After Water:

An ethnography on pain and the material environment, east of the lagoon of Fúquene.

Mónica Cuéllar Gempeler

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fullfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master in Anthropology

Department of Anthropology

McGill University

Montreal, Québec, Canada

July 2014

Acknowledgements

To Edgar Velosa I owe my deepest gratitude for guiding me through my fieldwork and sharing with me, so generously, his time and his life-changing storytelling. A heartfelt thank you to Adelaida Velosa, who trusted me with the contact of the people she grew up with, and reminded me that working with them had to matter beyond academic interests. To Cenaida Guerrero, Inés Dorado and Johana Dorado, thank you so very much, *muchas muchas gracias* for welcoming me into your lives, for your friendship, and for sharing with me your wisdom. To don Campo Elías, whose silence transformed the way I thought about life, a thank you big enough to reach him. Thank you to everyone in San Cayetano, Quicagota and San Miguel who shared with me their time and their narratives, and to those who offered me warm hellos and goodbyes as I walked up and down the mountain. I am indebted to don Agustín Mendieta and doña Isabel de Mendieta for receiving me in their home and for all their caring gestures.

The guidance of Eduardo Villarreal and Edilma Ruiz was essential for me and for this thesis, as it was to escape, once in a while, to their home in Tinjacá while I was doing fieldwork. I cannot thank you enough.

I am amazed by the support I have found at McGill University. I owe far too much to Eduardo Kohn, my supervisor, for his wonderful support, his encouraging words and patient listening. His contagious passion for anthropology and the creativity of his thinking were a motivating force for me and for this thesis. I want to thank Lisa Stevenson for her constant encouragement, and the generosity with which she listened to me and shared with me her inspiring thoughts, her moving work, and her love for words. To Colin Scott, whose thoughtful advice helped me shape the foundations of this thesis, thank you so much.

Special thanks to Olga Harmazy and Connie Di Giuseppe, who helped me navigate the intricate webs of bureaucracy, and with such patience. I am truly grateful to the Faculty of the Arts for the Graduate Excellence Awards and Graduate Student Travel Award, which funded this project.

To my friends and colleagues, Katie Strand, Janelle Baker, Daniel Ruiz-Serna, Camilo Gomez and Vineet Rathee: thank you so much for your help, comments and company. To everyone in my writing seminar, Shika Card, Nicole Rigillo, Josh Eisen, Sébastien Bluteau, Carolina Pineda, Amy Barns, Liana Chase, and Gregory Brass: thank you for your careful readings and insightful comments, and for giving me indispensable encouragement. And Lisa Stevenson: thank you, once again, for creating the space where we could all think together.

I cannot thank enough Diana Jovmir for putting up with me while I drowned in the writing of this thesis, for her insightful listening and, most of all, for making Montreal feel like home. Back home in Bogotá, I have to thank Maite Ibarreche for the creative space she shared with me, and both her and Daniela Rubio for their reassuring words. And to my long distance readers and dearest friends, María Fernanda Cepeda and Zamira Namén: thank you so much for your ongoing and loving support.

Finally, I am forever grateful to Marco, whose love and sensitivity make me over, and to my family: my brother, Nicolás, who guides me through life, my dad, Camilo, who blurs the boundaries between life and fantasy, and my mom, Juanita, whose voice is life-saving. How important your company and support is to me, is beyond words. This thesis is for you.

Abstract

In this thesis I seek to understand the connection between the material environment and different manifestations of pain, in relation to the drainage of the lagoon of Fúquene (Boyacá/Cundinamarca, Colombia). Based on four months of fieldwork with peasants who live in a region east of the lagoon, I attempt to grasp the affective register of the environmental transformations that have revolved around this body of water—and its social, political and economic foundations and consequences. I argue that perhaps because the way this region has changed affects most noticeably the economic conditions of peasants' lives, we can easily neglect the pain it has implied and what it means to live with it. In an effort to do otherwise, not only pain becomes visible but also everyday gestures of creativity, a poetics that exceeds us, and peasants' intimate engagement with the world.

Abrégé

Cette thèse a pour objectif de comprendre les liens entre l'environnement matériel et différentes manifestations de douleur, par rapport a l'asséchement de la lagune de Fúquene (Boyacá/Cundinamarca, Colombie). D'après un travail ethnographique développé pendant quatre mois avec les paysans qui habitent une région à l'Est de la lagune, j'aspire à saisir le registre affectif des transformations environnementales produites autour de cette masse d'eau—aussi que ses conséquences et bases sociaux, politiques et économiques. Je propose come hypothèse que nous risquons d'ignorer la douleur que ces changements impliquent, et ce qu'il signifie de vivre avec cette douleur, peut-être parce que la façon dont cette région a changé touche le plus visiblement les conditions économiques des paysans qui l'habitent. En essayant d'éviter de prendre cette tournure, non seulement la douleur se rend évident mais aussi des petits gestes créatifs, une poétique qui nous dépasse, et l'engagement intime des paysans avec le monde.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In the late eighteen hundreds geographer Alfred Hettner travelled through the Colombian Andes and passed by the lagoon of Fúquene. In a wooden boat, after riding mules for weeks, he navigated the "turbid brown" waters towards the island, El Santuario, and then climbed his way up the highest hill. From the distance, he contemplated the shallow body of water that he knew, because the surrounding mountains suggested it, used to be an impressive lake, and, as most writers who illustrated the lagoon in the years that followed, he noted something melancholic about this place.

He perceived it in the weather, "melancholic in itself"(1976:289), José Caicedo Rojas in the foam that "crashes at a melancholic pace"(1945:2), and Miguel Triana in the deity that lives underwater—the melancholic god Fú (1984:209). Peñarete Villamil described the sight of the lagoon as a "dreamlike landscape of honeyed sadness" (1969:6), and Nieto Caballero wrote that, from the island, "the view was *chibcha*, sedative, poetic, somewhat sad"(1969:8–9).

At least partly, the loss of water of the lagoon, "the last surviving vestige of a great chain of lakes which existed 40,000 years ago"(CAR 2000:172), must have inspired these phrases—which draw me to the place of which I write here and lead me, through ethnography's unexpected turns, to the people and the stories that are the heart of this thesis. The melancholy these writers manifest, a bittersweet sadness sometimes, foregrounds the issue that is central to this text: the connection between pain and the material environment, in relation to the drainage of the lagoon of Fúquene.

The way I found this relationship to exist in the lives of the people I worked with is of course different, and more elusive, than what the lyrical prose with which the lagoon was described suggests. In many ways, the ethnography I conducted distanced me from the writings that inspired it, but this text still somehow clings to them, perhaps in the manner of unresolved questions (for example: what does it mean that the weather can be melancholic *in itself*?), and surely with the belief that poetry touches on an affective register otherwise easy to overlook.

***

Between May and August 2013, I conducted fieldwork east of the lagoon of Fúquene with peasants, *campesinos*, whose lives are connected by their work, kinship ties, friendship, the unpaved road that links Guachetá (Cundinamarca) with San Miguel de Sema (Boyacá), and the path that starts in this road and snakes up the mountain, cutting through the *veredas* of San Cayetano and Quicagota (Ráquira). The "region" I refer to throughout this thesis is the place that takes shape in the everyday through these different kinds of ties, which therefore has a limited reach and doesn't correspond exactly to official geopolitical frontiers.

A year had passed since the last flood when I got there. It was an intense summer, a dry season that sharply contrasted with the last three years of heavy winters—as rainy seasons are called in season-less countries. The wind "strolled the lagoon", as don Enrique, an eighty-year-old peasant whose house faces the water, put it: *el viento pasea la laguna*. The water moved with the wind through the empty fields, surrendered, it seemed to me, to the unpredictable weather. I could only imagine, through the fresh memory of the previous years, the relentless force with which it periodically bursts into the fields, ruining the crops, drowning the cattle, and changing

the course of lives. With a single phrase people described it: “the lagoon takes back her territory” (*la laguna retoma su territorio*)—the land it lost gradually through a long history of environmental transformations and a myriad of drainage projects.

Its story is the backdrop of the stories I engage with in the chapters that follow, a presence at once undeniable and faint like the lagoon itself: the background of everyday life and of its telling. In one way, it begins with the rise of the mountain chain of the Andes, when the lagoon first came to be. When humans first found it, Lorena Franco and Germán Andrade imagine, it was already a fraction of what it once was, having lost its waters through the weather fluctuations of immemorial geological epochs (2007:44). Its sediments preserve the story of the small groups of hunter gatherers who inhabited the flat land that bordered the water some three thousand years ago, and began a slow process of deforestation—which intensified in pre-colonial times through the agricultural practices of the independent group of Muiscas who inhabited these lands up until the arrival of Spanish settlers (Andrade and Franco 2007:45–46). By 1849 Jean Baptiste Boussingault would deem deforestation to be the main reason why “…the oldest inhabitants of these places have seen the waters lower constantly, and new beaches appear” (1849:8).

For the Muiscas the lagoon was a political and religious center, which, in addition to the fertile land that enclosed it, must have lured the Spaniards who displaced them to the surrounding mountains and held them in place through the colonial institution of the encomienda (Langebaek 1995). Writers of the environmental history of this place suggest that their dispossession contributed to the erosion of the mountains, while Spanish settlers began the first efforts to dry out the lagoon which they conceived as flooded (workable) land (CAR n.d.; CAR 2000; Franco Vidal and Andrade Pérez 2007).

The dichotomy between Spanish settlers and indigenous people, flat and mountain land, still exists today in the form of "rich people" (absentee landowners) and "poor people" (peasants), haciendas and peasant farms—as do the mutual dependencies therein implied: as Roberto García Franco explains, haciendas depend on the labor force peasants provide and they need the land the latter inhabit to keep their cattle during the winter, while peasants need to work in the haciendas to make up for what the ruined soil of the mountains cannot offer (2007:62–65). The Colony, in this sense, still haunts these lands and people's lives.

Yet it was after Independence that the drainage of the lagoon took on considerable force, since public lands (*territorios baldíos*) and portions of the lagoon were adjudicated to men who had fought in the Independence wars[1], setting the grounds for a "tradition of private property" that justified a myriad of private drainage projects, as García Franco argues (2007:91–98). Headed by owners of the haciendas, between 1822 and 1915 took place the building of the París Canal, which broadened the Suárez River accelerating the exit of water, and of the Hatico Tunnel, which would cut through the mountains of Sema—east of the lagoon it was meant to "dry entirely", enabling also the expansion of the haciendas, the development of the dairy industry and the wealth of the neighboring cities (Peña 1878).

[1] Of particular importance, and especially haunting, is the story of José Ignacio París, the first man to have property rights over the lagoon, around 1822. Just a few years before, as historian John Hemming writes, París had tried to dry out the lagoon of Guatavita following the rumors of prehispanic treasures hidden underwater. But in his search for treasures he met with tragedy: the tunnel he was building to drain the lagoon collapsed, killing the indigenous people who were working there, and leaving París "as disillusioned and destitute as all his predecessors" (Hemming 2001). In the lagoon of Fúquene he built the París Canal, but could never exhaust the waters of the lake, for which the state revoked his ownership over the lagoon. García Franco relates that París died a rich man, made rich through exploitation of the neighboring emerald mines of Muzo. His inheritance permitted his son, Enrique París, to "pick up his father's dreams" and continue the building of the París Canal—though he inherited, also, his father's failures (García Franco 2007:92).

None of those projects were successful in their own time, for they did not manage to dry out the lagoon completely, as they anticipated. But the level of water did significantly decrease and on the newly dry land the dairy industry and the commercial agriculture of wheat and potato began to develop (Andrade Pérez and Franco Vidal 2007). These products were as promising as they were unstable, subject to the frequent floods each project sought to prevent but inadvertently intensified.

Drainage projects were also productive in other ways: the camps built to accommodate those who worked on the construction of the tunnel, which was never finished, grew into San Miguel de Sema (Silva 2003), the town where I stayed during my fieldwork in a two-story house of yellow outside walls, the home of don Agustín Mendieta and doña Isabel de Mendieta. Their lives, like the lives of everyone in this region, are thus entangled with the transformations of the lagoon in ways that exceed their memory.

What everyone remembers is the time when the dairy industry was at its peak. By the 1980s, people in town say with a hint of nostalgia but also proudly, this region had become one of the main milk producers of the country. Yet, if the drainage of the lagoon happened mostly for the benefit of the dairy industry as many have argued (Guerrero García 2010), the overarching presence of cattle ranching surrounding the lagoon furthered the loss of water and the contamination of the now endangered ecosystem—as did the introduction of foreign grass, and the building of the railroad and the roads that enabled the transportation of fresh milk (García Franco 2007).

Gradually, the lagoon's capacity to retain water decreased and the floods became a bigger threat than they ever were (Andrade Pérez and Franco Vidal 2007). Ironically, one of the main factors in this was a failed conservation project headed by the

environmental authority of Cundinamarca, CAR for its initials in Spanish (*Corporación Autónoma de Cundinamarca*): in an attempt to put a stop to the "informal" drainage of the lagoon and the constant flooding, by the middle of the 1980s a series of dams were built which ended up further damaging of the lagoon's natural frontiers (van der Hammen 2007; Andrade Pérez and Franco Vidal 2007)—although I do wonder what counts as "natural" in a place that grew out of and has known nothing but transformations.

If floods have been reported in this region ever since 1953 (González 2012), in 2006 the winter and subsequent floods were unprecedentedly heavy. For a few months, this region fell off the map and out of time: the water erased the main roads, in order to go to town peasants had to take the "paths of ancient people" (*los caminos de los antiguos*), as Inés Dorado said, and if you climbed to the top of the mountains, as Jairo Valderrama remembers, you could see the lagoon as it must have been a hundred years ago; connected, "like a rosary of wells" as Miguel Triana wrote in 1922 (1984:54), to the lagoon of Cucunubá and the Palacios wetland.

Once the water receded, people started leaving at an accelerated pace. The dairy industry collapsed, for the cows that did not drown had to be sold for less than half the original price. Absentee landowners, who owned most of the pastureland, began taking their businesses elsewhere, and young peasants, who largely depended on the jobs absentee landowners provided, began migrating to cities or nearby towns. If this kind of movement began in 2006, it intensified between 2010 and 2012 when three subsequent floods broke the remaining hopes of reconstructing shattered businesses.

This is the scene I entered in May 2013. There was an overwhelming silence, rarely broken by a car stumbling along the unpaved road that spent months underwater, over

the endless pasturelands spotted with willow trees bent to the side, I imagine, by the wind. New absences, in which still echoed the lives of those who had just left, peopled rooms in family homes and turned conversations to the recent past when the flooded land changed the vision of the future. Sometimes, these were constitutive absences, "carefully delimited spaces of absence and possibility" (Kohn 2013:35), that allowed for my project to come into being, and made room for me, for most of the time and space people shared with me they used to share, not long ago, with someone else.

***

Yet absences were also painful, particularly in the veredas where I spent most of my time. Following the web of relations that started to take shape as one person introduced me to another, and that person to another, and so on, I was *washed ashore but up the mountain*—as Carolina Pineda put it once, offering me the words to write my own experience. Each day, I was farther away from the lagoon yet closer, somehow, to the emotional, painful register of its transformations.

It was don Edgar Velosa who first pointed out to me that the environmental changes of this place and their social and economic consequences are not enough to understand the pain involved in going through life alone in this region. The way this place has changed, don Edgar worries deeply, has intensified poverty and abandonment to the point where it threatens not only life but also death. His life and stories are the stuff of chapter one, where I try to wrap my head around his disquieting claim that people from this region tend to die of sadness. This fatal pain, which he movingly illustrates through a childhood memory, brings into sharp relief that what the floods intensified, particularly up the mountain in the lives of "poor people" (*los*

pobres, as peasants refer to themselves), has existed always. Also that the telling of a story is as important as the way we listen to it, for we can easily deepen the forms of neglect we are being asked to recognize.

Don Edgar's concerns remind me of Nancy Scheper-Hughes' claim for the need of a "political economy of the emotions" (1992:341), which is partly what I attempt to do with this ethnography albeit perhaps in the opposite sense: while Scheper-Hughes argued that emotions cannot be understood beyond culture-specific moral biases without considering the economic constraints of a life in a specific material environment, I here argue that focusing solely on the socioeconomic conditions of life in the surroundings of the fading lagoon of Fúquene leaves out the way poverty and abandonment "register on the senses" (Allison 2013:14)—and thus the pain they might imply.

To write in the pain that slips into the every sphere of a life lived in loneliness and poverty is the aim of Anne Allison in *Precarious Japan* (2013), where she also pays close attention to the ways in which social life is affected and comes to mirror environmental transformations. Her work was for me a late-found inspiration, and I almost want to steal her words to express the objective of my ethnography when she claims to be most interested "in entering the pain—messy, murky, and meandering as it may be—and *touching* the circumstances, the conditions, and the everyday effects and affects of how precarity gets lived" (2013:17). I emphasize Allison's desire to "touch" the everydayness of pain, because one of the questions I implicitly ask here is in what way the words with which people narrate their lives are material—how can we touch them, how can they touch us?

I thus attend to the intricacies of people's houses, their gestures and the texture of their voices, the pace of their walks and of their narratives, in an attempt to grasp something more, an excess of sorts that might just be the irreducible otherness that so easily gets lost, and explained away, in writing. I read over and over James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, trying to understand what it is about his words that makes his writing so vivid and moving—trying to learn from his ferocious interest in reality… "so that the aspect of a street in sunlight can roar in the heart of itself as a symphony, perhaps as no symphony can: and all of consciousness is shifted from the imagined, the revisive, to the effort to perceive simply the cruel radiance of what is" (Agee and Evans 1960:11).

Yet I found fiction to be important: *the fictions we find in reality*—as Lisa Stevenson said during a session of the writing seminar where this thesis received the most loving readings, and I indispensable encouragement. Fiction in its root sense, something made, an outcome of *poiesis*, but also in the sense of the things we make up to grasp affective truths that slip through our fingers, and the folds of our memory, otherwise—although I also had to learn not to breach certain boundaries.

There are stories I did not write and questions I refrained from asking. Instead, inspired by Veena Das' claim that "giving voice to the voiceless" (2007:57) can be an unintended act of violence, on occasions I tried to understand the ways in which some things were left unsaid. Such is one of the challenges I face in chapter two, where I attend to the threaded words and the patient walks of doña Cenaida Guerrero—who states that "going through life alone, that's tough". While she described her "sufferings" almost clinically, explaining to me how they flow through her blood affecting her children's lives, she left her experience of this pain outside narration. I suggest that the way she shies away from her own pain is related to the "toughness"

she also describes, which mirrors the dry land peasants work under an intense sun that makes their skin tough both physically and metaphorically.

In this manner I attempt to describe, as Angela García does in *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession along the Rio Grande*, "how personal history is interwoven with cultural and political history" (2010:10). I find illuminating the way García moves ethnographically between the personal experience of heroin addiction and the communal experience of land dispossession in New Mexico's La Española, ultimately describing how the landscape not only represents personal and communal losses but also embodies heroin addiction: the river is polluted with syringes; in the abandoned houses people get high; and just as heroin addicts are melancholic so is the landscape to the extent that it represents "a past that is also the present" (2010:102). That the landscape can *be* melancholic[2] of course matters to this text, inspired as it is by writers of the nineteenth century who felt a certain melancholia in the shallow waters of the lagoon.

Melancholy, however, was not the predominant affect in peasants' lives. It was rather boredom, slow and haunting, that everyone avoided through everyday distractions, like *agrás* berry picking—the messy activity of looking for the wild agrás berry bushes that have remained, unlike wheat, potatos and milk, beyond human control. Through descriptions of walks and talks, I illustrate in Chapter Three, the final chapter of this thesis, the ways in which these acid purple berries have become economically and emotionally indispensable in the veredas of Quicagota and San Cayetano as they offer "alternate rhythms" to death and require what Tim Ingold calls

[2] For a different exploration of the relationship between the material environment and Melancholia, see Yael Navaro-Yashin's "Affective spaces, melancholic objects: ruinations and the production of anthropological knowledge" (2009).

a correspondence with the world (2013)—although the world we eventually need to let go of, too, in an act of mourning that is almost always at odds with melancholia.

The pain I write about is ordinary, uneventful. It relates to no communal tragedy, no critical event, for what the floods intensified has existed for what seems forever, as have the floods themselves. Rather, I write about the pain of life as it comes to matter in the complex difficulties of an everyday achieved through hard work that requires strong muscles and healthy bones, a sturdy heart and company—up the mountain of this slowly changing place, east of the lagoon of Fúquene.

To Die of Sadness

Old and dry laurel trees line the short path that leads to Edgar Velosa's house. *Yo dejo que se mueran de viejos*—he lets these trees die of old age. A few weeks before I had met don Edgar, an elderly pine tree fell down, and, as the fall uprooted the tree, it cracked the walls of his house. By May 2013, he was just beginning the repairs that turned out to be a bit of a headache: walls, floors, water pipes, everything needed some work. The pine tree only accentuated the myriad of problems that suddenly had to be taken care of.

One morning, as he showed me how the construction work was going, he told me that next to the cracked wall he wants to build his own crematory. He laughed, but it wasn't a joke: "I'm serious: I want to be cremated. First in a bonfire, like they do in India, and then in the crematory I'm going to build here. I want my ashes to be spread on the lagoon, or just anywhere near my house… It's important to think about death, young lady"—*es importante pensar en la muerte, señorita*.

Don Edgar built this house with his father forty years ago, looking for a quiet place away from the thick smoke of the pottery factories that Ráquira, the town where he was born and raised, is famous for. They found this spot east of the Lagoon of Fúquene and, as the fresh air soothed his father's asthma, decided to stay. Their lives were thus split in two, and this place became their home. Over time, the house has deteriorated and don Edgar has grown old, and people keep telling him it would be easier to just sell the house and the land and rent an apartment in the city of Ubaté, where he wouldn't have to work as hard. It requires a lot of work keeping the house running and the land productive, and at seventy-three it gets harder and harder to keep

up, especially living alone. Yet, don Edgar resists leaving this place. He worries that, if he does, he will die sooner of sadness, *allá seguro me muero más ligero de tristeza*.

***

When don Edgar was around six years old, he knew an old woman named Dolores ("*Hasta el nombre es…*"[3]), who lived close to his house in Ráquira. She was an artisan potter who sometimes worked for his aunt Margarita. He remembers Dolores sitting in her yard ("*entonces yo pasaba por la zanga, y la veía a veces por ahí, sentadita*"). Don Edgar doesn't know for sure if she had children or not: as a child he never asked about that, but the fact is, he says, that she died alone ("*lo cierto fue que murió solita*").

He remembers hearing about her death from his aunt Margarita's house:

> So when she died, from my aunt Margarita's house they noticed that there was no smoke coming out of her kitchen chimney. […] "There is no smoke coming out, who knows what happened. […] I don't know, it's been two or three days since we saw any smoke coming out"[4].

Two or three days went by before people knew about Dolores' death. Whenever don Edgar referred to this story, he emphasized that period of time: *two or three days*. Dolores could not walk so everyone got used to not seeing her around. If it weren't

[3] Translated literally from Spanish, what don Edgar said is: "Even her name is…". With this expression, he emphasized the disquieting coincidence between Dolores' name and her story: in Spanish, "Dolores" is the plural of "pain".

[4] I will include in footnotes the original transcription of don Edgar's words in Spanish each time I quote him in this subsection. My hope is that his storytelling be not limited to my translations and that his own choice of words be accessible to the reader:
"Y al morir entonces, ya de allá de al frente donde mi tía Margarita, se dieron cuenta, que qué sería que no echaba humo. […] "No se ve salir humo, quién sabe qué será. […] No sé, yo no, hace como dos, tres días, que no vemos salir humo de allá"".

for the smoke that stopped coming out of her house, people would not have known she was dead. “She was so poor”, don Edgar continued, “that there was no money to pay for a coffin”—so Dolores was buried on an improvised bed that, just like her kitchen door, was made out of laurel branches:

> She had her kitchen to the side of her house, and it had a door made out of laurel branches, I remember it well, little sticks. The wood boards had worn-out and so she threaded some dry laurel branches through them. […] Just like her deathbed, it shows you how life is. Her deathbed was the same as her kitchen door; I remember those little branches, maybe they were meant to keep the wind out, but still the bugs managed to slip in and hurt her[5].

Don Edgar attended her burial with his mother. He remembers the walk from Dolores’ house to the cemetery. As they got closer to town, the bells of the chapel rang, announcing, like the lack of smoke, that someone had died.

> Every time they took someone to be buried, after they got to town, or when… Before they got to town, they used to send a messenger to make sure the bells rang. Before they got to town like, it was like a welcome, it was a welcome for the deceased that the bells rang for, at least for a block before they got to the chapel. And so the sacristan made the bells ring in unison, all three bells, there were three bells. Three or two. They had two at that time, and then they got another one, yes[6].

[5] “Tenía su cocinita aparte, y la cocina de ella también era como con ramas de laurel, me acuerdo mucho, eran palitos. Se le habían caído ya las tablitas, por eso y ella le tejía un poco de ramas de laurel secas. […] En lo mismo que la enterraron, vea cómo es la vida. Lo mismo que la enterraron era la puerta de la cocina, me acuerdo que eran ramitas, para que no le entrara tal vez tanto el viento y se metían por ahí los bichos, los palos a hacerle daño”.

[6] “Siempre que llevaban a enterrar a alguien, después de que llegaba, y cuando… Antes de llegar al pueblo, acostumbraban a ir, mandar un mensajero adelante para que doblaran las campanas. Antes de llegar al pueblo como, como un recibimiento, eso era todo el recibimiento que le daban al difunto, era que las campanas doblaran por ahí unos, una cuadra antes de llegar a la capilla. Entonces el sacristán salía y hacía sonar las campanas al tiempo, todas tres, eran tres campanas. Tres o dos. Dos había en ese tiempo, después llevaron otra, sí”.

As soon as the procession crossed "the bridge of souls" (*el puente de las ánimas*), which lead to the main park, the tolling of the bells usually stopped:

> There, they stopped ringing. Or, it depended on the tip or the *guarapo*[7] they gave the sacristan so that he made the bells sound longer. Yes. So, depending on the category of the dead person, the bells rang accordingly[8].

The length of the solemn sound thus depended on the deceased person's social status and her family's economic resources. Since peasants were usually poor, the bells rang briefly. "And that's how the verse goes", said don Edgar:

> "With the tolling of the bells your loved ones will say, may God forgive you deceased and then they will forget you" ["*Al doble de las campanas los mismos tuyos dirán, Dios te perdone difunto y en después te olvidarán*"]. And that's the way it is. You die, people talk about you for a few days and then they forget about you and that's it, they don't remember the deceased anymore. It depends on how much the dead person left, right? That's it[9].

Against the tendency to forget those who die, don Edgar makes an effort to recall how Dolores' burial proceeded. Someone said a few words, although he can't remember what, but he knows that she was buried without a mass. Soon everyone went home, but don Edgar stayed against his mother's will. As two gravediggers covered Dolores' unprotected body with dirt and pebbles, he stayed and listened:

> When I went… I went to the burial, and I saw how they threw clumps and pebbles, everything on top of her body. And what else. It sounded, it

[7] *Guarapo* is fermented sugar cane juice, a thick sweet drink.
[8] "Allá ya no doblaban más. O dependía de la propina o del guarapo que le hubieran dado al sacristán para que, pa' que doblara más harto tiempo. Sí. Entonces, según la categoría del muerto así mismo eran los dobles de las campanas".
[9] ""Al doble de las campanas los mismos tuyos dirán, Dios te perdone difunto y en después te olvidarán". Y es así. Uno se muere y ahí lo nombran unos días y después ya se olvida y ya, nunca más se vuelven a acordar del muerto. Depende de lo, depende de qué tanto haya dejado, ¿no? Eso".

> sounded, I remember it sounded like a leather bag when the clumps and everything else fell on her, and then shovelfuls of dirt[10].

Still today don Edgar remembers that sound precisely:

> The dirt sounded, the clumps, everything, on her stomach, her chest, you could hear that. The last thing they covered was the face and that was it. They kept on throwing dirt and they told me—of course the gravediggers were careful, they said, "no, get out of here, you shouldn't look at that"[11].

Don Edgar imagined Dolores' dead body through the sound of the falling dirt, and that sonic image still moves him to his very core:

> That was something that moved me very much as a child. I was in school, I remember, I was very young. I remember, those things stay with you, they touch your soul and no, I… I won't forget about that[12].

With the inevitable uncertainty of what Dolores felt when she died and with the overwhelming knowledge that she died alone, don Edgar says that "she died of sadness"—*Ella murió de tristeza*.

***

After a few seconds of silence, I said:

"You tell the story beautifully".

---

[10] "Cuando fui, yo mismo fui, yo fui al entierro, y vi cómo le tiraban terrones y piedras y todo encima del cuerpo. Y qué mas. Sonaba, sonaba, me acuerdo que sonaba como un zurrón cuando caían los terronazos y todo, y luego las cucharadas de tierra".

[11] "La tierra pues iba sonando, los terrones, todo, sobre el estomaguito, sobre el pectoral, bueno, se oía. Lo último que le tapaban era la carita y ya. Seguían echando tierra y a uno pues, le decían claro, los, ellos eran cuidadosos los sepultureros eran, "no, quite de ahí, quite de ahí usted no vea eso"".

[12] "Eso fue algo que me conmovió a mí mucho, yo cuando era niño, estaba en la escuela, me acuerdo, estaba pequeñito. Me acuerdo, esas cosas a uno de niño se le graban mucho, y le llegan muy al alma y no, yo… no se me olvida".

"No. It's not a beautiful story, but it is moving. It's something very sad, something that reaches your soul" (*No, no es bonita, pero es muy conmovedora, es algo muy triste, es algo que le llega a uno muy al alma*).

I never know how to follow these words. I didn't know how to respond to them when don Edgar first told this story, and I don't know how to follow them in writing. It seems to me that everything that needs to be said has already been said, and, as don Edgar suggests, the only thing left is to feel *something*; something that could move us and unsettle our thinking to the point where we might actually imagine that people, sometimes, die of sadness.

Sometimes, but don Edgar worries that it happens all too frequently:

> There have been many cases around here, people who are dying of abandonment. A woman died, she lived nearby. Three days went by, until the vultures started surrounding her house. The sheep were roaring. Two, three days without eating. In the same spot. And the dogs were barking. Those dogs were her company: two dogs. And that woman had died three days ago. Can you imagine? Three days went by before her neighbors went to see what had happened. She lived all alone. And she died of that: of sadness. Of abandonment. Of the lack of medicine, food… there was nothing left. She died of hunger. Hunger and abandonment. Of sadness[13].

Poverty and the abandonment don Edgar senses happening around him, so central to his concerns, have recently intensified in this region in relation to the frequent floods

[13] "Aquí ha habido muchos casos, la gente que muere de abandono. Una señora murió, de para allá. Tres días duró hasta que los chulos empezaron a rodear la casa. Las ovejitas amarradas bramando. Dos, tres días sin comer nada en el mismo puesto. Y los perritos a aullar. Los que la acompañaban: dos perros. Y la señora se había muerto hacía tres días. Imagínese. Hasta los tres días fueron los vecinos a ver qué era lo que pasaba. Vivía íngrima sola. Y ella murió prácticamente por eso: de tristeza. De… de abandono, de falta de droga, de falta de comida… ya no había, ella seguramente ya sin provisiones, sin nada. Murió de hambre. De hambre y de abandono. De tristeza".

caused by the lagoon of Fúquene. From don Edgar's place we could see it down the hill, its waters, "residues of an ancient sweat sea" Manuel Ancízar wrote in 1853 (1983:38), sparkled with the intense noon sun.

When the lagoon overflowed in 2006, it was exceptionally devastating, don Edgar remembers—although "what we suffered", he says, "I want to forget". The water reached the foot of his farm and flooded all the surrounding pasturelands. His brother used to own some twenty-five cows, some of which survived the flood, but soon after that "the dairy industry went down", for just when the grass was turning green again, after months of being underwater and months of being dry but rotten, it started raining again. And again. All throughout 2010 and 2012.

In this dry year of 2013, what is strongly felt is the absence of all those who left. Absentee landowners, *hacendados*, who took their businesses elsewhere; young peasants, who started migrating to the cities or to nearby towns. Those who have stayed, mostly older peasants who own small parcels of land up the mountain and whose lives are "rooted" in this place, struggle with a ruined soil that makes agriculture, their main livelihood, notably difficult. In conditions of significant scarcity, don Edgar worries that they are more and more left alone—a social impoverishment, perhaps, that becomes terribly real in the way it affects death.

Yet the sadness don Edgar fears suggests that it is not enough to know that someone died alone and that she had nothing left. If the socioeconomic circumstances of a death truly matter to him, there is *something more* that both includes them and exceeds them: a form of sadness that is deadly, and yet easy to dismiss and to forget.

I asked don Edgar many times, “What does it mean that people can die of sadness?”, and he never answered but with the promise that one day, when he found the time, he would share with me his memory of the death of Dolores. When he finally did, during the morning of a hectic day, in between milking cows and fixing old plastic boxes to store berries, he made it clear, with the unhesitant “No” that followed my comment (“you tell the story beautifully”), that the way we listen to his story is just as important as its telling. The danger, it seems to me, is that we can easily deepen the form of neglect he wants us to recognize.

Walter Benjamin said that true stories are always “free from explanation” (1968:89). In his essay, *The Storyteller*, he writes:

> The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks (1968:89).

Information, he says, is “shot through with explanation”; it has to be plausible, verifiable. It is told “without losing any time”, and its value “does not survive the moment in which it was new” (1968:90). “A story is different”, Benjamin continues, “It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (1968:90). If we can learn from a story, it is not because it is “understandable in itself”, but because we can engage with it and it can change us.

I think the story of Dolores has this potential of transformation. It is free from explanation, and I think knowingly so. If we truly admit that it is a story, in the way Benjamin suggested, and listen to it as such, then we can realize that it is also about

something unexplainable. As don Edgar says, “the fact is that Dolores died alone”: we cannot escape the certainty that her pain, which had to be deadly, is unavailable to us—yet the knowledge that she died of sadness somehow stayed with don Edgar (“those things stay with you”), precisely at the moment when everyone else who attended Dolores’ burial left. Just at the brink of oblivion.

Our forgetfulness worries don Edgar deeply, the fact that we can easily turn our gaze away from others. This fear he expressed with a verse (“With the tolling of the bells your loved ones will say, may God forgive you deceased and then they will forget you”), stating his knowledge that we can conceive a death like that of Dolores in a way that poses no problem whatsoever—and this must make his experience so much harder to convey. “You cannot, you can’t, you almost can’t even relate something like this”, he told me once: “it seems incredible, but… but it has been this way” (*Eso no se, eso no se, no se, no se puede ni siquiera casi contar, parece increíble, pero… pero ha sido así*).

Perhaps we can think of don Edgar’s memory of Dolores, and the knowledge it registered in him, as being “painful in its inexplicability”, what Cora Diamond calls a *difficulty of reality* (2003). Diamond describes these phenomena as a range of experiences

> […] in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in its inexplicability. *We take things so*. And the things we take so may simply not, to others, present the kind of difficulty—of being hard or impossible or agonizing to get one’s mind round” (2003:2–3).

Diamond's italicized words—*we take things so*—manifest that the difficulty of reality is always double: it is both the experience of encountering something painful or astonishing "in its inexplicability", and the experience of encountering oneself isolated by this appreciation. A person haunted by the experience of the difficulty of reality is also wounded by "how unhaunted others are" (2003:3). Others, like everyone who left Dolores' burial as don Edgar stayed; others, potentially us, who can leave don Edgar's memory of this experience in the search for an explanation, reproducing the move away from Dolores' death, inadvertently enacting what don Edgar felt back then and what he fears today.

It is the pain of others being deaf to the experiences that unsettle our thinking that Diamond helps us understand. Even if the difficulty presents itself in the form of astonishment, there is the pain of it having no room in language, in our "language games" (2003:17), in our "ordinary life with our concepts" (2003:12). And, further, the pain of having it resolved by others through language and argumentation to the point where "it is not boggling at all" (2003:2). For Diamond, to disavow in this manner disquieting experiences and the wounded bodies that bear them, taking them as facts that may or may not be relevant to make an argument, is to *deflect* from the difficulty of reality.

Diamond is describing a phenomenon that "belongs to flesh and blood" (2003:25) and resists no resolution. It demands, instead, acknowledgement. I try to read her essay as an attempt to find the means to respond to this request, yet every time she seems to come close to an answer she shies away from it, perhaps suggesting that, if there is a question to be posed, it cannot be posed in language. What becomes clear is that in our effort to convey such an experience we can only ask "a kind of imagination that can

inhabit" (2003:14) what we feel. We can only ask of our listeners, as don Edgar asked of me, to sit with our story and be touched by it.

Striving to remember every thing and every sound, with thoughtfully chosen words, through a real thick description (Geertz 1973), don Edgar delineates the moment of Dolores' dying, rendering it so real we can almost touch it. *Two or three days* went by before people knew about Dolores' death, two or three days we become intensely aware of. The ringing of the bells stops, the sound of the falling dirt begins, and we are asked to dwell in the contradiction, as don Edgar did, that what sounds like a leather bag is also Dolores' face, her chest, her stomach, lying on a laurel bed that mirrors her kitchen's door, and this, don Edgar says, "shows you how life is". It shows us that our own lives are vulnerable to poverty, to death and to oblivion.

More than sixty years separate us from this moment, nearly the entirety of don Edgar's lifetime. But, for an instant, it is made present. And in its immediacy, with the shared awareness that we are all mortal, we can re-encounter our difference: this is not just death, this is a death of sadness. A form of sadness we can only relate to through don Edgar's fiction, this story, which he carefully crafted. Veena Das' assertion that "some realities need to be fictionalized before they can be apprehended" (2007:39) rings particularly true in the presence of imminent oblivion and in the recognition of the gaps that weigh on our memory.

I want to think about this story as a fiction, in the sense of it being an outcome of *poiesis*, "a creativity in life itself" (Desjarlais n.d.:19). "Poiesis", writes Robert Desjarlais, "is involved in the crafting of poems and the art of shipbuilding. It implies begetting, a fabrication of bringing forth, of some new form of actuality; something that was not present is made present" (Desjarlais n.d.:16). Fiction here denotes, then,

initially, something crafted, made present in the world. Yet it matters also, I think, as something made up, a product of the imagination, that gives us access to a truth different from the one we can document through an objective description of experience—which would not admit a sadness we cannot know, but feel. As Joan Didion writes in her essay "On Keeping a Notebook", sometimes what *really* happened differs from *how it felt to me* (2000:120). How it felt, however, is just as real as how it happened, but to convey it, and to remember it, requires a little fiction[14].

As *poiesis* brings into view the things we bring forth, it also reveals the creative gesture imprinted in them, and the crafter behind it—in this case, the storyteller. As Benjamin said, "the real life" of the storyteller "is the stuff that stories are made of" (1968:94): a story is material, at least, because a life clings to it. So perhaps to appreciate the materiality of a story, particularly a story that registers a form of pain that is unexplainable, can be a double act of recognition which responds to the double difficulty Diamond touchingly describes in her essay.

***

"Nothing goes to waste" in don Edgar's house (*Aquí nada se pierde*). With the help of Cenaida Guerrero, a woman who lives up in the mountain and works for him three days a week, he makes sure that everything is used and reused or saved in case it is needed later. The sweet water that remains after doña Cenaida boils carrots and beets for don Edgar's dinner becomes the base for preparing *chucula*, a thick drink made out of seven types of grains and cacao. The peels of fruits and vegetables are food for

[14] "The cracked crab that I recall having for lunch the day my father came home from Detroit in 1945 must certainly be embroidery, worked into the day's pattern to lend verisimilitude; I was ten years old and would not now remember the cracked crab. And yet it is precisely that fictitious crab that makes me see the afternoon all over again, a home movie run all too often, the father bearing gifts, the child weeping, an exercise on family love and guilt. Or that is what it was to me" (Didion 2000:120).

cattle. They keep the seeds of tangerines, oranges, mangoes and *mamoncillos* in concave dry peels of avocados, in order to replant them later. The flowerpots that pottery artisans from Ráquira usually throw out, with small cracks and imperfections, contain strawberry plants, wild flowers and medicinal herbs in the yard. The milk serum that remains after making cheese is poured over the garden's flowers.

However, the amount of things he saves exceeds the time he has to put them to use. Plastic spoons, boxes, napkins and small pieces of paper are neatly organized in dusty surfaces. Piles of dry avocado peels and tuna and sardine cans accumulate on don Edgar's dining table. Nothing goes to waste, and so don Edgar lives in subtle ruins, mountains of old objects through which resonates a resilient will to stay in touch with the past. There is something poetic about his place. The way don Edgar talks mimics the way he lives in such a way that his narrative seems to take place and shape, quite literally, in the landscape of his house.

Absences echo as you walk from one crowded room to the other, over the metallic voices that come from a radio that is always on. There is a calendar in the dining room with printed pictures of don Edgar's family, a gift from someone, fixedly open on the month that features his mother's portrait: she looks at the camera, her eyes squinting with a smile, her cheeks reddened by the intense sun, her silver white hair pulled back. Don Edgar's father died in one of these rooms. I remember he told me he died in his sleep, it was a peaceful death, he said. His heart just stopped beating.

Don Edgar's daughter, Adelaida, lived here until recently. Ever since she left, he has lived alone. One of the reasons why she decided to go, don Edgar explained, is because it became too hard for her to attend school and keep a job with the main road being so often underwater, each time the lagoon overflows. She now lives in Yopal,

about a six-hour drive away. But you can almost still feel her presence in his house, like a fresh footprint in the mud. Her favorite ceramic cup hangs heavily from the dish rack. In the living room, at the top of a wood column, hang her hats. Some of her paintings decorate the walls. Her old bedroom is untouched—don Edgar uses it to store fruits and bread, but these transitory objects are piled up on top of her belongings, which are kept as if she might come back at any moment.

Adelaida studied gerontology and wrote her bachelor's thesis about this region. In her work, she manifests her concern about the ways in which the perception of old age has changed in this region, and how it affects older peasants' relationships with their relatives. She describes how most of the people she worked with felt cut off from social life, even if they lived with many family members, once they were no longer able to work or walk. Perhaps because productivity has become more important than the knowledge of the elderly, she suggests in her conclusions, once peasant's bodies start to fail them they stopped being listened to (Velosa Vargas 2010). Because she left, she could not finish the project she had begun: the building of a social network that included the elderly. But whenever I talked with her on the phone, I could sense in her voice genuine concern and love for the people she worked with, and she asked me to visit them whenever I could. She misses them and everyone misses her to the point where, although I never met her in person, I almost missed her myself. At don Edgar's place, wherever I looked and whatever I said spiraled back to her. He wanted her to write his memories, but she had to make her life somewhere else.

Of all the people I spent time with during my fieldwork, don Edgar was the only one who was interested in being recorded. His has so much to say, he told me, but no time to write. He often asked me if my tape-recorder was on: "I think it's the best method, so that you don't forget what I say".

One morning, as don Edgar milked his oldest cow, *La Borona*, my tape-recorder went out of battery. He had just told me that I should never forget that, even if Colombia's countryside is beautiful, it is also tough: "That's why I say: 'the countryside is not for everyone, but for the few tough ones'" (*El campo no es para muchos sino para machos*). I mentioned the battery had died and he said: "It's like my uncle used to say: 'He's alive, but you can smell his death'" (*Está vivo y huele a muerto*). "What do you mean?" I asked. "When you're old, everything tastes the same and you just want to rest…you don't want to struggle anymore… that's why people say 'The best would be that God remembers me'[15]" (*Lo mejor es que Dios se acuerde de mí*).

The sudden death of my tape-recorder thus unraveled a web of sayings, a space of relationality in which his words and the words of others entangled, securing his place in his family, and in the broader social world—a world that on occasions talks for him, but also a social reality he wants to talk back to. And his distinct association of sayings simultaneously captures his uniqueness, hinting at his very own relationship with death and his fear of having his memories fade away.

Don Edgar collects sayings too, verses and short rhymes called *coplas*, some of which used to be parts of traditional songs. These bits of poetry, traces of music, talk about life and death, and things typical of everyday life in Boyacá. Don Edgar remembers them in his everyday practices, doing ordinary things, and they thus seem to precipitate from his everyday life with his objects.

As he stirs the *chucula*, for example, he often recites a copla his brother, who is a musician, wrote: *Siempre que voy pa' mi tierra y paso por Chocontá, de una jícara e' Chucula siento la necesidad* ("On my way to my homeland, when I pass by Chocontá,

[15] "Ya uno viejo, ya todo le sabe a coco y quiere descansar… no quiere batallar más… la gente por eso dice "lo mejor es que Dios se acuerde de mí".

I feel the need of a cup of *chucula*"). When we were drinking potato broth in a clay bowl, he remembered a copla his mother used to recite about another kind of vessel called *calabazo* ("gourd"): *El que bebe en calabazo y se casa en tierra ajena, no sabe si bebe sapos o casa con cosa buena* ("He who drinks from a *calabazo* and marries in foreign lands, doesn't know if he is drinking toads or marrying the right person"). This copla was often followed by the short anecdote of the three times don Edgar attempted to live in cities: each time began with a love story and ended with a divorce.

"He who sows winds, harvests storms" (*El que siembra vientos, cosecha tormentas*), he told me as he fed his cow, complaining about the heavy rains that have ruined the grass and the lack of solidarity that makes it harder to get by in these times of hardship. As we talked on the phone, he said goodbye with a piece of advice in the form of a saying: "Let's move forward, because if you move backwards the dogs will bite you" (*Vamos pa' delante porque pa' atrás la muerden los perros*)—those small furious dogs that guard people's houses, which bark loudly, showing their tiny sharp teeth, at the sight of strangers.

More often than not, a verse, a *copla* or a saying brings out a story, and sometimes it happens the other way around: a story brings out a verse, and the verse relates to an object, linking, temporarily, the dreamlike quality of a memory with the earthiness of the world. In the story of Dolores, with a verse don Edgar grounded the ethereal notion of oblivion, and his critique on socio economic difference, in the solemn sound of the tolling bells, of "all three bells. Three or two. They had two at that time, and then they got another one, yes".

Don Edgar's stories are thus "intensely tactile" (Stewart 1996:4), woven into the fabrics of his life, irreducible to his verses and his objects, but also strongly grounded

on them. This must be what Stewart McLean called a “language of material reverie”, an “inter-involvement of words and things” that blurs the boundaries between the stuff of our thinking and the substances of the material environment (McLean 2007:64).

The material environment don Edgar talks with exceeds the cracked walls of his house, cracked by the pine tree that died of old age and made room for the project of a crematory. His narrative comes about right on the unstable terrain that surrounds the lagoon of Fúquene, where he wants others to spread his ashes. If he was born and grew up elsewhere, this is where he has grown old and where he wants to die. It is not just pain that requires acknowledgement, but also the strength of attachments.

The Smoke of a Life

Up the mountain, everyone cooks on woodstoves. The smoke infuses the food, blackens the walls of people's houses, and comes out of chimneys in dense grey clouds. As doña Cenaida and I talked, we had to squint our eyes. The smoke of the woodstove accumulated inside her house, blurring our views, provoking dry coughs. The walls of the windowless kitchen are black, a deep black that looks like fresh paint. As you walk out of the kitchen, the walls lighten gradually, documenting the path of the smoke.

That day, doña Cenaida and I met early in the morning in the middle of the dusty, snaking road that leads to her place and walked together from there. This is a long road up the mountain surrounded by pastureland, cornfields, trees, wild bushes, and some houses. There is at least a ten-minute walk from house to house, and these are usually far from the road. Yet as we walked we could hear people talking—voices, as murmurs, traveled through vast distances—and we could see the smoke of the woodstoves. Through soft sounds and distant images, we could feel the few people around us.

When we got to her place, our breakfast, warm potato broth, was already done. Doña Cenaida had left it cooking on an ash-grey pot on the wood stove. She had prepared it at five-thirty in the morning, before leaving to take care of her cows. "I like to look ahead", she said: *a mí me gusta adelantar*. Every morning, as soon as the sun comes up, doña Cenaida walks an hour and a half to the small parcel of land where she has three cows, close to the main road that leads to San Miguel de Sema. She milks them, feeds them, and sells the milk to don Edgar. Three days a week she spends the morning at his place, helping with household chores: she helps make cheese and

agrás berry marmalade, prepares lunch and dinner for don Edgar, eats lunch, and feeds the dogs. After checking on her cows once more, she walks back home. The remaining days of the week, she goes straight home after selling the fresh milk and catches up on her own housework. Calculating the precise amount of wood to leave burning, when she gets back home, dinner or breakfast is already done. Smoke comes out of her chimney until she goes to bed, as soon as the sun comes down.

As doña Cenaida walks, she spins wool ("I don't lose time"—*Yo no pierdo el tiempo*), which she later sells to artisans. She walks slowly, steadily. A cellphone hangs from her neck, under her sweater. As she walks up and down the mountain, she sometimes sells prepaid minutes. Her presence is unmistakable from afar: she wears a black jacket with wide shoulder pads over a purple sweater, rubber boots and a black felt hat.

In the past few months, I had spent many mornings with doña Cenaida, sitting next to her while she cooked in don Edgar's kitchen. Doña Cenaida likes to "cut things in the air" (*en el aire*); instead of using a cutting board she chops carrots, onions or beets on her hands, little pieces of fresh vegetables falling directly into the bowl. At the pace of her chopping, in bits and pieces, she would tell me stories about her life. Meanwhile, with a complicit smile, she would pass me spoons full with sweet beets or salty pumpkins perfectly sliced.

This day, for the first time, we spent the day together at her place. In the midst of her daily routine, her narrative took on a different form: her words threaded into each other and I could not easily tell their edges. She flowed from one word to another, and from one story to the next, blurring the boundaries between her memories and her reflections, simple and difficult times.

The house where she lived when I met her was her brother's: her own house, half-built, is a few steps away, next to a cornfield. She had been building it slowly, over the years, but the construction work had to go faster now, because her brother, who now lives in some city she never specified, was going to rent his house. She could not pay the daily wage for many workers ("forty thousand pesos!"[16]), so she was planning on staying home the next week and help with the construction during the day. She didn't mind it too much, this kind of worked she liked. "I'm in a hurry now", but it's almost done, doña Cenaida said. Almost: it still needs floors, windows and a woodstove.

***

"Going through life alone, that's tough" (*Uno solo, eso es duro*), doña Cenaida said as we talked in the kitchen. We sat on small wooden benches, ceramic bowls filled with potato broth sprinkled with fresh cilantro on our laps, cups with coffee and fresh milk on the floor. "That's why I taught my daughters not to go through life alone" (*por eso les enseñé a mis hijas para que no les tocara solas*).

Doña Cenaida was following up on the conversation we had on our way to her place, when she told me that her older daughter ("The fat one", she said joking) married before she turned fourteen. She met a man who worked in an onion field that used to be close to doña Cenaida's place, where she and her sister had jobs washing the worker's clothes. "They were very disciplined" (*eran muy juiciosas*), doña Cenaida said proudly, and that's why one of the workers wanted her daughter to leave with him to go to Aquitania, a nearby town known for its onion fields, when the business moved there. Both her daughters left because "they are very attached to each other"

[16] 15 US dollars.

(*son muy apegadas*). Doña Cenaida tries to see them every year, but it has been a couple of years now since she last saw them. She explained that it is difficult to find the means to travel and someone to watch her cows for her.

We had passed by the lot where the onion field used to be that morning: an empty field with dry grass that has been vacant for years. It is one among the many relatively abandoned places one finds up these mountains. Someone owns them, people who have never lived here ("rich people"). But no one has used them for quite some time, perhaps because dry and rainy seasons have become equally intense, making agriculture increasingly difficult. Or perhaps because the main road, where perishable goods travel, floods entirely every time it rains heavily—each time the lagoon "takes back her territory". In any case, agribusiness has moved elsewhere, and with it the possibility of having a paid job. Taking doña Cenaida's advice, her daughters left, as did most young peasants from this region, following each other or looking for a job, or both. Or so it seems[17]. Vacant lots and empty rooms in people's houses, absences of different sorts outnumbered our presence.

In between sips of broth, doña Cenaida continued talking while staring at the floor, in such a way that I could not tell if she was talking to me or to herself:

[17] In his short essay "The Corn-Wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts", Michael Taussig asks us to be weary of agribusiness writing, agribusiness explanations, and agribusiness altogether, in that it "wipes out", or conceals in an ultimate act of magic, what is magical about reality and stories about reality—which make each other up, in haunting ways. I fear that by explaining youth migration with this sentence I could comply with such annihilating magic, and so I borrow Taussig's skepticism, a little counter-magic, which he condenses, sometimes, in these four words: …or so it seems (Taussig 2010:29, 31).

> The problem is that you start having thin blood. You start feeling down. You carry your sufferings with you, and your children take that from you and they're born sick[18].

"What are those sufferings?" I asked.

> Everything you have suffered. Imagine being pregnant and not being able to rest at all: your children take that from you. That's why Marcela gets sick easily and why my second to last child died[19].

Marcela is fifteen-years old; she is doña Cenaida's youngest daughter. The child she had before her died when he was under a year old. Doña Cenaida often talked about him, but she never mentioned his name. She called him her second to last son (*el penúltimo*), second to last in a line of seven children doña Cenaida brought up alone. Their father lives near by, but never lived with her or helped her with anything—for reasons she never explained, and I never asked.

The room filled with the unnamed presence of her child's death, we stayed in silence for a moment. In that solemn quiet, my thoughts shifted between the uncertainty of what could be said in the face of such painful memory, and the realization that doña Cenaida was not talking about the pain of losing a child, but the sufferings that caused her son's death. Emphasizing the effects her hardships had on the lives of her children, whatever pain she experienced she both suggested and left unspoken. Was this an omission of pain or a particular manifestation of pain? (Or was it something else entirely?)

[18] "El problema es que uno empieza a tener sangre delgada. Empieza a sentirse decaído. Uno lleva el sufrimiento y el hijo saca todo y nacen enfermos, eso enferma a los hijos".
[19] "Lo que haya sufrido la persona. Imagínese uno embarazado y sin poder descansar nada y entonces los hijos sacan eso. Por eso mi penúltimo hijo se murió y Marcela es enfermiza".

Doña Cenaida picked up our conversation and told me that all her children were born at home. This time I was sure she was talking to me, as her ash blue eyes met mine for a second. I asked doña Cenaida who helped her during childbirth:

> Who helped me? An aunt. But only for some of them, for others no. That's what I say: since I never stayed still… people said I had to get massages, and this, and that. Nah. […] As long as you don't stay still during your pregnancy... no, what I like, and I've been like this all my life, is to work. I almost didn't sleep when I was pregnant with my children. I stayed up until twelve at night spinning wool, went to bed, and then at four I was up again[20].

Because she never rested, her children's births were not complicated. The first one was born in twenty-four hours, but after him all others were born in a matter of minutes. What she had just described as a suffering (working during her pregnancy), she suddenly reframed as a stubborn decision that helped the birth of her children—reestablishing her agency, I thought, over the otherwise inevitable circumstances of her life.

Usually, doña Cenaida talked about her life in this way: she had to work all day long but she liked it, she was good at it, and she dreaded the possibility of staying home and doing nothing. Once one of her sons came to visit and asked her to rest. She did, "but the day felt sooo long" she said, *el rato se me hacía laaargo*, that she went back to working the next day. Whenever she mentioned that life was difficult, she quickly rephrased it stating that, after a lifetime of hard work, "it feels like nothing" (*a mí no se me hace nada*).

[20] "A mí, una tía. Pero pa' unos y pa' otros no. Lo que yo digo: como no me estaba quieta… que decían que me tocaba mandarse sobar, mandarse no sé qué, **qué** […]Después de que uno no se esté quieto dentro de todo el embarazo… no, yo sí, a mí me gusta, yo he sido así toda la vida: ando con chanclas trabajando, yo casi no me acostaba cuando estaba yo embarazada de mis hijos. Hasta las doce de la noche permanecía hilando lana y ya me acostaba y a las cuatro otra vez me levantaba".

Doña Cenaida began working when she was five years old, when she was sent to live with an uncle "who had been left alone" (*se había quedado* solo). I imagine, although doña Cenaida did not clarify, that his wife had died. This is a common practice in Colombia's countryside: when an older person is alone, family members send a child to help with daily chores. Doña Cenaida lived with him for two years, during which she learned how to shear and butcher sheep, and do all the housework. She then came back to live with her ten siblings and her parents, in a farm that used to be part of a hacienda. They used to pay *obligación*: they were tenants. But they eventually bought the land they inhabited ("How?" "Making cheese and spinning wool"), which was fragmented, one child at a time, into smaller and smaller farms.

Doña Cenaida's daughters also began working at a very early age. When Marcela was born, doña Cenaida had to leave the house at two in the morning because she milked three cows that were in different lots, but all the milk had to be in the same place by five in the morning. Her two oldest daughters, who were eight and six at the time, had to learn how to make breakfast, lunch, change Marcela's diapers and feed her while doña Cenaida was not around.

As we talked in her kitchen, her awareness of her children's hardships was fully present:

> They were so young and already had to struggle… they also had to deal with that goal of suffering [*también les tocó esa meta de sufrimiento*]. One of them, she had not turned fourteen when she left with her husband.

This time, doña Cenaida shrugged:

> They left *sin agüero*.

***

Sin agüero, literally "without portent" or "without omen", is a common saying used when a person does something in spite of the risks implied. To do something *sin agüero* is to dive into a situation without overthinking it, without weighing the possible outcomes: fearlessly. It means, at least in its remote origin, challenging the bird of bad portent, *pájaro de mal agüero*, that announces with his song and flapping wings evil ahead—usually, an imminent death. The saying denotes also, then, a particular relationship with time, in which the future is better left unpredicted.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, thinking with don Edgar's collection of sayings, verses and *coplas*, these phrases might be taken as securing a person's place in a web of relationality (using words told and retold by others) while capturing, in their telling, something about her uniqueness. I am reluctant, then, to dismiss a saying because "it's just a saying", as people say. Rather, I am interested in the way we make words our own, how words are infilled with experience (Das 2007), the stuff of a life (Benjamin 1968), a voice. This, understanding a voice as "that which might animate words, give them life, so to say" (2007:6), to quote Veena Das' reading of Steven Cavell's work.

By saying *sin agüero*, doña Cenaida was perhaps directly addressing her daughters' courage in the face of the uncertainty migration must involve, especially for a thirteen-year old girl. If she said it proudly, she also conveyed a slight indifference, as if performing the lack of concern for the future the saying denotes—defying, somehow, the "goal of suffering" she had just described. This movement between the sense of things inevitable and their challenging, a constant reframing of same situations, recurs throughout doña Cenaida's telling of her life. And it seems to me

that, as her appreciation of particular moments of her life shifted, she changed as well, both as a "narrating I" and a "narrated I"[21] (Desjarlais 2003:109).

While doña Cenaida was fully present as a woman who likes to work and refuses to stay still ("That's what *I* say: since I never stayed still […] what I like, and I've been like this all my life, is to work"), she was only relatively there when she reflected on her hardships: "*You* start having thin blood. You start feeling down. You carry those sufferings with you"—*uno empieza a tener sangre delgada. Empieza a sentirse decaído. Uno lleva el sufrimiento*. It was only in this manner, somehow both deep within herself (illustrating the depths of her body and immersed in her thoughts) and at the edges of herself (shying away from appearing as an *I*) that doña Cenaida addressed her sufferings. In these moments, as a "narrating I" her voice lowered and her gaze moved away; as a "narrated I" she almost disappeared under an undefined "you" (*uno,* in Spanish).

It is common in Boyacá that people talk about their hardships in this manner, conveying them more as a general statement than as a personal experience. Yet that morning, in her fluctuating narrative, with her threaded words, each time doña Cenaida referred to her sufferings she was not only talking about herself, however

[21] In his *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists*, Desjarlais argues that the way we talk about our life does not just illustrate our lived experience but shapes it, affecting also the way we understand ourselves and others. In the telling of a life, he explains, there is a "narrating I" and a "narrated I" whose voices change throughout a narrative and also change each other. He illustrates this beautifully when he reflects on the narrative of Kisang, an eighty-six-year-old Buddhist Yolmo woman, when she talked about a death experienced earlier in life. He writes: "Kisang's account of her first husband's death involved a different narrative voice from the one expressed in her tale of her marriage to the lama. The tone was somehow more direct, more mature, even a bit world-weary. It was the voice of a worried wife, one who had already mourned the death of several loved ones. The narrated I, Kisang, was also more assertive in her pronouncements. Now the mother of several children and settled within her husband's household, she was more able and willing to voice her own judgments, to mouth critical words in response to the actions of others" (2003:176).

indirectly. Rather, they always came about in relation to her children. Her use of an undefined "you" thus seems significant beyond it being a regional habit—even though this might be true and telling. It also denotes her presence *in relation* to others, an open-ended presence that cannot be captured with a discrete "I".

A mother's sufferings, doña Cenaida explains, are not only her own: "your children take [your sufferings] from you and they're born sick". When I asked doña Inés Dorado about the relationship between her hardships and the lives of her children she described it in terms of "weeds" that settle in one's body: "one's child inherits all the weeds one has", she said (*las malezas que tiene uno las saca el hijo, las hereda*). These weed-like sufferings, "everything you have suffered" turned into matter, "make your blood thin": they are literally (that is, physically) heavy, a load you have to carry. That "you start feeling down" is perhaps less a matter of speech than, as Michael Jackson wrote, "a psychophysical relationship with the world" (1983:329).

And this, doña Cenaida said, talking from within herself, is what "the problem is". This is why she taught her daughters not to go through life alone, why she helped them move away following their husbands as they moved with their work from that nearby lot to the land of onions. Her sufferings are central to their story and her own, complicating what it means and why it is that young people tend to leave this place. Yet doña Cenaida's experience of this pain remains somewhat elusive and somehow unsaid, even if described concretely as a thing so real it has a weight to it.

I find here necessary the distinction Veena Das makes between voice and speech: if a voice is what gives life to words then it is "not the same as an utterance" (2007:8), for it follows that we can also speak lifeless (voiceless) words—speech that is detached

from experience. Striving to convey the ways in which the violence and the pain inflicted by the Partition of India are spoken of and lived with, Das writes:

> …in the lives of communities the manner in which the violence of the Partition was folded was *shown* (sometimes with words) rather than *narrated*. Words were spoken, but they worked like gestures to show this violence—to draw boundaries between what could be proclaimed as betrayal, however delicately, and what could only be molded into a silence (2007:10).

In her moving description, the silent gesture that are voiceless words, if there are words at all, is an expression of violence *and* of the way in which it is endured in the everyday. The limit manifested, then, requires as much attention as the pain kept at the edges. I read this in relation to Das' assertion that "I cannot separate my pain from my expression of it" (2007:39): the fact that there is a limit to the manifestation of pain is part of what such pain is, and of what it means to live with it.

So perhaps we can better understand doña Cenaida's sufferings by taking into account the boundaries that surround them. This means acknowledging (rather than attempting to know) her pain, but also her agency: as Das suggests we sometimes need to fight against our desire "to give voice to the voiceless" (2007:57), and with it the assumption that a silent body always reveals a passive subject. In other words, we need to consider that silences are sometimes deliberately contrived (Strathern 1992), or at least meaningfully appropriated.

I understand the boundary doña Cenaida manifests in relation to her claim that "going through life alone, that's tough". This word, "tough", *duro*, people used regularly during my fieldwork to describe their lives, and it felt like an unbreakable wall, sometimes. You can see it in their hands, you can see it in their skin, a toughness

inscribed on their bodies. That "life in the countryside is tough" (*la vida en el campo es dura*) is a historical fact as old as the Colony, associated with the unequal distribution of the land and the dependencies between haciendas and peasant farms. It thus seems to me that this expression makes visible how doña Cenaida's personal and bodily experience articulate with the broader socioeconomic history of this place, which, as I sketched in the introduction, is intimately related to the environmental transformations that have revolved around the lagoon of Fúquene.

Let me elaborate, drawing mainly from Roberto García Franco's paper "Elementos para una Historia Ambiental de la Region de la Laguna de Fúquene en Cundinamarca y Boyacá" (2007), where he argues that the mutual dependencies between haciendas and peasant farms are at the core of the transformations of this landscape. The origin of the haciendas, he explains, is associated with the institution of the encomienda, the allocation of public lands (*terrenos baldíos*), and the drainage of the lagoon (2007:62–63). Having displaced the Muiscas from the surroundings of the lagoon, Spanish settlers secured their own place in the flat land—the most fertile land—through the encomienda, whereby the dispossessed Muiscas gained their right to inhabit a parcel of the Spanish haciendas by providing the labor the productivity of the latter depended on. Forced to live up these mountains (Langebaek 1995; García Franco 2007)—which are now inhabited by peasants—and having limited space for subsistence agriculture, the Muiscas presumably significantly contributed to the erosion of the mountain land, while Spanish settlers began the first active efforts to dry out the lagoon (Andrade Pérez and Franco Vidal 2007; García Franco 2007).

As I mentioned in the introduction, in the newly founded Republic, public lands and portions of the lagoon were adjudicated to men who had fought in the Independence wars (CAR 2000; CAR n.d.; García Franco 2007), which began a "tradition of private

property" that justified a myriad of drainage projects (García Franco 2007:97). The lagoon was never entirely dried out, but haciendas grew in the newly dry land, fostering the development of the dairy industry that turned out to be as promising as it was unstable, subject to the floods these processes ironically intensified[22].

Although the institution of the encomienda was abolished after Independence, its logic persisted under tenant-landowner relationships up until the middle of the twentieth century when most peasant families, like doña Cenaida's, managed to buy the land they inhabited[23] (García Franco 2007:63). Yet, with the passing of time, through the inheritance of the land, peasant farms decreased in size, leaving less space for agriculture in an already eroded soil. The labor haciendas required became a necessary means to compensate for what the land could not offer—a source of income that has almost disappeared nowadays that the floods have driven absentee landowners away since, as a man explained to me in San Miguel de Sema, after many efforts to repeatedly rebuild their businesses and wasting many loans on repairs (that were soon undone by the water), "people fear investing in cattle" (*les da miedo invertir en ganado*). "They are so scared", he said, "that they don't even want to buy milk" (*tanto miedo tienen que ya no quieren ni comprar leche*)[24].

[22] In consequence, haciendas came to depend on peasant farms during the winters, to keep the cattle when the flat land was essentially underwater. García Franco thus argues that peasant farms are not just dependent but also complementary to haciendas (2007:65).

[23] An important event in this matter was the founding of the Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute, INCORA for its initials in Spanish (*Instituto Colombiano para la Reforma Agraria*), with the law 135 of 1961, its main objective being: "to reform the social agrarian structure by means of appropriate procedures, to eliminate and prevent the inequitable concentration of rural property or its anti-economic fractionation, to reconstitute and to grant lands to those who do not have them, with preference to those who conduct directly their own exploitation and incorporate therein their personal labor" (Translation taken from: Duff 1966:75)

[24] Perhaps for the same reason most absentee landowners "left but did not sell" (*se fueron pero no vendieron*), as peasants' say. That is, why they did not or were unable to sell the land they abandoned. Unfortunately, the research needed to fully understand this exceeds the reach of this thesis. I would like to further note that the floods affect also peasants who have small dairy businesses on the surroundings of the lagoon. As David González wrote, many found

As far as they can remember, peasants of this region have thus had to work double to get by—so it makes sense that "it feels like nothing", most of the time. But this is demanding physical work that, as doña Cenaida suggests, requires a strong heart and "thick blood", healthy bones and company. Life, love and work become so closely tied together that they become difficult to tell apart, in such a way that the pain of a life gets verbalized in terms of the practical difficulties it implies—difficulties that make your skin tough, a resistant surface constituted through practice (Taylor 2005), which denotes the strength that rural life, up the mountain of this slowly changing lands, both requires and produces[25].

To think of this toughness as ultimately describing a relationship between the body and the material environment makes sense to me in light of several metaphors people used to talk about their lives which made this connection explicit—if we admit that they do not just "express a concept in terms of a bodily image" but might disclose an "integral connexion of the physic and the physical" (Jackson 1983:329). I am thinking, for instance, about doña Inés' description of sufferings as "weeds", *malezas*. Or about the words of don Maximiliano Dorado, a neighbor of doña Cenaida who Adelaida Velosa quoted in her thesis: "The thing is, the land has become like us: all covered in weeds" (*Es que la tierra ya se ha vuelto como uno: ya se echó a enmalecer*) (2010:57). I remember also the time doña Blanca, who is married to doña Inés' nephew, told me that her dad worked "until the years wore him out, just like in

---

themselves not only broke but also homeless after the flood of 2011. González relates that one of the men who suffered these consequences, who he interviewed, was afraid to go back to his home even though the land was already dry, because "he fears the next winter" (2012).

[25] As Janelle Taylor suggests, the surface of the body is better understood as being unstable, constantly ruptured, and always in the making (2005:744–746). In her essay "Surfacing the Body Interior" she writes: "The interesting question—the very important question that any careful use of the term "discourse" should signal—is exactly how, in any given instance, representational, social, material, and other practices may work together to materialize bodies in very particular ways and within specific kinds of relations" (2005:746)

time the grass wears out" (*hasta que lo agotaron los años, como se agota el pasto en tiempo*).

The passing of time appears as an important factor in all these expressions, as it does in doña Cenaida's telling of her life. Time "wears out" people's bodies and the land, their lives being threaded together by agriculture—which takes a toll, too, on the land and the body. As time passes, and new generations are born, others things happen too: farms become smaller, agriculture more difficult, and sufferings accumulate on the body threatening the lives of unborn children. This logic of decrease delineates a bleak future, but there are also other temporalities at play.

There is the uncertain future doña Cenaida helped her daughters escape to, suggesting that youth migration does not only happen in the form of abandonment but also, at least sometimes, through motherly love and care. There is the past, weed-like bits of her past, that they left without, *sin agüero*. And there is doña Cenaida's decision to stay, not without invitations to leave, in this place where she has experienced a pain that exceeds her, but where she persistently makes something out of time: something like the breakfast we ate that morning, like her house, a skein of wool, or the prepaid minutes she sells walking up and down the mountain. *Poiesis*. Doña Cenaida does not stay still, she almost never sits down, and, as her words thread into each other, she stresses how she makes a life for herself *and* others in spite, but also in the awareness, of her sufferings—as the smoke of her woodstove comes out of her chimney throughout the day, indexing her life, her craft, and her resilience.

Agrás Berry Picking

The branches of the wild *agrás* berry bushes[26] bent with the weight of the round purple fruits. The *agrás* berry season was in full swing when Inés Dorado, her fifteen-year-old daughter Johana and I met in their house, up the mountain, right at the limit between the vereda of Quicagota and the vereda of San Cayetano. The warm light mingled with the chilly wind, and slowly dried the morning dew. From their yard, we could see the hills rising under the bright blue sky of an intense summer, covered with grass so dry it looked like wheat, as doña Inés noted (*parece trigo*). We ate maize *arepas* doña Inés had prepared at sunrise and talked for a little bit over the sound of the tottering, spasmodic steps of eight newborn chicks. Soon, we decided to walk up the hill, all the way to doña Inés' favorite spot, from where she likes to look at the landscape. Ever since she was a child, she enjoys sitting there for hours.

Our destination was thus set, but our path was to be improvised because it entailed a process of discovery, a careful exploration of the scrubland (*monte*): we were going to walk up the hill and, on our way, see if we could find some *agrás* berries—*y a ver si encontramos alguna pepa*. From time to time, whenever we found an agrás berry plant, we broke the straight line in which we were walking, stepping out of the footpath marked by years of walking to the same place, and into the bush.

Johana had an idea of where we could find them. On a break from school, she had plenty of time to herself, and even if the TV "distracted her eyes" (*me distrae los ojos*) she liked better to go outside and pick berries. "It distracts me" (*me distrae*), she explained, from the long hours of the holidays. She couldn't wait to go back to

[26] The scientific denomination of the *agrás* berry is *Vaccinium meridionale*. It is sometimes called "Andean blueberry" (Castrillón et al. 2008). During my fieldwork people simply called it "agrás", and this is how I will refer to it in what follows.

school; she found the break really boring. Picking agrás was also how she planned to gather a little money for her school supplies (*con eso me consigo una platica*). She had her eyes set on a pink pen she had seen at doña Isabel's store in San Miguel de Sema.

"I remember I saw one over there", she would say recalling her walks from the previous days. The three of us would then gather around the short plant and roll the berries off the thin branches. The ripest ones, almost black, we would mix with blackberries from their yard to make juice for lunch, with a little bit of sugar. The dark purple ones, ripe but still firm, doña Inés would sell to don Edgar, perhaps to buy some groceries. Or maybe to pay the bus to San Miguel de Sema next Sunday, when she goes to attend mass and have a few cold beers with friends. The bus driver had already noticed that she sometimes rode the bus without paying, so next time she had to make sure to have two thousand pesos[27] in her pocket. The berries that were still red we would try to remember to pick later, sometime in the next days. And the dry ones, with a wrinkled peel, we would leave for the birds to eat.

"Time goes by fast like this", doña Inés said (*así rapidito se pasa el tiempo*). "You get distracted… anything that gets you up and walking" (*uno se distrae… cuando sea caminar*): taking care of the cows, chopping wood for the stove, fixing fences, cooking… "Otherwise you get bored", she said (*si no uno se aburre*). "You get pensive" (*a uno le entra la pensadera*).

We eventually got to a meadow and sat down on the grass. Doña Inés sat next to me, complaining about her hat, which is a little crooked. She likes mine better, but I like the uneven edges on hers—she finds this funny. Looking down we could see the

[27] US $1. A kilogram of agrás berries during agrás berry season usually sells for US $3.

snaking path that goes down the mountain, all the way to the main road leading to San Miguel de Sema. By the main road, dusty and unpaved, we could see don Edgar's house. On a distant background, the lagoon of Fúquene looked like a pond of water surrounded by swamps. And all around us, wide pasturelands, a checkered landscape of different shades of greens, extended infinitely. With doña Inés, we counted twenty cows, only twenty small black and white dots that moved slowly and heavily.

There was a time, many years ago, when the lagoon extended all the way to the foot of this hill, and not long ago thousands of cows roamed these lands. Doña Inés asked me to imagine that, with a tone that acknowledged how challenging it is to conceive that things change so much—*Imagínese*.

***

Agrás berry picking is a fairly recent activity in this region. Doña Odilia, who lives in San Miguel de Sema but grew up in the vereda of San Cayetano, remembers that, when she was around ten years old, some thirty years ago, the branches fell to the floor full with berries that nobody picked or sold. She and her friends ate them all, handful after handful, until their faces were covered in purple juice and there was no room left for lunch.

It must have been ten years ago that people started picking berries, she calculated as we talked in her sewing room, where used pants, shirts, skirts, and school uniforms piled up. Doña Odilia fixes clothes from everyone in San Miguel: garments worn down, accidentally ripped, indexes of their owners' lives and the life of a town where people can only rarely afford new clothes. While we tried to untangle a piece of thread that had clogged her sewing machine, and like a thick white spider web had pulled her afternoon into an ordinary despair, she remembered when the news spread

that agrás had become a delicacy in places like Bogotá—the city from where she had just returned back then, after nine years of living with and working for a wealthy family as a cleaning lady.

She came back to spend her maternity leave with her family at her parents' farm, "and then they just wouldn't let me go" ("y *ya no me dejaron devolverme*"), she said with humor, acknowledging her family's affection: she stayed thinking she might leave again, but she never did. Somewhere between her attachment to her family and the difficulty of bringing up a child on her own, Bogotá slowly became a nostalgic memory of a potentially different life.

In San Miguel she found a place, a two-story house right where the urban center ends and the veredas begin. The paved road from her block turns into the endless fields of grass. She remembers there was still plenty of *movement* in those days; business was good as people from out of town were constantly coming and going, foreigners who bought the crafts she made with *enea*, a reed that grows in the lagoon. Nostalgia shades her memory of that time, too, as it does for most inhabitants of San Miguel who claim that after the flood of 2006 "this town was never the same again" (*el pueblo ya no volvió a ser el mismo*).

It was also after the flood, doña Odilia explained, that berry picking became vital for many peasant families, like her own, whose economic lives largely depended on the dairy industry and the monocultures of potato and wheat that took over the flat land (Guerrero García 2010:32). Doña Odilia's father worked his whole life, *toda la vida*, in one of the haciendas that used to border the lagoon, until he was too old to keep up with the heavy routine of milking cows. Throughout the years, he witnessed the water

recede slowly and the haciendas grow, as this region became, if only for a moment, one of the first producers of milk in the country (CAR 1986).

As happens in most of Boyacá and Cundinamarca (Van Ausdal 2008), cattle ranching revolved mainly around milk and was contingent on the building of roads that enabled the transportation of perishable goods. In this region, the construction of the two roads that were essential in this sense (Simijaca-San Miguel and Ubaté-Guachetá) was finished by 1953 (García Franco 2007:76). García Franco describes them as the means through which "the east sector of the lagoon was taken out of its isolation […] enabling its integration into livestock economy" (2007:76). The inverse relation between isolation and cattle reminds me of geographer Shawn Van Ausdal assertion that "cattle ranching helped to articulate economically the country […] establishing ties between marginal regions and the rest of the nation" (2008:80).

The opposite is also true: the failure of the dairy industry ruptured vital links of communication. Indeed, after the three subsequent floods between 2010 and 2012, which devastated the businesses that still strove to recover from the flood of 2006, in some sense this place seems to have fallen off the map. Hardly ever a car drives by apart from the colorful buses from the company Rápido el Carmen that lift the dust of the unpaved road four times a day, and the milk truck that stumbles through at five in the morning—which recently sometimes fails to pass by[28], leaving litters of milk to

[28] Even though the cattle and the dairy industry are monopolized mainly by the elites, they are not exclusive to them. As Van Ausdal points out (2008:81), to argue otherwise is to comply with a traditionalist perspective that overlooks the more complex reality of cattle ranching in Colombia, and particularly fails to recognize the problem of the unequal concentration of the land: by 2009, Van Ausdal calculated that 60% of the production was in the hands of 8% of the producers (2008:88). This holds true in this region, where most peasants own two or three cows which are essential to their sustenance. That the milk truck sometimes fails to pass by, affects mostly them. Its absence is related to the failure of the dairy industry, as I just pointed out, but also responds to the Free Trade Agreements (TLC for its initials in Spanish) that have happened largely at the expense of small producers—as peasants were quick to state when I

rot on the side of a road that has been flooded so many times it seems to have stayed underwater.

Without customers for her artisanal *enea* crafts, doña Odilia began mending clothes, covering holes with patches and sewing over ripped fabric with this white metallic sewing machine that keeps failing on her, in this town that some call a ghost town, where you can hear a communal loneliness that people do not say but sigh, once in a while: …*Esta soledad*…

Yet, that afternoon, it was a different kind of loneliness that weighed on doña Odilia's mind. She was worried about her mother, who was staying alone in the farm. With a quiet voice, the loving seriousness of recent losses, she told me that her father had died a month ago. In a week, there was going to be a mass. Her mother stayed with her for a few days, but soon decided to go back to the vereda, despite her daughter's concerns. Upon leaving her words were: "I'm leaving to pick *agrás* because if I don't I'll get bored" (*yo me voy a recoger agrás porque si no, me aburro*).

Agrás "grows on its own" (*crece solo*), doña Odilia explained to me: you do not have to take care of it, but you cannot control it, even though people have tried recently, without significant success. Still today, "you have to go find the agrás berry bushes wherever they grow" (*uno tiene que ir donde las matas crezcan en el monte*): you have to walk into the scrubland, *al monte*, and look for them. My guess is that it is precisely this feature that makes it vital nowadays, in sharp contrast with the monocultures that covered the surroundings of the lagoon. Yet doña Odilia's mother's words challenge the reach of this speculation. It was not a few pesos that she needed,

---

asked about the milk truck. In this sense, it is important to take into account the ways in which this place remains, despite certain forms of isolation, connected.

nor the kind of movement that people miss in San Miguel—at least not *just* that, not then. It was to avoid boredom that she left, doña Odilia remembered she said.

***

In his book *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben describes profound boredom as the moment when the (soon to be) human awakens "*from* its own captivation, *to* its own captivation" (2004:70). Through his reading of Heidegger, he suggests that to be bored, in a first "structural moment", is the experience of "being-left-empty", which he describes, threading his words with those of Heidegger, as follows:

> …in boredom we suddenly find ourselves abandoned in emptiness. But in this emptiness, things are not simply "carried away from us or annihilated"; they are there, but "they have nothing to offer us"; they leave us completely indifferent, yet in such a way that we cannot free ourselves from them, because *we are riveted and delivered over to what bores us* (2004:64).

This captivation, Agamben continues, the feeling that "we cannot free ourselves" from things that refuse themselves to us, is followed by the realization that we are "being-held-in-suspense" (2004:66). That is, our becoming aware of the world we suddenly find ourselves without. Agamben suggests that "the openness at stake in [boredom] is essentially the openness to a closedness, and whoever looks in the open sees only a closing, a not-seeing" (2004:68)—and it is our ability to know the not-open, in Agamben's interpretation, that makes us human.

In boredom there is an intense awareness of loss, of being cut off from the world. Yet for Walter Benjamin "boredom is a warm and gray fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colorful of silks", and "in this fabric we wrap ourselves up when we

dream" (1999). Boredom, he wrote in *The Storyteller*, "is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience" (1968:91): it is how our thoughts rest, and how we listen to what others say in such a way that their words get woven into us. As doña Inés said, the morning we walked to her favorite spot up the hill near her house, "you get pensive" when you get bored. When you don't get up and walk. What is it about our thoughts that scares us out of our stillness?

Lisa Stevenson formulates the question I would like to ask myself in *Life Beside Itself*: "Isn't our fear of boredom related to our fear of death?" (Forthcoming:208). Perhaps this is why Juan Orrantia found that, in the aftermath of a paramilitary massacre in Nueva Venecia (in the Colombian Caribbean), all the deaths that struck people's lives lingered in the boring hours of the warm afternoon, "where the air feels heavy" and takes place a subtle way of remembrance—challenging the "politics of forgetting" that paramilitary groups intend by throwing bodies fresh out of life into the flowing river (Orrantia 2012). Recalling Agamben's words, it seems to me that the awareness that makes us human might be the knowledge of our mortality—and that of others.

Johana and doña Inés talked of distractions as being the opposite of boredom. The kind of distraction that made "time go fast" as we walked through well-known paths into discovery, and took agrás berries off their branches. The distractions doña Odilia's mother needed in the presence of loss—an "alternate rhythm" (Desjarlais n.d.:169–179), perhaps, to death. These two words, boredom and distraction, articulated in speech the everyday of rural *life*: everyone described their chores, not just berry picking, as distractions through which they shied away from boredom.

For don Edgar it was making cheese and taking care of cattle, as it was for Cenaida who refuses to stay still because otherwise the day feels sooo long. “At least I distract myself” (*por lo menos me distraigo*) is a phrase I heard often, at the end of short monologues that begun with “how are you doing today” and unraveled into the list of the tasks carried out throughout the day. “Not to get bored” were doña Inés and doña Cenaida’s answer to why they spun wool walking around instead of sitting down, and why they like to cut things in the air, standing up. And it was boredom that kept doña Odilia away from her parent’s farm, “because when the agrás berry season is over, there is nothing left to do”.

“Anything that gets you up and walking”, doña Inés said: distractions are whatever gets you out in the open, which is usually what it means to be working—though work, as doña Cenaida suggested in her narrative, is so closely tied to life they become difficult to tell apart. The similarity is of course significant, as Adelaida notes in her thesis (2010), not just because distractions are at once peasants’ livelihood but also because not being able to work or walk means, more often than not, to be isolated from social life (a social death, perhaps?). I would like to take this further and suggest that to be distracted is to be doing something *with* the world (not just a social world). To put it differently, and borrowing Tim Ingold’s words, it seems to me that agrás berry picking requires, and so offers, to “correspond with the world”. That is, “…not to describe it, or to represent it, but to *answer to it*” (Ingold 2013).

Thinking about distraction, Stanley Cavell turns his attention to mourning, suggesting the two hold a significant relation as responses to the recognition of the world “as separate from me” (1986:109)—threading, in a sentence, the meanings that are latent in the word *distraction*, as I eventually learned to listen to it in relation to boredom. Mourning he says, can be understood as

> The path of accepting the loss of the world (you might say, accepting its loss of presence), accepting it as something which exists for us in its loss (you might say its absence), or what presents itself as loss (1986:109).

In a moment that resonates with the words of Michael Taussig, for whom everyday distraction appears to be world-making (1991), Cavell claims that "the world must be regained every day, in repetition, regained as gone". To learn how to mourn, he continues, "may be the achievement of a lifetime. ("I am mourning for my life.")" (1986:109).

***

An old dog tied up to his wooden doghouse barked loudly, announcing my arrival. Don Campo Elías, doña Inés' older brother, said softly I could come in: *Siiiga*. He greeted me with a long and tired good morning (*bueeenas*) and gestured towards the small wooden bench where I could sit down. He sat on a white plastic chair, in front of his house, surrounded by wild flowers that doña Oliva, his wife, had put in ceramic pots around their garden. His house seemed sunken in the middle of the mountains, hills rising from all sides. The leaves of the cornfield, just behind him, rustled. Wrapped up in a checkered blanket, with his hat on and holding a walking cane, he sat in silence. It was a thick silence. The whole world felt silent.

I asked him how he was feeling. He took his hand out of the blanket and touched his knee, tensing all the muscles of his face. I knew his knees had been hurting him more than usual because the week before I had run into one of his nieces, the one who lives in Chiquinquirá, who had come to see him and give him some medicine to ease the pain that, this time, she said, wouldn't go away.

For the past ten years don Campo Elías had been having problems with his hips and knees. About four years ago he had a hip replacement surgery and, ever since then, he had not been able to work or walk. Before, doña Inés told me, don Campo Elías liked to talk, and talked about many things. "Just like don Edgar", she said, who "talks as if he was reading a book" (*habla como si estuviera leyendo un libro*). But then his knees got weak and weaker, and his hips wore down. Now he had no choice but to stay at home all day. He could barely take a few steps from the entrance of his house to the white plastic chair, where he sat throughout the day "to heat up a little" (*para calentarme un poquito*). "He's bored", doña Inés explained to me. Maybe that's why he doesn't feel like talking.

When I asked him about his life, don Campo Elías left my questions hanging in the air. On the rare occasion that he did answer, he would say, with a quiet voice, barely opening his mouth to let the words out, "I don't remember" (*No me acuerdo*). I asked him if he grew up here, what his parents did for a living, I asked him about his children and grandchildren who live just a few minutes away and whose laughter we could hear, from time to time. I asked so many questions I knew I was probably bothering him, and I annoyed myself. *I don't remember*. I once asked him how come he had come to forget: "It must be because I'm so old" (*será por lo viejo*), he said[29].

For a while, I stopped visiting. I was unsure of what it meant that don Campo Elías didn't say a word, and I think my own discomfort towards his silence lead me to assume that he felt uncomfortable with me too. But a few weeks later he asked where I had gone, wondering why I had stopped going to see him—unsettling my

[29] As Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst wrote once: "life itself is as much a long walk as it is a long conversation, and the ways along which we walk are those along which we live" (2008:1).

assumptions about the time I had spent with him, and making me rethink what I thought ethnography was. Surely, it is not just about asking questions. And, sometimes, it must be something other than conversation.

From then on, I sat with don Campo Elías, and like him, in silence. It was now a shared silence. More than once I thought he had fallen asleep, because he blinked so slowly, and heavily. But now and then some disoriented hens would burst onto the cement floor and he would break the enfolding quiet with his walking cane, driving them away with a wordless sound, *sshh, sshh*. In front of him rose the wood boards of a motorcycle garage, the only thing blocking out the view of the landscape—the mountains, the creeks, the oak trees, the grass spotted with tiny white flowers called *totes*. But it was the garage don Campo Elías stared at. Every day I found him there, in the very same spot, facing the garage's wood boards.

It was such a powerful image: a man unable to walk, day after day sitting in the same spot, staring at the only wall that conceals the landscape. A man who claims to have forgotten everything and who barely says one word, but who doesn't mind sharing his silence. A man who seems to be letting go of his past and seems to be blocking out the world.

Two months had passed when don Edgar called me and said he had sad news. I knew exactly what he would say next, but then it felt like I didn't when he told me that don Campo Elías had died. He was almost eighty-years old, and he was very sick, don Edgar said, so there was the general feeling that he had rested. I remembered the time I got to spend with him and thought that, maybe, in the moments we shared, don Campo Elías was already stepping out of life, as slowly as he blinked.

A few days later, I called doña Inés to ask how everyone was doing. “Very sad”, she said. I already knew what had happened, but I stayed in silence while she gave me the news about don Campo Elías’ death. They did not celebrate her fiftieth birthday as she had planned; she wanted to have a barbecue, with meat, corn, music and everything. They didn’t, but that’s okay, she said: that’s life. “And how is doña Oliva doing?”, I asked.

“Really, truly pensive”, doña Inés answered gently: *Siempre harto pensativa*.

Conclusion

In his beautiful *In Amazonia: A Natural History*, Hugh Raffles asks us to stare at an aerial photograph of the Rio Guariba and writes: "though we cannot see it yet, that river is growing, and in growing it transforms the lives that transformed it" (2002:2). We cannot see it *yet*, his readers, as we read through the second page of his ethnography, but he could not see it either, could not even imagine it, as he contemplated the thick forest and twisting rivers from the airplane that took him to the site of his fieldwork. He turns to Benjamin's words to explain "the difference between passing over and walking through a landscape" and emphasizes that only by walking a road can we learn *the power it commands* (2002:3). It is an unsettling experience, one that changes not only the ethnographer's perspective but also her whole life, to learn that power.

I could not imagine either what I would find before walking through the uneven ground, demanding inclines and the dry *monte* of the mountains that surround the lagoon of Fúquene. It is only now that I begin to grasp how the lagoon has been shaping people's lives, as slowly as it has changed, for generations. The image that comes through this thesis is opposite to the one Raffles offers us: here, what one has to take pains to notice is loss rather than growth—a lagoon that decreases and, in doing so, "transforms the lives that transformed it".

Though I refrained from attempting to outline a natural history—mainly because I found there were other stories to be told, and that required listening—walking away from the lagoon (both physically and discursively) and into people's houses, their narratives and everyday walks, changed the way I understood the environmental

transformations of this region, their affective reach and, from this viewpoint, their social, economic and political foundations and consequences.

In some ways, the foundations came to matter more than the consequences. That is, there is not an exact causal relation between the difficulties people have to deal with in this region and the drainage of the lagoon. It is not *because* the lagoon lost its waters, or *because* the last floods were devastating, that "life is tough" up the mountain in the veredas of Quicagota and San Cayetano, as doña Cenaida illustrates with her narrative. It is rather the logics under which the drainage of the lagoon took place, particularly the unequal distribution of the land that dates back to the Colony, which makes up the "toughness" of the countryside. Don Edgar, doña Cenaida and doña Inés manifest, it seems to me, that after the drainage of the lagoon, after the floods, *after water*, almost nothing new happened. Rather, old difficulties intensified and, in some ways, became more visible—and so a sixty-year-old memory comes back to help make sense of the present. Yet, in other ways, the pain they have experienced, forms of pain that are often latent underneath thick surfaces, remains significantly hard to grasp—and, in this sense, a structural explanation becomes an insufficient explanation.

So I agree, but only partially, with Roberto García Franco in that the dependencies between haciendas and peasant farms are at the core of the transformations of this region. Yet the pain of life, ordinary pain, and everyday losses—as devastating as they can be—cannot be reduced, it seems to me, to this structural argument, for there is more at stake than poverty in the difficulties of a life—as don Edgar movingly claims with the knowledge, and the fear, that people here tend to die of sadness. Indeed, what I have tried to do with this thesis is to complicate that argument, without

leaving it aside. I have tried to grasp, in other words, what such approach obscures. The danger, that I see threatening the lines of this conclusion, is to explain it all away.

As don Edgar said, it's important to think about death—our own and that of others—perhaps because it makes us look at the world with the awareness of our own vulnerabilities. In doing so a certain excess becomes visible, something *more* that allows us to see beyond the general and appreciate uniqueness, entangled as it is in webs of close and distant relationships. This is essential to this thesis, which is mostly centered on individuals and tries to see the world as it unravels from their narratives and ordinary practices.

And yet company, the possibility to share our lives with others, comes through as indispensable to life and death (and all the unsettling in-betweens)—in practical, emotional and existential terms. If anything, this insists on the importance of attending to the complicated ways in which youth migration occurs and affects the lives of peasants—those who leave and those whose stay, their lives being "rooted", as they say, in this place.

Through this kind of approach, what counts as "the environment" widens. The material environment I have attended to includes of course the land, the lagoon, the grass, the wheat, the corn, the cows, and the agrás berries that capture the affective register of people's relationship with this changing place. But it includes also tiny objects, the walls of a house, the things that cluster in family homes, the paths that people walk. And so, familiar absences become visible, but also everyday gestures of creativity, a poetics that exceeds us, and an intimate engagement with the world—which can be, as Raffles noted, disquieting. But then again, the main point of this

thesis may just be about the importance (ethical, perhaps) of allowing one's perspective, and oneself, to be changed.

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio
2004 The Open: Man and Animal. Kevin Attell, tran. Stanford California: Stanford University Press.

Agee, James, and Walker Evans
1960 Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Cambridge: The Riverside Press.

Allison, Anne
2013 Precarious Japan. Duke University Press.

Ancízar, Manuel
1983 Peregrinación de Alpha: Por Las Provinicias Del Norte de La Nueva Granada En 1850-51. Editorial Incunables. http://www.banrepcultural.org/sites/default/files/libros/brblaa805595.pdf.

Andrade Pérez, Germán, and Lorena Franco Vidal
2007 El Complejo de Humedales de Fúquene, Cucunubá Y Palacio. Un Ecosistema Estratégico Bajo Tensión. *In* Fúquene, Cucunubá Y Palacio. Conservación de La Biodiversidad Y Manejo Sostenible de Un Ecosistema Lagunar Andino. Germán Andrade Pérez and Lorena Franco Vidal, eds. Pp. 43–60. Bogotá: Fundación Humedales e Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt.

Van Ausdal, Shawn
2008 Un Mosaico Cambiante: Notas Sobre Una Geografía Histórica de La Ganadería En Colombia, 1850-1950. Margarita Fajardo, Alberto Flórez, Margarita López, and Claudia Leal, trans. From the Selected Works of Sawn Van Ausdal: 48–117.

Benjamin, Walter
1968 The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov. *In* Illuminations. Hannah Arendt, ed. Harry Zohn, tran. Pp. 83–109. New York: Schocken Books.
1999 The Arcades Project. Woward Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Boussingault, Jean Baptiste, and Francois Désiré Roulin
1849 Viajes Científicos a Los Andes Ecuatoriales Ó Colección de Memorias Sobre Física, Química E Historia Natural de La Nueva Granada, Ecuador Y Venezuela Presentada a La Academia de Ciencias de Francia. Paris: Librería Castellana. http://cdigital.dgb.uanl.mx/la/1080022430/1080022430.html.

Caicedo Rojas, José
1945 Los Misioneros Del Meta. *In* Apuntes de Ranchería Y Otros Escritos Escogidos Pp. 1–86. Bogotá: Biblioteca Popular de la Cultura Colombiana. Ministerio de Educación Nacional.

CAR
1986 Proyecto de Aprovechamiento Hidráulico, Manejo Y Ordenamiento de Cuencas Hirográficas Y Distritos de Riego. Bogotá: Corporación Autónoma Regional de las Cuencas de los Ríos Bogotá, Ubaté y Suárez.
2000 Fúquene: El Lecho de La Zorra. Bogotá: Corporación Autónoma Regional de Cundinamarca.
N.d. Memorias Del Comité de Expertos Para La Recuperación de La Laguna de Fúquene. Corporación Autónoma Regional de Cundinamarca.

Castrillón, Juan Carlos, Edwin Carvajal, Gustavo Ligarreto, and Stanislav Magnitskiy
2008 El Efecto de Auxinas Sobre El Enraizamiento de Las Estacas de Agraz (Vaccinium Meridionale Swartz) En Diferentes Sustratos. Agronomía Colombiana 26(1): 16–22.

Cavell, Stanley
1986 The Uncanniness of the Ordinary. *In* The Tanner Lectures on Human Values. Delivered at Stanford University. http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/lecture-library.php#c.

Das, Veena
2007 Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Desjarlais, Robert
2003 Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists. University of California Press.
N.d. Subject to Death: Life and Loss in a Buddhist World.

Diamond, Cora
2003 The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy. Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas 1(2): 1–26.

Didion, Joan
2000 On Keeping a Notebook. *In* Slouching Towards Bethlehem Pp. 117–126. New York: The Modern Library.

Duff, Ernest A.
1966 Agrarian Reform in Colombia Problems of Social Reform. Center of Latin American Studies at the University of Miami 8(1): 75–88.

Franco Vidal, Lorena, and Germán Andrade Pérez
2007 Fúquene, Cucunubá Y Palacio. Conservación de La Biodiversidad Y Manejo Sostenible de Un Ecosistema Lagunar Andino. Bogotá: Fundación Humedales e Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt.

García, Ángela

2010 The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession along the Rio Grande. Berkeley: University of California Press.

García Franco, Roberto
2007 Elementos Para Una Historia Ambiental de La Region de La Laguna de Fúquene En Cundinamarca Y Boyacá. *In* Fúquene, Cucunubá Y Palacio. Conservación de La Biodiversidad Y Manejo Sostenible de Un Ecosistema Lagunar Andino. Germán Andrade Pérez and Lorena Franco Vidal, eds. Pp. 61–102. Bogotá: Fundación Humedales e Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt.

Geertz, Clifford
1973 Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. *In* The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays Pp. 3–30. New York: Basic Books.

González, David
2012 Una Laguna Inundada de Potreros. Cerosetenta. http://cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co/una-laguna-inundada-de-potreros/.

Guerrero García, Paula Kamila
2010 La Laguna de Fúquene: Etnografía de Un Megaproyecto Virtual de Desecación. Universidad de los Andes.

Van der Hammen, Thomas
2007 Prologue. *In* Fúquene, Cucunubá Y Palacio. Conservación de La Biodiversidad Y Manejo Sostenible de Un Ecosistema Lagunar Andino. Germán Andrade Pérez and Lorena Franco Vidal, eds. Pp. 11–12. Bogotá, Colombia: Fundación Humedales e Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt.

Hemming, John
2001 The Draining of Lake Guatavita. *In* The Search for El Dorado. Phoenix.

Hettner, Alfred
1976 Viajes Por Lo Andes Colombianos: (1882-1884). Heinrich Henk, tran. Bogotá: Talleres Gráficos del Banco de la República. http://www.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/historia/viaand/indice.htm.

Ingold, Tim
2013 Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture. London: Routledge.

Ingold, Tim, and Jo Lee Vergunst, eds.
2008 Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot. Aldershot, United Kingdom: Ashgate.

Jackson, Michael
1983 Knowledge of the Body. Man, New Series 18(2): 327–345.

Kohn, Eduardo
2013 How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Langebaek, Carl Henrik
1995 Arqueología Regional En Los Valles de Fúquene Y Susa. Bogotá: Uniandes / University of Pittsburg.

McLean, Stuart
2007 "To Dream Profoundly": Irish Boglands and the Imagination of Matter. Irish Journal of Anthropology 10(2): 61–68.

Navaro-Yashin, Yael
2009 Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 15: 1–18.

Nieto Caballero
1969 El Jetón Ferro. *In* Crónicas Y Chispazos Del Jetón Ferro Pp. 8–9. La lotería de la Beneficiencia de Boyacá y la Industria Licorera de Boyacá.

Orrantia, Juan
2012 Where the Air Feels Heavy: Boredom and the Textures of the Aftermath. Visual Anthropology Review 28(1): 50–69.

Peña, Manuel
1878 Empesa Del Desagüe de La Laguna de Fúquene Y Pantanos Adyacentes. Bogotá: Imprenta de Borda.

Peñarete Villamil, Fabio
1969 Crónicas Y Chispazos Del Jetón Ferro. Boyacá: La lotería de la Beneficiencia de Boyacá y la Industria Licorera de Boyacá.

Raffles, Hugh
2002 In Amazonia: A Natural History. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy
1992 Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Silva, Libio
2003 San Miguel de Sema: Origen, Historia Y Desarollo. Bogotá: Kapra Ediciones Culturales.

Stevenson, Lisa
Forthcoming Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Stewart, Kathleen
1996 A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Strathern, Marilyn
1992 Between a Melanesianist and a Feminist. *In* Reproducing the Future: Essays on Anthropology, Kinship, and the New Reproductive Technologies Pp. 64–89. New York: Routledge.

Taussig, Michael
1991 Tactility and Distraction. Cultural Anthropology 6(2): 147–153.
2010 The Corn-Wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts. Critical Inquiry 37(1): 26–33.

Taylor, Janelle S.
2005 Surfacing the Body Interior. Annual Review of Anthropology 34: 741–756.

Triana, Miguel
1984 La Civilización Chibcha, vol.4. Bogotá: Banco Popular.

Velosa Vargas, María Adelaida
2010 Propuesta Para La Conformación de Redes de Apoyo Social Que Incluyan a Las Personas Mayores Del Área Rural Del Municipio de Ráquira/Boyacá, Con Base En El Estudio Del Capital Social de Algunas Personas Y Familias de La Comunidad. Tesis de pregrado, Universidad de San Buenaventura.