that the priest used during his Virgin of Candelaria Day sermon.

As we walked, we passed by some of the young monks. I saw some of the teenage girls from Aguabuena flirting with them and wanting me to take pictures of them with the young friars. On several occasions I had heard that monks had had affairs with young single female potters and was even told that some of them lost their calling to the priesthood as a result.

My host family and I sat by the Candelaria River, which in the dry season seemed more like a narrow creek. We observed other potters sitting down and having lunch or making toasts and drinking. In the late afternoon live music and fireworks animated the celebration. After lunch, most Aguabuena potters hung out together, sitting on a bench located in front of the improvised stage, where the bands were playing. As the music started, some of the married couples began to dance, while the youngsters and old people remained sitting, the latter drinking beer. Not many artisans danced; they preferred to watch. I also preferred to observe and rejected some invitations to dance. Potters did not chat much. At times, one potter made a provocative or funny comment about someone else that aroused much communal laughter. Apart from that there was not much communal sharing or verbal interaction, but there was an intense visual confrontation and surveillance of one another. The fireworks were the closing act and quickly vanished, leaving a huge cloud of smoke that made me and some of the older people cough. Around 10 p.m. the first car was ready to go up the hill. Agustin, the brother of the woman who was hosting me, was willing to take her and her children, the *comadre* Teresa, and two other old ladies and me in his jeep. His wife was coming with us too. Other relatives convinced him to take them as well. In total, twelve people managed to squeeze into a small Chevrolet Jimmy and we were soon bouncing around the unwieldy turns that Agustin took due to his intoxication, making him

an even worse driver than usual. After a 25-minute ride, which some of us thought was going to be our last, we finally arrived safely in Aguabuena. As people were asking him to stop and getting out of his car, they paid him 2,500 COP (0.50 GBP). His sister shouted from the back: “Agustin don’t you have any shame today? It is a holy day!” People laughed at her remark while some of the other drunken passengers still in the back commented that the envy of the man knew no limits, as he dared to charge people on a day like today. I also paid and even offered to pay for my host family. However, today was somehow different. Agustin gave me a discount. I had encountered a similar generosity in the morning, on my way to the monastery. While walking the dusty path, the car of another potter had picked me up. When we reached our destination, he asked me to give him what I considered was a correct sum. Other people, who were also about to pay, looked at me smiling. I gave him 1.000 COP. What I thought was a sign of his cheapness, was for the rest of the passengers an expression of that man’s envy who, just like Agustin, had no fear on a holy day.

Priests can also be envious

Potters respect priests and friars but do not have a submissive relationship towards them. In Aguabuena stories are often told of how potters deceived the priests or fooled the monks or even made them *caer*, fall, causing them to renounce their vocation. The stories involving potters and the Augustinian clerics involved female potters of all ages. Gossip about mature women trying to deceive the priest or monks to get extra money from the charity run by the monastery is widespread. To the same extent, rumours about old ladies lying to the priests and asking them to bring the Communion to their houses just to avoid going to church, draw on the moral looseness and mischief of Aguabuena women.

At the same time, however, many of those stories do not simply present priests or monks as passive subjects, easily manipulated by potters. On the contrary, Augustinian clerics are said to be equally envious, and capable of outwitting the potters through the same surveillance that potters use to speculate about the lives of others. The following short story takes up some of these ideas through the concrete interaction between Marina (a single mother with three children) and one of the priests of the Candelaria Monastery.

One Wednesday afternoon in 2009, while I was helping Marina to rearrange some pots that had been damaged by a rooster, separating those that had been destroyed from the damaged ones, one of the priests from the desert passed in his car. As we spotted him through a hole in the workshop's wall, Marina told me the following story: "Some people here advised me to ask him for clothes or food that monks collect in their charity programmes for the poor. I did not realise that the people who told me that just wanted to mock me. However, I did as they told me. Last week as I saw his car coming up the slope I went quickly out onto the road and stopped him. After asking him for some clothes or food, he replied that he could give me some but only when I was on my own, meaning when I no longer had male visitors. To my surprise, he even told me that two weeks ago I had had a male visitor in my workshop and that perhaps I could ask that man for food and clothes." She confessed to me that she felt offended and unsafe as everyone here, including the priests from Candelaria, were keen to keep watch over others. She portrayed him as envious, telling me "you know... priests are envious too, [envy] is not just something related to people like us." She then explained how she had told the priest off by making clear to him that he should "mind his own business," and even questioned his good morals and Christian values.

A very popular saying among Aguabuena potters perhaps condensed best their subversive relationship to priests. People who knew or saw something related to the public and social life of the village, used to say: "In Ráquira everyone, including the priest himself, can be absent, but me". This phrase, which I heard on several occasions both from men and women as I was inquiring about potters' social activities, indicated precisely to me the readiness and quickness of the artisans to be in the right place at the right time in order not to miss any detail of the life of others, to the extent of contesting the power relations and hierarchies of the clerical order.

Potter women like the Devil and the Virgin

Lastly, the tension between the sacred and envy is also present in potters' gender constructions and performances, especially regarding women. A sign of this is the recurring presence of the Devil and the Virgin in stories, inspiring family names (cf. Chapter 6), as well as influencing or shaping the personhood of female potters and their tasks or missions

in life. In the same way, women appeared to affirm their subjectivities and agencies through their encounters with either the Virgin or the Devil. In fact, stories about and narrated by women who had encountered the Devil and defeated or fooled him with their faith in the Virgin were very popular throughout my fieldwork.¹⁷¹ In these stories the Devil appeared associated with temptation and was represented with masculine features in the shape of a specific man. These narratives portrayed women as saints and as truly victorious beings because even the Devil could not win them over or take them with him. These same women, on the other hand, were said by the men to have evil powers or traits of the Devil's character.

Marina, the woman who was defiant towards the priest, told me on another occasion how the Devil wanted to take her with him. One full moon night, after seeing the father of one of her children and avoiding an ex-lover with whom she has another child, she was in bed thinking about the two men. Suddenly, she heard some noises coming from the outside, somewhere in her field. It sounded as if someone was sawing wood. She clearly heard the sound of a chainsaw and thought it was her male neighbour trying to steal some of her trees. She got up silently and opened the door quietly, leaving the lights off. She curled up behind the plants near her entrance, trying to make out the man's features. She suddenly felt that her body was being twisted, as if someone was trying to grab her by force, trying to take her away. She struggled with the stiffness of her body and finally managed to get inside her house again and quickly shut the door saying aloud, "Holy Mary!" As she explained to me, the Devil appeared because she was thinking about two men and also because she went outside at a *mala hora*, bad hour, a special time a few minutes after midnight when the rooster has not yet crowed. Then, remembering the noise she had heard and the Devil's presence, she said to me: "That day even the Devil himself could not have fooled me!"

Men often refer to women as Devil incarnates. In the household of Delfina and Manuel, he often talked about some female potters, with of his wife's consent, using imagery related to the Devil or hell. For example, he talked about Marina saying that her tongue "served her to sweep hell" and about Clotilde he said that "she herself was the Devil!"

¹⁷¹Potter men would encounter the Devil as well.

On the other hand, Clotilde, when talking about the Devil, claimed that: “The Devil cannot defeat us (women)”. At the same time she also recognises that “women are the saviours of men.” Interestingly, women appear to men as Devils or with an evil character while – from the women’s perspective – women are saints and the saviours of men. Talking about gender relationships, Clotilde told me one afternoon: “God takes care of men with his power. Men are men and they are always in (sexual) need. We women are instead hard-working, weak, with high confidence (it seemed to me Clotilde was mixing opposite attributes making her narrative in a very interesting although contradictory way), silly, and we like to serve God as well as we can. That is why they (men) tell us: I look for you and marry you because you will save me... What does this mean then? And at the sermons the priests say that women are, we, women, are, committed to saving the men.”

Men’s representations of women and women’s representations of themselves in relation to men related to the Church discourse and religious beliefs and expanded the agencies of women. Many men compared Aguabuena women to the Devil or depicted them as beings with Devilish faculties. This made women dangerous, to be feared because of their artful and cunning features, likely to deceive men. At the same time, women like Clotilde believed that women were men’s saviours, and this power imbued them with a certain holy aura that equally served them to defeat or fool the Devil himself, making them similar to the Virgin.

As Clotilde claimed in her contradictory list of womanly attributes, women were considered more hardworking than men, and even men in Aguabuena would admit this (cf. Introduction). Men were seen as less available to maintain the household economy and to provide for the family. Often, women ended up lonely, raising their children alone while supporting their ex-partners when they came back to them in their old age. This was Clotilde’s case. Her husband returned to her after falling sick, following years of absence spent in different rural regions of Colombia. However, although men were seen as not indispensable for supplying economic means to support a family, women frequently fought over men or were beaten up by men.¹⁷² In part, the need for men was related to reproduction as it was thought that the women’s main duty was to have children, regardless

¹⁷² Although stories about men beaten up by women are also known.

of having a husband or a permanent partner. In fact, single women in their forties were encouraged to find married men to *hacerles el favor*, do them the favour, which was to impregnate them just for the sake of having children. Children were the guarantee for women of having someone taking care of them when they grow old to ensure that they were not abandoned.

From the women's point of view, men were satisfied by women who saved them and made them *seres humanos en jrente de Dios*, human beings in front of God, whilst women became women only through children. Within this context women were close both to the Devil and the Virgin, since being either evil or a saint became a means of shaping and affirming their role in front of men as much as the source of conflicts and sorrows.

Ending

The so-called Desert of Candelaria and its monks have a close and historically rooted relationship to potters and the envious world of Aguabuena. Both places and dwellers are conflicting, but complementary. Thus the sacred and envy are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they are co-dependent to the point of one being the condition (and perhaps the reversal) of the other.

Colonial documents or further ethnohistorical studies do not reveal whether the pre-Hispanic population inhabiting the area of today's Aguabuena (like the Muisca) had a local category for envy and whether it was relevant to their life in community, social organization, cosmology or religious beliefs at that time, or even how it transformed (if at all) with the monks evangelising them. However, the *visitas*¹⁷³ of the late 17th century portray the indigenous people dwelling in the area as *desidiosos*, a common trope used across the Americas referring to the inhumanity of *indios* and a means of legitimising the Spanish conquest. Paradoxically, *desidia*, prior to the arrival to the New World, was a state often ascribed to the monks in the Western world, long debated during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. On the other hand, *desidia* is related to envy as they became one and the

¹⁷³Generally, *visitas* were "detailed census[es] of native tributaries that included precise ethnographic description of the structure and custom of the communities, orders to be implemented by colonial officials, and minute tabulation of the names, ages, and families of tributaries" (Cummins and Rappaport 1998: 179).

same after important theological reformations brought about after Gregory the Great's rule. Nowadays, envy is a trope commonly referred to by monks in their interactions with potters, but, interestingly, it is also a condition ascribed to the priests by the artisans themselves. To the same extent, gender constructions and performances, especially related to women, oscillating between the extremes of virtue and sin, represented by what the Virgin and the Devil impinge on artisans' subjectivities, in a way condense some of the tensions between the sacred and the envy occurring on other levels.

This chapter builds a digression as a way to explore the above thoughts, combining different sources (ethnohistorical, as well as from oral history and ethnography). To suggest that there has been a "syncretic" process in which envy, as much as the imagery around the Virgin or the Devil, are pre-colonial survivals is to deny the complexities and self-articulations of this process in which, as Rappaport claims, we should take into account "the interplay of the national and the local, of the legal, political and economic conditions that influence the choice and utilisation of symbols in the communities that we study" (1988: 737). Establishing a direct link between the present-day potters and the *indios* inhabiting the area in colonial or pre-colonial times, or the transformation of the *desidia* of the monks into the slack of the *indios* and the envy of today's potters of Aguabuena is an impossible endeavour. Besides, rather than exploring its continuities, it is more interesting to acknowledge its discontinuities and resonances in the study of colonisation and colonial order. Importantly, potters themselves are not concerned with these issues and do not have a historical consciousness that coherently and systematically links their memories to the past like other Colombian Andean communities (cf. Rappaport 1988). Rather than being linear, their historical narratives are extravagant and discontinuous, multi-temporal, and juxtaposed.

When I started writing this chapter, my original motivation was to place envy in a more historical framework. Such an attempt quickly lost its purpose as I encountered many disconnected pieces on the way, which, nevertheless, had interesting (possible) connections, pushing me towards excursions or digressions. As much as envy permeates different spheres of life in Aguabuena, the sacred also intervenes in different and important ways and on different levels (from the metaphysics of the place to the subjectivities of the

people and gender performances), which are both rivalrous and complementary subjects. An account of envy would be incomplete without an exploration of the sacred.

CONCLUSION

Envy: Craft, Hydraulics and Entanglements

This thesis is about potters, and yet not about pottery-making. When I started to write this ethnography, I wanted to show different aspects of Aguabuena peoples' lives, connected, but not reducible to ceramics and their modes of production. Of course, studying a craft community presupposes detailed knowledge of the techniques of production. Moreover, beginning fieldwork by learning a craft has proven to offer useful and very particular insights into peoples' lives (cf. Marchand 2001, 2010). It is clear that strong relationships between the work performed and their cosmological and social realms are important in cementing the world views of these artisans (see Bailey 1994, Gosselain 1992; 1999; Herzfeld 2004, Venkatesan 2009b). However, I intended to show, by means of Aguabuena potters' lived experience of envy, vistas of life in a community as well as social relations and the self in the world, disclosing tensions, conflicts, contradictions and potentialities that social life poses to individuals. In this way, I position myself vis-à-vis earlier, isolating and exoticising depictions of artisans.

The relationship between a craft, such as pottery making, and subjective aspects of the human condition have been explored previously in anthropology. One of Lévi-Strauss' famous works, *The Jealous Potter* (1986) discussed the subjective bond between pottery and human and divine jealousy. In his analysis of various myths from South American indigenous communities, Lévi-Strauss explained the connection between jealousy and pottery through the conflict between beings from heaven and subaquatic ones. Ownership of the cooking fire, also used in the firing of pots, was the main object of the deities' conflict. In this rivalry, human beings appeared marginal as passive beneficiaries and victims. The combat between the supernatural powers of the world from above and the world from below was endless; consequently, the conflict remained unresolved. The jealousy of the spirits reached the humans converting them also into jealous and envious beings.¹⁷⁴ Within Lévi-Strauss' intellectual agenda, his argument was significant since

¹⁷⁴In his work, Lévi-Strauss did not distinguish between jealousy and envy, taking the concepts as synonymous and exchanging them deliberately. In the same way, in some dictionary definitions jealousy appears as a synonym of envy. In this thesis, I do not follow this interpretation. Although jealousy and envy

pottery and jealousy were coupled, constituting a meaningful dichotomy in the ways of thought of indigenous people.

Although my own endeavour differs from that of Lévi-Strauss, like him I bring to the fore (by means of ethnography, in my case, or mythology in his) the fact that potters are not just reducible to the craft they perform, and that there are other aspects to be considered in their study. In what follows, I present a series of reflections pulling together key points scattered throughout the thesis, developing them as concluding remarks. Here, I recall ideas and themes that are central not only to our understanding of the lives of the potters of Aguabuena, but to the development of an anthropology of envy.

The potters of Aguabuena refer both to pottery-making and to envy as *ojicio*, craft. *La gente mantiene haciendo ojicio*, people keep on doing craft, and *aquí la gente tiene por ojicio la envidia*, envy is the craft of people here, are expressions which artisans often used when describing to me the most common activities they performed. Indexing and comparing pottery-making and envy with *ojicio*, craft, opens interesting possibilities for analysis. *Ojicio* could be referred to a work executed with the hands and the body and implies skill and dexterity (cf. Ingold 2000). In this regard, both envy and pottery-making are activities engaging the body in which all senses are put into play and through which a sense of belonging is shaped through the body and its physical outputs (Chapter 3). As much as pots are the finger-prints of potters and emulates their anatomy (Chapter 4), the anatomy of envy stands for a collective reverberation of the senses leading to an extreme awareness of each other's co-presence via their bodily traces (Chapter 3). Moreover, both pots and envy bring people together, creating a compact material and social universe, recognised by external actors like officials or middlemen through rustic objects and persons (Chapter 4 and Introduction), grouped together as *ralea*, an infamous ilk (Chapter 6).

Viscerality (and scatology) also play important roles in the experience of envy not only by means of the exacerbation of senses and body traces as experienced in Aguabuena (pottery fragments, but also farts, snores, faeces), but also via the grotesque bodies skilfully

are semantically closely related concepts, they do not encompass the same experience. Aguabuena potters make this clear by referring to jealousy in cases related to love and sex relationships. A person was considered to be jealous when for example married potters were having sex or affairs with people other than their partners. In contrast, in Aguabuena jealousy does not have the same wide experiential range as envy.

portrayed in potters' stories. Violent encounters between women or between women and men, depicting acts such as strangulation, rape, murder and so on are favourite themes recalled by artisans in their narratives, in which self-fashioning processes take place through "borrowed skins," blurring the boundaries between self and other. Moreover, the viscosity of envy also contribute on the material level to place people together, blurring the limits between people's bodies. Hence, as much as the performance of envy unveils a skill involving the body and the narrative, it also displays dexterity or a "know how" (Ingold 2000; Marchand 2010) put into play in the way envy is embodied, performed, recognised, reciprocated or circumvented.

Thinking of envy as craft raises the question of its modes of performance, and of its material outputs. Both craft-making and envy are considered both embodied and fully individual. As in other craft communities, in Aguabuena the way to make an object is never verbalised, and needs to be mimicked or even *copiado*, copied with the body (cf. Ingold 2000, Dilley 1999; Herzfeld 2004) by other members of the workshop. In Aguabuena, this is also the case. There is no formal learning of pottery-making and children start working in ceramics very early, doing the easiest tasks like forming coils. Family members of the same workshops are encouraged to look at the way their relatives perform certain movements with their hands and fingers to improve the quality of their production process but are never explained how to do it. And pottery-making is always considered a distinctively individual bodily activity, the output of which is a unique vessel (see Chapter 4). Whilst potters claimed pottery-making to be an activity also performed by their great-grandparents, they never referred to it as to a craft transmitted from generation to generation. This last point was, instead, the official discourse promoted by Artesanías de Colombia and the Ráquira municipality, which represented pottery-making as a craft passed on across generations.

As with pottery-making, potters talked about envy as a craft but referred to the ways this *ojicio* was transmitted and circulated from the world to the people or among the people, whilst also stating that it was part of their beings. Hence, potters of both genders, of different ages, and even fetuses, were unanimously portrayed as envious. I remember Marina telling me about how envious her youngest son David was, even before he was

born. She mentioned that he, as early as during gestation, tried to get as much of “her energy and body” as he could, or would not allow other children or relatives to come close to her by violently kicking her from inside or making her feel sick, all of this because he was envious. Hence, envy is experienced in Aguabuena as a condition of the self in the world, a situation exacerbated by envy’s metaphysical status as stories in Chapter 1 demonstrate. Finally, the outputs of envy present us with its tracks and traces which, as the chapters show, are of various kinds and involve above all the senses, ways of relatedness and belonging, as well as the self.

In anthropology, one of the most popular understandings of envy has presented it as a levelling mechanism within a setting of social relations comparable to a zero-sum game (cf. Foster 1972b). Characteristic of face to face societies or moral communities, such as small peasant groups, envy was conceptualised as a “functional device,” maintaining the homeostasis of a group’s social structure. Despite the reductionism of this type of model, one of its main achievements was to place envy at the core of social relations and as actively shaping or reproducing the social organisation of a group. More recent and alternative readings on envy as an emotion, although giving a more central role to the individual, have also undermined envy’s central role in social relations by confining it to a subjective trait located in between the ideological and factual realms (see Chapter 2).

Focusing on the experience of the potters of Aguabuena provides us with theoretical alternatives when understanding envy. In fact, the ethnographic material discussed throughout the thesis shows envy’s centrality to social life. Moreover, it shows envy both as a subject and an object, its dynamism and multivalence. Thus, on the one hand, artisans believe in the envious nature of the hill and the embodiment of envy, while on the other, they put envy in motion, influencing, circumventing or deviating its course. Moreover, envy’s enactments through the senses, narratives, kinship bonds or practices like legal actions or debts, display the intense circulation and reciprocation of envy.

Aguabuena’s case shows the vitality of envy to be more than a simple mechanism. Instead it is an experience encompassing fluxes of various directionalities, which can be conceptualised rather in terms of hydraulics. The most telling example in this regard is the potters’ artificial water system constituted by a complex web of rubber hoses in constant

states of assemblage, re-composition and sabotage (Chapter 6). The potters' artisanal aqueduct is a powerful image, perhaps one of the best ways of understanding envy at work, given the fact that it combats dryness (a condition associated with envy, see Chapter 2 and 3) in a place with a paradoxical name: Agua-buena, Good-water. Drawing on this comparison and on the hydraulics of both systems (envy and aqueduct), I have looked at the physics of envy as a key aspect of its experience, and as a realm in which individuals and their intentionalities, as well as their social relations, are embraced and put into motion.

I have tried to understand envy by looking at how people envy and how it comes into being in Aguabuena peoples' lives. In such an endeavour, I have come across the anatomy, praxis and practicalities of envy, as well as its outputs (i.e. its traces). An alternative hydraulics of envy seeks the dynamic of flows and velocities (of narratives and actions), surfaces or channels (i.e. the body, the clay, the objects), directionalities (for example exchanging position between creditors and debtors, victims and victimisers, the accused and prosecutors, or water givers and water takers), and also leakages of those trajectories, such as digressions or sabotages (see Chapters 7 and 6 respectively). Within all these processes envy has its own agency, but it is also activated and conducted by artisans who assemble means and directions for envy's flows.

Central to the dynamics of envy is its existential quality as a perpetual oscillation (Chapter 2). In fact, envy's *boleo de lado a lado*, bustling about from side to side describes a constant movement between self and other (Chapter 5), the body and the world (Chapter 1 and 3), potters and their pots (Chapter 4), being for oneself and being for others (Chapter 6) as well as vice and sacredness (Chapter 7). Within this fluid setting, multiple ramifications and changing directionalities ensure a flow of moral reciprocations which give shape to the social and existential closeness of potters, their ways of relatedness and sentiments of belonging (Chapter 6). Hence, more than balancing social relations within a context characterised by scarcity and competence over resources by individuals feeling inferior (Foster 1972b), or merely being a category for explaining what lacks sense (Taussig 2002), envy encompasses in itself a universe of relationality, connecting and providing a continuum across different realms (i.e. metaphysical and physical, individual and social, the self and others), whilst putting into play tensions between relatedness and differentiation.

One thing that envy does to people in Aguabuena, is to *enriedarlos*, entangle them. *Enriedos*, entanglements, are how potters describe the mesh of threats and tensions that characterises how they related with each other. The stories I outlined in Chapter 5 narrate these *enriedos*, while in the descriptions of Chapter 6 I showed how entanglements become existential, making potters too close to one another. Potters create and reproduce these entanglements, being authors of the lives of others and shaping an overlapping system of relations. In Aguabuena *compadrazo* ties are superimposed onto kinship bonds, while other forms of relatedness, such as debts and lawsuits, contribute to tightening the artisans' social webs. In this mesh it is difficult to trace the directionality of social relations and the role of individuals. This same difficulty occurs if we are to track the directionality or source of envy, as the threads of envy lead us to a maze of lives, in which it is difficult to establish boundaries. And indeed, potters' envy also entangled me. Their *enriedos* confused me to the point of causing me to doubt what was real and of making me part of their fabrications (cf. Chapter 5), as well as involving me bodily in Aguabuena's envy (Chapter 3).

Enriedos are potters' assemblages. Made up of parts put together and recomposed or sabotaged in different ways, entanglements playfully placed individuals in a tragicomic mesh where difficulties of life were reaffirmed but also circumvented. Hence, the potters' stories were a network of words, deliberately and adventitiously connected or interrupted, changing flows or subverting them, containing and transporting voices, rhythms, and body movements, eliciting laughter whilst touching upon cruelty and violence. Other entanglements by means of the chain of credit/debt and legal cases or moral and kin obligations had the same fluidity and recomposing effects. *Enriedos* were a source of both enjoyment and imprisonment for potters. If entangled lives aroused empathy, care and laughter, they also provoked feelings of being smothered by others. In this oscillation between being for others and being for oneself, envy provided a bridge between the individual and the world with its tensions and power asymmetries.

Potters mistrusted each other, yet were willing to lend each other money; they wanted to leave the hill but were worried about doing so, thinking their departure would mean their neighbours and relatives "had won" (cf. Chapter 6). In the same way, stories of crimes including rape and other immoral behaviour, which blended the fictional and the real,

always expressed a concern regarding the traces or proofs of such mischiefs as if potters' legal actions against each other at the inspectorate were perhaps efforts or ways to produce the real.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, potters' *enriedos* involved the inspector and state officers (see Chapter 6) as well as commercial middlemen (cf. Chapter 4), or monks and Catholic priests (cf. Chapter 7).

What does an anthropology of entanglements and therefore of the assemblages of envy and its role in peoples' lives look like? My view is that such an endeavour should not make sense of the entangled by disentangling it, but instead should follow the threads sometimes leading to dead points and diversions, sometimes leading to the core of the web, allowing the person who is following these twisted fibres to become lost and also entangled. Before coming to Aguabuena, I enjoyed following traces as part as my archaeological training. After meeting and living among the people of the hill, I became aware of peoples' signs and traces, and their importance to social life as a lived experience and not just as a part of the archaeological record. I learned that I could trace envy in someone's look or body posture, in the futuristic picture of water pipes crossing the air, or in ceramic shards. I also became aware that sometimes peoples' deeds were untraceable or that their traces were either deliberately or inadvertently confused. While in Aguabuena, I became accustomed to looking at fragments of the world through *puntos*, like the one in Marina's improvised shower (see Figure 20). Outside her house, next to the corn fields, stood Marina's shower made from a canvas tent, covered with a corrugated iron roof, with a brick floor.

¹⁷⁵ In her analysis of science as a story-telling practice, Haraway (1989: 4) introduces an interesting argument regarding the connections and boundaries of fiction and fact. As she states, "both fiction and fact are rooted in an epistemology that appeals to experience." However, despite this common origin, both constructs are characterised by an important difference. "The word fiction is an active form, referring to a present act of fashioning, while fact is a descendant of a past participle, a word form which masks the generative deed or performance." Following her, a fact is "unchangeable" whilst fiction is inventive and open. In this last element or opening "lies the threat of merely feigning, of not telling the truth form of things."



Figure 20. The view from the *punto* in Marina's shower.

The shower used an extension of a rubber hose plugged to the main hose of the workshop for water. From a big hole in one of the sides of the tent, overlooking the fields, the mountainous landscape, the dusty road, and the potters passing by, I showered, enjoying the devilish Aguabuena, at times more, at times less, thinking of my life and of my research, and experiencing the water cuts of the neighbours, which lead Marina and I, in the darkness of the night, on numerous excursions, tracing potters' envy. Like those journeys, this text is my own excursion across fragments and shards of the lives of others and how they crossed over and entangled in mine, and of the *puntos* through which I spotted the Aguabuena world and the envy of its potters.

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