IMMORAL ECONOMY

NEGATIVE ETHICS AND EVERYDAY ECONOMIC LIFE IN THE SOUTHERN PERUVIAN ANDES

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FOR GRANDMA

who always saw the good in people

(1940-2017)
DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.
Abstract

This dissertation explores the perverse vitality of negative ethics—that is, how concerns about immorality animate everyday economic life in rural Andean Peru. Through a consideration of issues such as land inheritance, borrowing money, gift exchange, wealth inequality, and cash cropping, I argue that routine evaluative judgements about bad actions and characteristics of others are deeply implicated in attempts to make a good living and to live well. The dissertation is based on 18-months of ethnographic research in the small Aymara-speaking community of Suma Marka and sits at the intersection of the anthropology of ethics, economics, and materiality.

Where immorality has often been considered analytically as a straightforward inversion of the good and subsumed within people’s attempts to achieve the good, I argue that negative ethics comprises a richly textured field of actions, beliefs, concerns, and logics that significantly incorporates, but also extends beyond this dialectic. Consequently, each chapter explores less-than-straightforward relationships between the ‘bad’ and the ‘good’, moving from an examination of interpersonal settings to collective economic endeavours over the course of the dissertation. Chapter Two begins in the setting of intimate kinship. I consider the nature of obligation when relations break down following a tragic death and ongoing disputes over land, demonstrating how people continue to tolerate bad kin in order to maintain their ideals and practices of good kinship.

Chapter Three extends the consideration of debt obligations in particular, juxtaposing interpersonal moneylending with apxata (beer crate) exchange at fiestas to consider reciprocity’s discontents, and to explain the emergence of shame as interpersonal debt relations become hierarchical. Here, good attempts to extend credit inadvertently produce bad borrowers. The theme of inequality is again taken up in Chapter Four, which examines envy ascription and envy avoidance. I demonstrate how public commitments to avoiding envy contrast with private narratives about others’ envy, where the attribution of bad intentionality
to others bolsters people’s self-constructions as good people who are getting ahead and living well. Finally, Chapter Five considers the failure of a quinoa sale, illustrating how material contingencies can prompt shifts in people’s ethical judgements over time, as people appraise and then reappraise the material and moral consequences of theirs and others’ lying. Here, the bad is temporarily suspended in pursuit of greater goods, only to reappear when these goods fail to materialise.

The dissertation’s contributions are two-fold. Firstly, it re-centres economic activity as a sphere of social life subject to significant ongoing and unfolding moralisation, through an analysis of material affordances, interests, and contingencies. Secondly, an attention to negative ethics in Suma Marka provokes a reconsideration of the nature of the good, and draws attention to understudied aspects of relational ethics, specifically: the role of comparison, situated perspectives, instrumentality, and the occasionally-seductive quality of ethical transgression. Consequently, the dissertation affirms both the destructive and generative potentials of the “shadow side” of Suma Marquenos’ ethical lives.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ...................................................................................................................... 8

**A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND PSEUDONYMS** .............................................................................. 10

**LIST OF KEY PERSONS** ..................................................................................................................... 10

**INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................................................................... 13

  LOCATING ETHICS AND MORALITY IN THE SUMA MARQUEÑO EVERYDAY ............................................. 16
  A BIG, BAD ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE GOOD? LIGHT AND DARK IN MORALITY AND MORALISM ........ 18
  ON THE ETHICS OF REPRESENTATION AND THE PLACE OF MORAL AGENCY ........................................ 27
  FROM POLITICAL ECONOMY TO MORALITY AND ETHICS: MATERIALITY AND THE (IM)MORAL ECONOMY 32
  SUMA MARKA: HISTORY AND ECONOMY .................................................................................................. 36
  FIELDWORK IN AND AROUND SUMA MARKA .......................................................................................... 43
  CHAPTER OVERVIEW .............................................................................................................................. 45

**CHAPTER TWO** ................................................................................................................................. 48

**ANTAGONISTIC CONNECTIONS: SIBLINGSHIP, DEATH, AND LAND** .................................................. 48

  PRELUDE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARKA RAMOS FAMILY ......................................................... 48
  INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................ 53
  THE CHARKA RAMOS SIBLINGS: A POTTED HISTORY .......................................................................... 55
  RUPTURE ONE: A HISTORY OF EXPLOITATION .................................................................................... 57
  RUPTURE TWO: POISONING ................................................................................................................... 61
  RUPTURE THREE: LAND AND BLOOD .................................................................................................... 65
  NOT ENDURING RELATIONS, BUT NOT NOT RELATIONS? SIBLINGSHIP IN PRACTICE ...................... 70
  ENDURING OBLIGATION ......................................................................................................................... 73
  CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................................................... 81

**CHAPTER THREE** ............................................................................................................................... 83

**DEBT TWO WAYS: INTERPERSONAL LOANS, APXATA, AND SHAME** ............................................... 83

  BORROWING IN CONTEXT ....................................................................................................................... 85
  INTERPERSONAL LENDING IN AND AROUND SUMA MARKA ................................................................. 90
  GOOD BORROWERS AND GOOD LENDERS ............................................................................................ 92
  KEEPING IT PRIVATE: DEBT AS SHAME .................................................................................................. 100
  RECIPROCITY: FROM THE AYNI OF LABOUR TO THE AYNI OF THINGS ............................................. 105
  APXATA AS AYNI: RECIPROCITY AND "THE GOOD" ........................................................................ 108
  RECIPROCITY’S DISCONTENTS: CHANGING “THINGS” FROM T’IRI TO BEER ........................................ 113
  CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................................................... 117

**CHAPTER FOUR** ............................................................................................................................... 120

**THE OTHER NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK: ENVY AND AMBITION IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE** .... 120

  ENVY ....................................................................................................................................................... 122
  AMBITION .............................................................................................................................................. 126
  GETTING AHEAD AND LEGITIMATING WEALTH .................................................................................... 130
  “YOUR ENVY WILL BE MY PROGRESS”: RHETORICAL POSITIONINGS AND AFFORDANCES ............ 135
  (IN)DIVISIBLE GOODS: PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION, ENVY, AMBITION, AND FAIRNESS .................... 141
  CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................................................... 151

**CHAPTER FIVE** ................................................................................................................................... 153

**FAILED SALE: IMAGINED FUTURES AND THE CONTINGENT ETHICS OF LYING** .......................... 153
LYING, DECEPTION, AND HALF-TRUTHS IN THE ANDES.................................................................156
“SOMETIMES IT’S BETTER TO LIE STRAIGHT UP (DE FRENTE)”: PERFORMING ORGANIC CERTIFICATION……160
THE INSPECTION ..................................................................................................................167
IMAGINED FUTURES: FROM POSSIBILITY TO COLLAPSE .........................................................172
“FOR THE FAULT OF ONE PERSON, WE ALL PAY”: ESTABLISHING BLAME FOR A (NOW)-COLLAPSED FUTURE ......176
PRAGMATICS AS ETHICS: EMBRACING CONTINGENCY .......................................................179
CONCLUSION ......................................................................................................................182
CODA: NEW FUTURES ......................................................................................................183

CONCLUSION ......................................................................................................................185

MATERIALITY AND MORALITY ........................................................................................188
PERVERSE VITALITY: ACCENTUATE THE NEGATIVE? ........................................................189

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................192

LIST OF MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Map 1. Map of Puno Region and Lake Titicaca .................................................................12
Map 2. Map of the Charka Ramos siblings’ houses. .........................................................52

Photo 1. View across the village at dusk ............................................................................39
Photo 2. A message painted on the side of a building in Puno city, which reads “don’t be a bad debtor/defaulter” .........................................................................................75
Photo 3. Magaly and Hector thanking their guests for apxata, and receiving mistura ....110
Photo 4. Association members advance on the flock of sheep in anticipation of the draw...149
Photo 5. A staged sign reading“storage shed” ................................................................170
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A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND PSEUDONYMS

Throughout the dissertation translations are given in brackets, with Sp. denoting Spanish and Ay. denoting Aymara. Aymara is primarily an oral language. While I have used the standardised spellings common in university and classroom settings, a range of spellings persist in vernacular usage.

All persons and place names in the dissertation are pseudonyms.

LIST OF KEY PERSONS

Charka Ramos Family

Miguel  head of the Charka Ramos family and father to the Charka Ramos children
Carmela  Miguel’s first wife, mother to Rodolfo and Manuela, also Raquel’s first cousin
Raquel  Miguel’s second wife, mother to Gerardo, Laura, Isabel, Karmina, and Arturo, also Carmela’s first cousin
Rodolfo  Miguel and Carmela’s eldest son
Facunda  Rodolfo’s wife
Manuela  Miguel and Carmela’s eldest daughter
Luz  Miguel and Raquel’s eldest daughter, who lives Lima
Gerardo  Miguel and Raquel’s eldest son
Teresa  Gerardo’s wife
Laura  Miguel and Raquel’s second daughter
Isabel  Miguel and Raquel’s third daughter
Jefry  Isabel’s husband, active member of the quinoa cooperative
Arturo  Miguel and Raquel’s youngest son, who lives in Tacna
Luis  Teresa and Gerardo’s godson by marriage
Claudia  Teresa and Gerardo’s goddaughter by marriage
Flor  the largest landowner in the village, cousin to the Charka Ramos siblings and Jorge’s sister-in-law
César  Flor’s husband, Jorge’s younger brother
Yeli  Flor and César’s only surviving daughter
Dominga  Alberto’s first cousin on his mother’s side

Compadres

Arsenio  my compadre, married to Carmen
Carmen  my comadre, married to Arsenio
Jhon  Arsenio and Carmen’s 20-year old son
Ofelia  Arsenio and Carmen’s 13-year old daughter and my goddaughter (ahijada) by first communion
Eva  Carmen’s mother, who lives with the family

Suma Jirwa Quinoa Cooperative

Eber  Suma Jirwa’s general manager, from the neighbouring village of Jisk’a Marka
Jorge  Suma Jirwa’s president, Flor’s brother-in-law
Hector  an agricultural engineer from the neighbouring village of Jisk’a Marka, who was contracted to support the cooperative until mid-2015
Mario  an agricultural engineer who helped with the cooperative’s organic certification
Sheep and Llama Association

Hilario  the sheep and llama association president
Carlos  an elderly man, member of the sheep and llama association

AREA MAP

Map 1. Map of Puno Region and Lake Titicaca (source: Wikipedia Creative Commons Licence BY 2.5).
April 2017. I was nearing the end of fieldwork in a small community in the Andean countryside that I will call Suma Marka, and spending my remaining time tying up loose threads. In particular, I was puzzling over a series of statements people made each time I moved between houses to stay with a new family. When I first left Tía Teresa¹ and Tío Gerardo’s house to spend a week with my compadres (Sp. co-godparents) Carmen and Arsenio, Teresa counselled me sternly: “Corinna, when you go to Carmen’s house, you are going to make sure you don’t tell them what you have eaten here, don’t tell them how we cook, whether we use a gas stove or a fogón (Sp. clay stove fired with dried cow dung). They always want to know things here, the people here are very curious. When they ask you, you aren’t going to say anything, you’re going to say I don’t know, same as you”. Taking these claims at face value as being about the importance of circumspection in general, I duly heeded Teresa’s words, keen to ensure that my presence in multiple Suma Marqueño homes did not cause problems for my interlocutors. When my comadre asked after Teresa, “what did she cook for you? What did she cook it on?”, I was accordingly evasive.

But as fieldwork progressed and people repeatedly asked me to be specifically circumspect about the dishes I was served and how these were cooked, I became certain that there was more to these exhortations. Yet I couldn’t quite fathom exactly what. In each household, people cooked a very similar range of dishes, and most had both a gas stove and the more traditional fogón, alternating between these depending on their preference. Gas was “faster”, but by and large people preferred the fogón as they considered the traditional method of cooking “on clay” to impart better flavour to their meals. I put these fledgling observations to Tía Isabel one evening as she flash-fried an egg over her own gas stove, and she laughed, shaking her head a little that I hadn’t cottoned on to what was, for her, a painfully obvious concern. “They are worried about the vale de descuento FISE”, she explained, referring to the state-sponsored coupons which offered vulnerable families a discount of S/. 16 (approximately £4) on the price of a gas bottle, to ensure access to a safer and more environmentally-friendly source of cooking fuel (see FISE 2020).² Participation in the

¹ Tía and Tío (Sp. Aunt and Uncle) are the most common respectful terms of address for older people in rural Andean settings. As this was how I was encouraged to address people during my fieldwork, I have retained these conventions throughout the dissertation.
² Cooking with dung produces significant smoke pollution, leading to respiratory problems and cancer (Rinne et al. 2006).
programme was limited however, meaning not everyone in the community had the discount. This was why, according to Isabel, people were so interested in how other people were cooking: “If they know you are not using the gas, if you are taking advantage and also cooking on your fogón, they could denounce you to the authorities, and they could take it off you (te pueden quitar) and have it for themselves”. Whether or not this would actually eventuate seemed to me to be a moot point. Nevertheless, Suma Marqueños were acutely sensitive to the prospect of being monitored and evaluated by others as having done something wrong. They also in turn sought to monitor and evaluate the behaviour of others. Moreover, people actively envisaged negative possibilities in even the most banal of everyday activities: by knowing which stove they were using to fry their eggs, fellow community members could potentially seek to harm their economic interests.

This dissertation, based on 18-months of fieldwork in and around Suma Marka, an Aymara-speaking part of the Southern Peruvian Andes between Puno city and the Bolivian border, considers negative ethics in Suma Marka’s everyday economies. By tracing a series of important economic activities and associated concerns—such as land inheritance, debt, gift exchange, wealth inequality, and cash cropping—I seek to answer the following questions: How do Suma Marqueños generate and negotiate negative ethics in their everyday attempts to make a living and live well among others? In particular, how does this manifest in the routine intersectionalities of their economic and social lives? How do Suma Marqueños evaluate, monitor and respond to each other’s negative ethical practice? And at a more theoretical level, how does this consideration of routine, everyday negative ethics in people’s economic lives contribute to the anthropology of ethics? There have already been several important interventions aimed at integrating, or alternately, problematising the integration of economic and ethical concerns (e.g. Lambek 2008; Ortner 2016), alongside an implicit assumption among some economic anthropologists that their work already speaks to moral questions (Browne 2009; Beldo 2014), which I discuss below. However, following Nancy Munn (1986) and Yunxiang Yan (2014), I specifically engage practices in people’s economic lives which are locally evaluated as negative, problematic, bad, or immoral, which I have glossed here as “negative ethics”. As Yan (2011: n.p) has observed: “immorality is rarely examined by anthropologists, let alone explored in ethnographic depth”.

In this dissertation, I argue that routine evaluative judgements about “bad” actions and characteristics are deeply implicated in attempts to make a living and to live well in Suma
Marka. These include concerns about the unfair division of inherited land, bad debts and work-shy debtors, unbalanced or inadequately reciprocal exchanges, others’ envy and ambition in pursuing wealth, and the consequences of lying when attempting to sell crops as a collective, actions and characteristics which are taken to be socially destructive and injurious to the livelihoods of others. Contending with what is considered to be bad, problematic, troubling, or immoral is a core component of people’s relational ethics, and my analysis points to the ubiquity of negative evaluation in Suma Marqueño social life as creating a routine practice of ethical disapproval and reputational injury. Yet where immorality has often been considered analytically as a straightforward inversion of the good and subsumed within people’s attempts to achieve the good, I argue that negative ethics comprises a richly textured field of actions, beliefs, concerns, and logics that significantly incorporates, but also extends beyond this dialectic. I term this *perverse vitality*, representing at once a destructive and generative force in Suma Marqueño social life.

In each of the dissertation’s four chapters, I consider the perverse vitality of negative evaluation, beginning with intimate relations among kin, shifting outward to other interpersonal connections and finally to collective economic endeavours. Each chapter explores less-than-straightforward relationships between the ‘bad’ and the ‘good’, demonstrating how people continue to tolerate bad kin in order to maintain their ideals and practice of good kinship; how good attempts to extend credit inadvertently produce bad borrowers; how people attribute bad intentionality to others to bolster their self-positioning as good people who are “getting ahead”; and how the bad is contingently suspended in pursuit of greater goods, only to reappear when these goods fail to materialise. These also point to distinct generative logics and logics of enactment, evident when minor transgressions are considered desirable and pursued; whenever negative ethical practice is materially or structurally unavoidable; in the unfolding, negotiated consequentialisms generated in Suma Marqueños’ pursuit of negative ethical practice; and in the positioned character that routinely accompanies the attribution of negative ethics.

The introduction is organised as follows: first, I situate my analysis of negative ethics within the Suma Marqueño everyday. I then address some central debates in and around the anthropology of the good, including Joel Robbins’ (2013) call for attending to the good and Sherry Ortner’s (2016) dark anthropology as a critical response. I also consider other
approaches to immorality, including those focused on processes and consequences of negative ethics, and calls for programmatic study, which provide useful framing for thinking about the negative. An explicit focus on negative ethics raises questions about the ethics of representation, particularly of indigenous peoples, to which I suggest a focus on (and defense of) both moral complexity and moral agency is an appropriately anthropological response. This should not stymie but rather complement some of anthropology’s critical tendencies. This is followed by a discussion of the relationship between economic anthropology, materiality, and morality. In the second section, I provide a brief introduction to Suma Marka and its people, including a historical overview and contextualisation, and explain my methodology. The introduction concludes with an overview of the dissertation’s four chapters: on land inheritance and sibling conflict; on debt, shame, and ‘dark’ reciprocity; on envy ascriptions and avoidance; and on lying in organic certification regimes.

_**Locating ethics and morality in the Suma Marqueño everyday**_

The rural Andean village I studied is an everyday, often mundane, and profoundly “ordinary” social context of “life as lived for itself” (2010: 3; see also Stafford 2013, 2020). People in Suma Marka were primarily concerned with the daily realities of making a living and being a competent social actor in and beyond the village. Consequently, rather than a forward-oriented, deliberative ethical praxis oriented towards the _telos_ of becoming a certain kind of person (see for example Laidlaw 2014), morality and ethics in Suma Marka was marked by situations where people were acting and reacting to particular events and people in the course of everyday social life and processes, and then deliberating on these and making judgements about them in the aftermath (see also Yan 2014). This is not to say that self-cultivation did not feature as part of Suma Marqueños’ moral and ethical lives, but it was not the singular characteristic of the community as a social project (insofar as a community can be considered a social ‘project’), or of people’s orientations toward others. Ethics in Suma Marka is, as Anastasia Piliavsky and Tommaso Sbriccoli (2016) have argued following Cheryl Mattingly (2010), a worldly endeavor, oriented outward toward social complexity.

Furthermore rural village life, by virtue of proximity and scale, particularly lends itself to questions of having to live with, and make a living alongside, one another (see Stafford 2020). Likewise, economic endeavours are never solitary undertakings but require
engagement with others, making relational ethics central to negotiations about both morality and materiality. The particularly heavy emphasis on collective organisation within Andean economic life—such as the prevalence of associations and cooperatives dedicated to one particular form of activity like quinoa production or handicrafts, corporate legislative structures of village membership and property ownership, and the prevalence of interpersonal loans of money, among other features—make village economics a particularly useful site for studying everyday relational ethics and moralities. Within the broader field of the anthropology of ethics, ordinary ethics-based approaches have been particularly attentive to questions of relational ethics and to the everyday. Webb Keane (2016: 80) has noted that intersubjectivity is foundational to ethical life: “anything that can be described in ethical terms involves people’s interactions with one another”. Here, issues of responsibility and care for others, particularly in intimate kinship, have formed one important strand of recent scholarship (see for example Al-Mohamm 2010; Mattingly 2010). However, as I demonstrate in the dissertation, questions of care are by no means the only consideration in household ethical relations, and especially so the further out into economic life one ventures—regarding others does not always mean regarding them tenderly.

Additionally, scholars such as Michael Lambek (2010) and Veena Das (2012) have emphasised the tacit dimensions of everyday ethical life, in actions, gestures, and exchanges that are not necessarily marked as ethical. By contrast, others such as Charles Stafford (2013) and Michael Lempert (2013: 387) draw attention to the everyday as a site of explicit moralizing, and point to the significant “labour […] through which actors make ethics recognisable and effective in discursive interaction” (see also Keane 2016). Moreover, Das (2015: 54) has countered perceptions of the everyday as “the residual category of routine and repetition”, suggesting that it is also “taut with moments of world-making and world-annihilating encounters that unfold in a few seconds or over the course of a lifetime” (see Robbins 2016; Laidlaw 2017 for a critique). My approach draws elements from a number of these authors, seeking to highlight the explicit evaluation and reflection that negative ethics in particular engenders, and canvassing both mundane encounters and the critical moments which emerge from these. People in Suma Marka were particularly vocal about the moral failings of others, making initial evaluative judgements in their interactions with one another, and then re-articulating these through complaint and gossip to third parties, narratives which Londoño Sulkin (2012: 4) collectively terms “moral portrayals”. Following Londoño Sulkin,
I suggest this kind of everyday or banal moralism is an important site for understanding morality in general, and immorality or negative ethics in particular.

A brief note on terminology before continuing: as will be apparent from the discussion thus far, I have chosen to use the terms ethics and morality side by side throughout the dissertation. A number of recent authors have preferred to use the term ‘ethics’ to signal their departure from Durkheimian conceptions of morality which emphasise unconscious, collective moral codes (see for example Laidlaw 2002; Zigon 2007, 2008). However, there is by now enough of a consensus that there needs to be “room for conscious reflection in any ethical framework” (Mattingly and Throop 2018: 479) that such a clear distinction is no longer necessary. Moreover, as will become apparent from the following chapters, everyday economic life in Suma Marka is not amenable to the neat decoupling of reflective from unreflective elements, as moments of breakdown and contemplation sit side by side with issues of obligation, shared value, and normative conformity in ways that preclude easy analytic opposition (see also Kleinman 2006). In the next section, I canvass the existing literature in and around immorality and negative ethics and make a case for their focused study.

A big, bad anthropology of the good? Light and dark in morality and moralism

In Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry, Pertti and Gretel Pelto warn novice fieldworkers of the 1970s about straying too far from ‘neutral’ ground:

A fieldworker who is especially interested in people’s negative characteristics – their fears, hostilities, aggressions, and deviant behaviours, is likely to elicit descriptions of behaviour from informants that include a liberal sprinkling of such attitudes. The fieldworker who dwells on the positive side of things may evoke information of a somewhat “Pollyanna” quality (1970: 74).

It is somewhat ironic, then, that one of the emerging debates in recent anthropological thinking on ethics and morality has centered precisely around the opposition between ‘light’ and ‘dark’ anthropology. These are at once intellectual claims about what and how anthropology should study, and political claims about the discipline’s wider purpose and
possibilities. In a widely cited article published in 2013, Joel Robbins proposed a new departure in the ethical turn, toward what he termed in the title, “an anthropology of the good” (p. 457), a paradigmatic approach to the study of values that has been particularly productive to think with. In establishing his call for an anthropology of the good, Robbins suggests that anthropology has undergone a major shift, from a focus on the “savage slot” to an examination of the “suffering subject” (p. 448). That is, a shift from studying ‘the other’ in their situated cultural, social, and historical specificity, to a more generalised anthropological subject whose suffering appears to transcend this rooted context and speak to a shared humanity. Robbins is broadly sympathetic to this shift but makes a clear case for reviving some of the most useful features of the earlier culturalist approaches: namely, the conviction that other people must be leading good lives we have yet to be made aware of. Robbins’ proposition for an anthropology of the good concludes by outlining three key arenas of study: 1) how the good and its proper pursuit is (culturally) defined, including questions of value, morality and well-being, 2) how the good is fostered in social relations, including questions of care, empathy, and the gift, and 3) belief and action towards the good beyond what is present, including questions of time, change, and hope.

Robbins’ explanatory framework of competing and contradictory values, combined with a focus on more Foucauldian-inflected technologies of the self (2004, 2007), makes for a particularly compelling and nuanced account of processes of rapid cultural change at a structural level. Moreover, values-based approaches such as these offer an opportunity to think through some of the underlying tensions and contradictions which animate social life. For example, a tension between reciprocity and individualism has been well-illuminated in Andean and other Latin American contexts over successive generations of scholarship (e.g. Long and Roberts 1978; De Montoya 1996; Albó 2002; Vincent 2017) and finds further ground here (see Chapter Four on envy in particular). However, while Robbins’ ethnography is replete with richly-textured human-scale concerns, an analytic focus on identifying value structures can have the effect of parsing people’s conflicts and concerns out of the specificities and complexities of their interactions, thereby inadvertently reducing these to a function of culture, conceived of as a set of enduring, stable (and thus ultimately predictable) value conflicts. By contrast, a more “ordinary ethics”-based attention to language and action in everyday interaction dwells on and seeks to analyse some of people’s routine, human-scaled concerns. It can thus consider other questions such as how ‘values’ (or morality or
ethics more generally) are enacted, negotiated, contested, and mobilised in everyday life? How do people position themselves in relation to these values, and to one another? With what intentions, and to what ends?

An implicit suggestion here is that these ends may not always be readily or straightforwardly identifiable, raising questions about intentionality, sincerity, and human motivation more broadly. Robbins’ approach to the good is informed by an implicit theory of human motivation, elaborated on in his contribution to the 2013 Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory (GDAT) debate (in Venkatesan 2015). He contends that: “the good is what people are aiming for in action, what they desire [and also] what people found desirable, what they found was pulling them […] they found themselves drawn to it” (p. 24). While this is a compelling account of two facets of “the good”, it is worth considering further the foundational claim that a vision of the good is what ultimately drives people: the telos of human action (see also Keane 2016). Taking this claim at face value, we might also wish to note that—even if the good is the ultimate telos—a significant amount of social action or askesis is directed explicitly toward the bad and the negative, in terms of concern, torment, outrage, attempts to control or contain, and perverse attempts to subvert these forms of control and containment. It is perhaps revealing that seven of the Ten Commandments are framed as injunctions not to do certain things, for example: thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, rather than positive exhortations to appropriate conduct, for example: thou shalt observe the Sabbath, thou shalt honour thy mother and father. In Suma Marka, people were much more readily able (and willing) to elaborate on what was problematic about another persons’ behaviour than what was good about it, or even in the abstract, of how one should go about being good, which would invariably result in discussions of what one should not do. If the good is the telos of much of human action, then much of what stands in for the good might more readily come under the problem of being bad, immoral, or sinful, which has implications for how social life is understood: for although they are related, identifying the bad is not always or only reducible to pursuing the good.

A related concern is that attempts to avoid or root out the morally and ethically problematic in service of the good are often not straightforward and may routinely fail. Indeed, Robbins identifies the constant threat of moral failure among the Urapmin due to a pervasive ontology of sinfulness, but nevertheless cautions that people’s ideals and attempts to achieve the good
should not be “dismissed as unimportant, or worse, as bad faith alibis for the worlds they actually create” (2013: 457). Yet if we are to take people’s ethical visions seriously, we should also take the repeated failures and fallings-short of these visions seriously as failures, because this is something people themselves consider to be particularly morally weighty in certain contexts, and as ultimately unresolvable in others. The question of if and when the good is ever fully realised is significant, and one I touch on in Chapter Four. Here, I consider the pragmatics of what I call ‘good enough’ moralities, aimed at foreclosing (or at least temporarily suspending) certain ultimately unresolvable moral conflicts in order to move on with social life.

Furthermore, alternative accounts of human motivation separate out the desired from the good, in everything from Freudian psychoanalytic divisions of the id, ego, and superego (Freud 1966) to Adam Smith’s arguments about the pursuit of economic interest tempering a series of passions which might otherwise overwhelm and corrupt the liberal subject (see Hirschman 1977). What these suggest is a series of complex, contradictory, and conflicting motivations: what people desire is very often not what is considered good, and moreover, part of what makes a particular action enjoyable can also be its ethically transgressive qualities. For their part, Suma Marqueños often maintained similar distinctions. Drinking at fiestas for example was enjoyable, but “bad, because then we neglect our agriculture”, as Hector, a 30-something community leader and agronomist told me solemnly, several weeks prior to getting uproariously drunk during Suma Marka’s anniversary celebrations. Similarly, receiving more than others during the distribution of community goods was a transgression of norms of equitable distribution of common resources, but was also quietly celebrated as a cunning fait accompli if you could get away with it. Bringing extra meat to eat surreptitiously by oneself at a ququ (Ay. shared meal) was frowned upon but delicious, and according to Tía Eva who shared her extra chicken with me with a sly smile, particularly delicious because we were “behaving badly” (portandonos mal). I consider some of these tensions in Chapters Four and Five.

Anthropological approaches which privilege the good have a tendency to resolve or subsume the bad into a function of the good, rendering the negative epiphenomenal.3 In some cases, this can be methodological. For example, in Ellen Oxfeld’s (2010: 27) study of morality in a

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3 With thanks to Tom Powell-Davies for this particularly apt turn of phrase.
Chinese village, she follows John Barker (2007) in suggesting that moral breaches can alert researchers toward their interlocutors’ more tacit “moral orthodoxy”. Others analytically compress the bad and the good, as in Melissa Caldwell’s (2017: 61) examination of compassionate care in Russia. She writes: “concerns about moral decay are, at heart, concerns about order and rightness, as Russians debate the extent to which individuals and institutions conform to or deviate from social norms of appropriate behaviour”. In this reckoning, identifying the negative performs the particularly Durkheimian function of (re)asserting shared values, which he understood as an act of social integration (Durkheim 1960 [1893]; see also Edel and Edel 2017 [1968]). Durkheim (1960 [1893]: 102) notes:

Crime brings together upright consciences and concentrates them. We only have to notice what happens, particularly in a small town, when some moral scandal has been committed. They stop each other on the street, they visit each other, they seek to come together to talk of the event and to wax indignant in common.

Certainly, “waxing indignant” in this manner is an important aspect of negative ethics in Suma Marka. It does also alert researchers to important values, such as saliendo adelante (Sp. getting ahead, materially and socially), which I detail at length in Chapter Four. However, while the good is a necessary part of the puzzle of negative ethics, to stop here would present an altogether too-settled account of the role of negative, and the work of evaluations and articulations of the negative, in social life. Consequently, I argue in this dissertation that the negative should not only be considered as a subsidiary or index of the good, but as a set of actions, concerns, beliefs, and logics which extends beyond this straightforward inversion.

I now turn to consider anthropological approaches to the ‘bad’, immorality, and negative ethics in more detail. Thus far, these constitute a somewhat disconnected and divergent series of departures rather than a coherent set of debates, but nevertheless offer important guideposts for examining negative ethics in Suma Marka. I have grouped these into three loose camps: critical structural approaches, approaches which consider the social processes and consequences of immorality, and programmatic efforts to generate focused study. Chief among critical structural approaches is Shery Ortner’s valorisation of “dark anthropology” (2016: 47), which responds directly to Robbins’ call for an anthropology of the good. Ortner suggests that examinations of the good downplay structural concerns, and instead advocates for cultural critiques that highlight the “ugly realities of the world” (p. 60) and seek to change
these, which she finds in a tradition of US-based anti-neoliberal activist anthropology from the 1980s onward. However, Ortner’s vision arguably is less concerned with elucidating the particularities of interlocutors’ ethical lives and more with anthropology as a moral project, aimed at exposing injustice in service of social and cultural change. In approaches such as these, immorality is often understood to be externally located, in oppressive structures and inequities which impinge on the lives of otherwise ‘good’ people, and in the problematic actions of individuals and groups acting in service of these (e.g. Narotzky and Moreno 2002, Appadurai 2013).

Interestingly, some of the broad tensions between an anthropology of the good and dark anthropology have also played out in Andean economic and political anthropology. Historically, Andean economic anthropology has been more attentive to normative questions of the good. Authors such as Billie Jean Isbell (1978), Catherine Allen (1988), and Enrique Mayer (2002) have posited strongly normative claims about the value of reciprocity in particular as promoting harmonious unity in Andean society. By contrast, rejoinders to this approach have focused instead on inter-class conflict and ‘external’ structural inequalities that produce suffering (see for example Smith 1989; Paerregaard 2017). In the 1990s in particular, these concerns informed key debates on “Andeanism” among Peruvianists: Orin Starn (1991) argued that culturalist approaches focused on ritual, ecological management, and symbolism had led anthropologists to ignore structural inequalities which fomented the internal conflict between the Government and the Shining Path. This meant they had effectively “missed the revolution” (p. 63), leading to a bloody internal conflict which became one of the longest-running civil wars in Latin America.

More recently, the pendulum has swung back in the opposite direction, with Marigold Walsh-Dilley (2013, 2017) re-emphasising reciprocity as a core Andean value, and Olivia Angé’s work on creativity and joy in miniature-making (2016) signalling new departures in questions of the good. My analysis complements these approaches by considering a third, understudied, aspect of people’s ethical engagements. I ask: how do people from approximately the same class and racial backgrounds⁴ moralise with, about, and through one another? Alongside visions and projects of the good, and critical engagement with bigger structures and strictures

⁴ With an awareness that these are dynamic and shifting categories in the Andes, where racial, class, and gendered categories do not always map neatly onto a biological understanding of race (see Weismantel 2001; De la Cadena 1995).
of power and inequality that condition contemporary social life, we might also pay specific ethnographic attention to ‘internal’ critiques about problematic behaviour closer to home, in familial, interpersonal, and community interaction, driven by questions of how to live with one another and what we owe to one another. Crucially, this does not downplay structural considerations of inequality or oppression but is attentive to these as they emerge in situated contexts, rather than making them the primary or overwhelming focus of analysis.

In a second camp are approaches which consider the social processes and consequences of immorality, broadly conceived. A key example is Matthew Carey’s (2017) book on mistrust, an approach which might be termed relativist or functionalist as it considers the work that mistrust ‘does’ socially. Taking issue with literature which suggests that “mistrust is not frequently seen as anything but undo[ing] the positive work of trust” (p. 2), Carey makes an argument for mistrust on its own terms, as a socially productive force which allows his Atlassian interlocutors to navigate uncertain social worlds, and in doing so, preserve their interpersonal autonomy and moral equality. Carey’s attention to the vital import of mistrust is an important step forward in considering immorality as more than an inversion of the good. However, in focusing exclusively on what is constructive about immorality, such approaches can potentially obviate some of the social import of negative ethics as something which people find problematic or undesirable. Indeed, Carey’s interlocutors did not themselves consider mistrust to be a socially positive phenomenon: “nobody likes being betrayed, lied to, or welched on, nobody extols these things” (p. 13). Consequently, my work aims to keep the vitality and difficulty of immorality in productive tension.

Other authors, such as Nancy Munn, have instead focused on how negative value is produced. In *The Fame of Gawa* (1986), Munn sets out a novel approach to the study of moral and economic life. Her account of fame in Gawan society charts a dialectical opposition between positive and negative value, where positive values are acts which extend socio-cultural spacetime and generate self-other relationships. By contrast, negative value constitutes the “contraction of spacetime or the failure to expand it; and more radically the subversion of positive, relatively expansive transformations” (p. 13). This is most evident in Gawan witchcraft, which Munn describes as a mode of value reversal within the broader system, as it consumes value and inhibits people’s capacity to generate social relations. Munn’s account of the negative pays especially sensitive attention to moral positionality. In
her discussion of witchcraft, she notes that the extension of intersubjective spacetime through gifting can be considered a form of relational neglect from the perspective of those who are left out of the exchange. She therefore provocatively suggests that the negative is present as an interior possibility in every act of exchange. Munn’s broader point about competing, situated evaluations of the same action by different people, and by the same people at different points in time is a significant feature of negative ethics in Suma Marka, and an issue I take up at length in Chapters Two, Four, and Five.

Finally, several scholars have begun to consider the negative on its own terms. Work on dark kinship is the closest approximation to my own approach to negative ethics in the context of ordinary social and economic life. Authors within this vein seek to emphasise the difficult, troubling, and problematic aspects of everyday relatedness, such as Michael Lambek’s (2011) work on kinship as theft in the context of an inheritance dispute in Madagascar, and Peter Geschiere’s (2013: ix) discussion of witchcraft as exemplifying the “dangers of intimacy” (see also Peletz 2000). While these approaches have been primarily ethnographic, others have made further moves to establish variants of negative ethics as a specific analytic and theoretical focus. Thomas Csordas (2013), together with William Olsen (2019), has called for an anthropology of evil, drawing on and expanding David Parkin’s earlier contribution to the topic (1985). This is an important attempt to delineate the negative as a legitimate and substantive field of enquiry. Yet while Csordas and Olsen suggests that this approach can also incorporate “the shades of gray between […] blacks and whites” (2019: 1), a focus on evil nevertheless presents an overly Manichaean or polarised vision of morality. Accordingly, work in this vein has tended to focus on the extreme end of problematic action, particularly where these relate to violence and suffering that is considered to have human, rather than supernatural or occult, causes. Recent examples include work on political violence (Good 2019), torture (Catton 2010), and confinement (Narotzky and Moreno 2002). This has the potential to reinforce the idea that negative ethics are somehow aberrant or excessive practices which exist on the fringes of moral society, only taking centre stage in a state of exception or excess of human depravity.

Along similar, but more tempered lines, Yunxiang Yan (2011, 2014) has argued for attention to immorality. Choosing to focus explicitly on public discussions of immorality, Yan describes two cases of morality crises in contemporary China: the exploitation of Good
Samaritans offering assistance to strangers, and wide-ranging practices of food adulteration. He suggests that immorality constitutes, at an abstract level, “nothing more than the violation of the social” (2014: 461) and argues that it has been understudied in favour of a methodological and ideological focus on the good. By contrast, he suggests focusing on the immoral can be a way of bringing together the emotional and the rational, building a model of moral engagement which shifts from “intuitive” (p. 487) moral action in the moment, through to post-factual reasoning and evaluation, in which moral sentiments continue to play a role. He also shows how concerns about immorality play a role in producing reflection and reckoning at a societal level, and can thus help anthropologists to understand societal change.

Incorporating a focus on the negative within the broader remit of the anthropology of morality and ethics is important for several reasons which build on those Yan has offered. Firstly, as both Yan (2014) and Stafford (2013) have noted, people’s concern about immorality, the ‘bad’, and the ‘negative’, is an empirically significant feature of social life. In the Andes, moralism—evaluative, usually negative, judgements of others’ actions—is an abiding feature of daily routines of talk as a form of social action (Van Vleet 2003; see also Londoño Sulkin 2012). It is rarer, though not unheard of, for a person to be evaluated as “good” (es buena/walisk’twa), and rarer still for key values to be explicitly articulated as a matter of course when all is going well—they are more readily apparent, and commented upon, in the breach (no está bien/jan walk’iti). This may serve as a useful guide moral orthodoxy (Barker 2007; Oxfeld 2010), but it also suggests that the good does not require or warrant the same degree of articulation, elaboration, and debate in daily social life as do the problematics of poor or inappropriate behaviour.

Moreover, attempts to circumnavigate the more problematic aspects of social life are profoundly generative. They are not only ‘positive’ in Yan’s formulation of soul-searching societal change, or in Carey’s reckoning of mistrust as upholding the value of autonomy, but also animate social life and produce social effects in a less straightforwardly progressive or affirmative manner. There is a perverse vitality to immorality, it produces tension, drama, and conflict on which the stakes of social life are hotly contested (see also Castellanos 2015). While the good may be desirable and attractive in a pure sense, the bad is not, or not only, straightforwardly repulsive. Inasmuch as people are shocked, horrified, or saddened by immoral or problematic acts, they are also drawn to them—to circulate in hushed gossip, to
denounce loudly in public, to struggle with in private, to pursue when no-one is looking, and to move to act against. This is not to suggest that striving for the good does not also produce angst, doubt, and difficulty, as Robbins has amply demonstrated (2004, 2013). Rather, it is an acknowledgement that the bad is equally, yet differently, generative.

Secondly, an attention to how people conceive of and contend with immorality and the negative on the ground, alongside an anthropology of the good (Robbins 2013) and of reflective judgments (Laidlaw 2014), ensures anthropologists continue to speak ethnographically to moral complexity. While what is good and what is bad might appear definitive in a given moment and people repeatedly make categorical statements about good and bad, moral and ethical life in the Andes (and elsewhere) is far from clear-cut. In many cases, the two are fundamentally difficult to fully disentangle. The relationship between these evaluative judgments of bad and good and the intricate complexity of life-as-lived is worthy of further study. The ‘bad’ complicates the ‘good’, and vice versa. People’s visions and practices of the good life are routinely impinged upon by others, moral conflicts emerge in ways that are difficult to reconcile satisfactorily, ambiguity and uncertainty form a significant part of people’s ethical reflections, and struggle, falling short and failure—along with the pragmatics of temporarily settling for less-than-good or ideal—is as much a feature of both self-cultivation and socially-oriented ethics as is striving. Thus both sides of this ongoing dualism, and all the shades of grey which exist in between, are worthy of serious and sustained consideration.

On the ethics of representation and the place of moral agency

Questions of negative ethics raise questions about the ethics of representation, intersecting with a long trajectory of concerns in the discipline about the protection of oppressed and impoverished others (Stoczkowski 2008). This is of particular relevance for my work as it is a representation of indigenous people and their moral concerns, which anthropologists have historically been wary of lest they be perceived as condemning their interlocutors directly by using “language that implies moral judgement as an analytic frame” (Good 2019: 62). Indigenous people in the Americas and in Andean Peru specifically have been subject to physically violent forms of colonial repression, and ongoing forms of structural racism and
marginalisation (Stavig 2000; Scarritt 2012). As Penny Harvey (1994) incisively notes, focusing on one particular aspect of social life is a representative choice, and one that can have deleterious effects on the people represented. In her discussion of domestic violence in the Peruvian Andes, Harvey suggests that what had hitherto been a notable silence on gendered violence in the Andeanist literature can be partially attributed to a desire to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes of violent, irrational “indios” (Sp. Indians – a particularly derogatory term).

Historically, leftist currents in Peruvian politics have attempted to counter pervasive racism, structural and state violence. For example, one of the most famous socialist interventions is journalist and philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui’s (2010 [1928]) materialist analysis of the ‘Indian Problem’, which blamed the poor conditions of Peru’s indigenous population on latifunda landowners, and is still a core text in contemporary anthropology and sociology courses in Peruvian universities. Yet popular representations of indigenous “serranos” (Sp. an offensive term for people from the mountainous regions of Peru known collectively as the sierra) as closed off from outsiders, cold and unaffectionate, prone to bouts of irrational and extreme violence, and naïve about the wider world persist. On my very first day in Lima during a scoping trip prior to fieldwork, I was explaining to a taxi driver that I planned to do research in the Puneñan countryside. “Puno?!”, he exclaimed, “what would you want to go there for? They are all drunks and wife-beaters (todos son borrachos y golpeadores)”.

One very visible and controversial representation of indigenous Andeans is the until-recently frequently re-aired television show Paisana (Sp. Countrywoman) Jacinta (1999-2018), which finds comic relief in the apparent stupidity of rural folk not fully understanding the complexities of city life. Paisana Jacinta is a grotesque caricature of an indigenous woman played by a male actor in conspicuous drag, and opens to the theme tune “ay mamacita, I’m going to be sick/get drunk⁶, now I know the city (ay mamacita me voy marearsh, ya lo

⁵ In one particularly egregious case, some 20,000 indigenous women across the Andes (including several from Suma Marka) were subject to a campaign of forced sterilization under Alberto Fujimori’s state ‘family planning’ programme between 1996 and 2000 (Bertha Foundation 2020; see also Kovarik 2019). The goal was poverty reduction, based on the claim that indigenous women have too many children, so these are certainly representations that matter. Interestingly, some of the women from Suma Marka who were subject to state sterilizations claimed they had not been forced to undergo this (the practice was variable depending on the individual doctors and nurses administering the sterilisations, though murky issues of consent remain).

⁶ The literal translation of the Spanish verb marear is to be nauseous, but it is used colloquially as a synonym for “get drunk”. The grammatically incorrect phrasing of “me voy marearsh”, including the ‘h’ at the end of the verb, is intended to mock the accented Spanish of indigenous speakers.
conozco la capital). One memorable episode I watched, wedged between my compadre Arsenio and his mother-in-law Eva on the family’s couch, was titled ‘Paisana Jacinta and her confusions in the juice shop’ (see Latina.pe 2014). In this episode Paisana Jacinta goes to a juice stall in a market in Lima, where the owner offers her coconut water. He explains that she can also eat the flesh of the coconut but suggests she will need to “work for it” (meaning to peel the coconut). Misunderstanding and thinking this is a sexual proposition, she gets out the stick that she always carries to hit him with. The show was removed from the airwaves in 2018 following a legal battle spearheaded by several indigenous women from Cuzco, as it was considered to be “denigrating and offensive to the Andean woman” (Diario Correo 2018: n.p). Interestingly, the show was particularly popular among male viewers in Suma Marka, potentially because it reinforced the commonly-held belief in the Andes that women are “more Indian” than men (De la Cadena 1995: 329).

Representations are not straightforwardly ‘good’ or ‘bad’ but rather take on different significance in different social contexts. Some representations of indigenous Andeans by outsiders, which may appear and are in fact intended to be derogatory, are not always viewed as such by members of the community: some are even actively perpetuated by Aymara themselves. For example, forms of public and communal violence are denounced by non-Aymara outsiders, but were often recounted by community members with a degree of pride in their autonomy and community strength. Tía Teresa, for example, recalled a lynching that had taken place in the community around 20 years prior over the theft of a cow hide used for beating quinoa. The accused, a man who had married into the village, been whipped near to death and then burned alive and buried in the andenes (Sp. terraces) up on the hillside behind the village. Summarising the incident and the community response, Tía Teresa said, with notable conviction: “we are thief-burners, everyone has called us thief-burners (quemaladrones) and they are scared, now we don’t have any problems with theft”. Similarly, several people fondly remembered El Aymarazo (Sp. Aymara uprising, literally “The Great Aymara”), a massive anti-mining mobilization which took place in Puno in 2011. The Aymarazo shut down the whole city, blockading roads, overturning cars, waving the wiphala (Ay. Andean indigenous flag), and reputedly, according to my interlocutors, whipping people...

7 The show was also popular because of its lewd humour. Paisana Jacinta emulates local practices of men cross-dressing as women during carnival periods, notably including at the annual Fiesta de la Virgen de Candelaria in February, Puno’s largest festival. One particularly notable character is the diabla chinita, a man dressed up in a knee-length skirt, usually with balloon-breasts, and an oversized phallus exposed to great hilarity by lifting the skirt at the crowd. Men were particularly keen to take jokingly sexualised photos with the diablas chinitas.
in the streets for speaking Spanish or languages other than Aymara (see also El Comercio 2017). This was a response to the government’s refusal to recognise Andean communities as indigenous rather than as members of “rural communities”, and thus afford them the same rights of refusal in negotiations over the introduction of international mining operations as designated indigenous communities. Thus in this context, violence was a form of claims-making about indigenous autonomy that people valued (McDonnell 2014).

The moral quandaries and sentiments which these particular acts of violence elicit—even, and perhaps especially, on the part of the anthropologist—may form part of what appears to be a reluctance to treat immorality as an ethnographic object. Even those anthropologists who do deal directly with “difficult” topics are often starkly confronted by the point at which a broad disciplinary commitment to moral and ethical relativity intersects with the limitations of their own tolerance. Orin Starn (1999) for example, in his book about the rondas campesinas (Sp. rural extra-judicial community patrols) in Northern Peru, writes of his extreme discomfort when the patrol caught a thief and administered a particularly violent punishment. Following a confrontation in which their leader was injured, the patrol tied the man’s arms behind his back and strung him up from a tree, forcing his shoulders to dislocate under his own weight. Starn recalls:

I tried in Tunnel Six to avoid the sermonizing of the coloniser or the missionary. Yet I was not so stupid about the doctrine of respect for diversity as to think that villagers had the right to torture. It was a simple lack of courage that made me into just another spectator of the hanging. Michael Taussig describes how anthropologists may find themselves made into knowing or unwitting accomplices of “terror’s talk and terror’s silence”. This happened to me on that night in Tunnel Six (p. 86).

Moreover, anthropologists who do address potentially unsavoury aspects of their interlocutors’ practice are at pains to point out that this is not a ‘complete’ representation. In the introduction to Mistrust, Carey reassures his readers that although he has painted his Atlassian friends as “chronically suspicious […] frequent liars, occasional traitors, and opportunistic welchers”, this is only a very partial rendering as they were equally generous, affectionate, caring and above all “good company” (2014: 13). Nevertheless, he maintains that the (positive) social effects of mistrust are what makes it “worthy of sustained interest” (ibid). The appeal to empiricism is a common move, one which Stoczkowski (2008: 346) also
makes when he questions whether “anthropology can serve – at once – the Good and the True”.

Without discounting the potentially very significant impact that negative representations of people can have, I suggest that, in addition to a broad commitment to empiricism more generally, anthropologists could make a specific (and renewed) case for moral complexity and moral agency. A sense of morally complex lives is latent in Carey’s discussion of his interlocutors above, but is worth teasing out in further detail, particularly in relation to the potentially thornier question of moral agency and responsibility. In philosophy, a moral agent is understood as being someone who can “be held accountable for their actions and the consequences of their actions” (Talbert 2019: n.p). Anthropology is not primarily in the business of holding the people it studies to account, unless those people happen to be particularly powerful social actors (e.g. Nader 1999 [1972]). Rather, the aim is to account for people –and particularly, account for people in their messy situated complexity, to be good, bad, and everything in between, on their terms and in their specific cultural, social, historical, and political contexts. Consequently, only focusing on positive representations denies interlocutors their full moral agency to be complex human beings and denies anthropologists the capacity to analyse (and defend) that agency. While it is important to be mindful of the harm that poor representations can effect, representations of indigenous people that are only ever positive run the risk of romanticism, caricature, and potentially being perceived as disingenuous (see also Stoczkowski 2008).

Furthermore, what moral agency means and where it is situated is primarily an ethnographic question. For my interlocutors, there was a very clear sense of the possibility of attributing culpable moral agency to other people for their actions, even as the responsibility for the redress or correction of this may extend beyond the individual in question (though this was situationally contingent). For example, the then-village president Luis was considered to be personally in the wrong when he was caught in the city with another woman who wasn’t his wife. However, his aunties who had witnessed his liaison took it upon themselves to chastise him thoroughly and spread the word around about his poor conduct, in order to shame him into returning to his marriage. While he was considered to be the moral agent, the older women believed they were also responsible for policing his behaviour: “we have to correct him”, Tía Dominga explained. This is a microcosmic example of policing by the community
as a whole, where a number of explicit, formalised technologies for intervening in people’s conduct such as fines or physical punishments of whipping or beating known as *castigos* were used, alongside informal social pressure such as gossip and *miramientos* (Sp. dirty looks).

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the potential repercussions, attributions of agency were often contested. Many people were quick to justify and explain – or indeed, explain away – actions which others considered to be immoral or problematic (see also Keane 2016; Butler 2003). As I discuss in Chapter Four, people were considered by others to be responsible for their animals’ actions as an extension of themselves, even as they personally described their animals as “willful” and ultimately beyond their complete control. Likewise, Luis tried to explain that his infidelity was, in part, a consequence of his wife’s insufficient attention. However, he ultimately capitulated to the pressures of the elder women and, suitably chastened, attempted to resurrect his marriage. Moreover, both individual and distributed attributions of moral agency among people also existed alongside and was conterminous with other non-human forms of agency, including that of God, who could provide blessings, and of Pachamama, an animate landscape with the capricious capacity to both provide for people and make them sick (Sax 2015). This meant the question of how and to whom to attribute moral agency was itself an ethical issue in Suma Marka (see Chapters Four and Five particularly).

*From political economy to morality and ethics: materiality and the (im)moral economy*

Suma Marqueños’ preoccupation with negative modes of social action and culpable moral agency was especially acute when these socialities had material stakes. These stakes did not have to be very high to be considered significant, pointing to underlying moral concerns rooted in a history of financial insecurity that could not easily be divested. Some Suma Marqueños lived in a state of relative material comfort compared to their parents or grandparents (see also Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999), participating in (reasonably) steady employment outside the village and building up assets like land and livestock. However, Suma Marka is still, at least partially, an agrarian context where the gap between abundance and famine can shrink like an empty stomach from one year to the next, and the memory of childhood deprivation is fresh. Moreover, like many other contexts dominated by agricultural
and episodic wage labour, cash flow—for everything from purchasing seeds to schoolbooks—is a perennial problem (see Sneath 2012). As the quinoa cooperative’s young manager Eber wryly observed when some of the women from the cooperative were chasing him for a few soles of change they were owed: “the people from the countryside, they would cry for 10 centimos, and they would die for S/. 1”.8

The intersection of moral and economic questions has a long history in economic anthropology, from Mauss’ Essai sur le don (1990 [1950]) onwards. There has, however, been a tendency for some economic anthropologists to produce normative statements about what constitutes the good in a given economic context, and also to make “morality […] synonymous with the particular set of principles inscribed in reciprocity-based, non-capitalist societies” (Browne 2009: 9; Bloch and Parry 1989 is a notable exception). Indeed as Hart (2014) notes, much of Mauss’ work and thinking on reciprocity was informed by his involvement in cooperativism and support for socialist reform. In an Andean context, the romance of small-scale, ‘embedded’ transactions has been most readily expressed in detailed treatment of ayni (Ay. reciprocal exchange), which historically referred primarily to a practice of labour exchange and other communal forms of work (Harris 2007). As Karsten Paerregaard (2017) has argued, the emphasis on the reciprocal nature of exchange in Andean contexts has caused people to gloss over more competitive and antagonistic elements (see also Chapter Three). Although such depictions are not necessarily rooted in Durkheimian visions of social life, they do run a very similar risk of conflating what is good with what is socially worthwhile and materially beneficial (for all), in ways that collapse the ethical into the social (Parkin 1985), and their own moralities into those of their interlocutors (Stoczkowski 2008; Browne 2009).

Perhaps the most explicit intersection of moral and political economic questions, and potentially the most significant for the Suma Marqueño context, has been the concept of moral economy. This concept, which includes antecedents and corollaries in the work of R. H. Tawney and Karl Polyani (Rogan 2017), found its most fertile expression in E. P. Thompson’s (1971) discussion of bread riots in eighteenth century Britain. Thompson argued that riots are not caused by material insecurity alone, for the experience of the 18th century peasantry was one of enduring precarity. Instead, he suggested riots were linked to specific

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8 S/. 1 was approximately 25p in 2017.
circumstances where the moral order has been violated: by raising prices on goods beyond an affordable level for the local peasantry or limiting supply, granaries and shopkeepers transgressed the “traditional [...] social norms and obligations and the proper economic functions of several parties within the community” (p. 79). The concept of moral economy found a particularly receptive audience among scholars of peasant studies in South America (see for example Brass 1991), who used it to explain the mass peasant mobilizations against the hacienda system which took place from the 1960s across Latin America.

In an important critique of the concept, Didier Fassin (2009) argued that the popularity of the term has meant that it has been extended to the point that it simply refers to other kinds of value than base economic utility, without much further theoretical elaboration or specificity. Indeed, the concept has enjoyed continued usage in the anthropology of Peru, where scholars have considered the moral economy of precious metals (Sallnow 1989), water (Trawick 2001), and migrant remittances (Paerregaard 2015), among others. By contrast, recent work that has attended to moral economy in the sense of both material and moral concerns has leaned heavily on materiality as an explanatory framework. For example, Ivan Rajković (2017) argues that material constraints such as the state sponsorship of a failing manufacturing industry and a lack of other employment opportunities curtailed people’s reflective freedom (and thus their ethics) in post-socialist Yugoslavia. However, as Tim Rogan (2017) has noted in his intellectual history of the ‘moral economists’ (R.H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, and E. P. Thompson), a present-day shift to an overarchingly materialist rhetoric of inequality and dispossession has foreclosed possibilities for discussion of the relationship between moral and economic life in other, more expansive terms. This is my aim in this dissertation. In Thompson’s rendering, the economy is both figure and ground. It is at once structural constraint and enablement, which has repercussions for people’s capacities to pursue or actualise particular visions of the good life. At the same time, it is something that can be reflected on and moralised about9 – in terms of both commentary on wider structures and processes, and in the course of everyday practices of oikos, the management of home, making a living, and contributing to the community. I explore these questions in Suma Marka with regard to time, labour, goods, and money.

9 Though in Thompson’s reckoning through a modality of conservative reproduction of the established order, which is significant, but by no means the only modality of ethical practice.
Alongside attention to materialism as a political-economic concern, I argue that it is important to pay attention to what Webb Keane (2016: 27) terms the “ethical affordances” of material objects, that is, “the opportunities that any experiences might offer as people evaluate themselves, other persons, and their circumstances” (p. 31). This dissertation is therefore materialist in both senses of the word, attending to people’s economic conditions and relations, and to the materiality of objects. Donald MacKenzie has referred to this combined approach as “material political economy” (2017: 172). In his discussion of high-frequency trading, he suggests that STS perspectives have unduly emphasised the materiality and agency of objects, to the detriment of a focus on political economy, and seeks to bring the two together to consider “economically consequential material orderings” (ibid). While materiality has, conversely, long been incorporated within debates in political economy more broadly, and Marxist materialism in particular (e.g. Taussig 1980), materiality has only attracted limited purchase in the anthropology of ethics. One notable exception is Angé’s work on miniatures (2016) and barter (2018). In the latter, Angé draws on Munn’s (1986) work on qualisigns to inform her discussion of bartering practices, techniques of (non-monetary) valuation, and the values that adhere to specific agricultural products in the Argentinean Andes. Although I do not consider different qualisigns in the same depth as Angé does in her analysis of cambio transactions, I take up Keane, Angé, and Munn’s broader point that materiality has moral import. In Chapter Three, I consider how the ethical affordance of beer—specifically its ability to be consumed—erodes the full value of the gift in apxata exchanges. In Chapter Four, I consider how the indivisibility and irreconcilability of sheep provokes envy, as people struggle to achieve a fair distribution of non-equivalent livestock.

Finally, where anthropological approaches influenced by Aristotelian virtue ethics have understood ethics as “forms of activity whose aim is intrinsic to the practice itself, rather than an external end achieved by instrumental means” (Laidlaw 2014: 53), attending to materiality and morality in tandem offers opportunities to consider how negative moral precepts and framings might themselves be strategically mobilised, attended to, or suspended in service of material and other goals. In particular, it provokes questions about the role of instrumentality in ethical life, in a context where material resources are vastly unevenly distributed at a local and national level, and where saliendo adelante (Sp. getting ahead or progressing, materially and socially) is significant ambition for many (Leinaweaver 2008b). The issue of
instrumentality is taken up in the latter two chapters of the dissertation, which demonstrates how Suma Marqueños strategically attribute envy to others in order to index themselves as ethically and materially progressing and to circumvent critique, and draw on consequentialist ethical frameworks which incorporate material loss in their evaluation of problematic practices. In the next section, I provide an ethnographical contextualisation of Suma Marka’s contemporary economic life within a broader overview of the community.

_Suma Marka: history and economy_

Suma Marka is a blink-and-you’ll-miss it _comunidad campesina_ (Sp. peasant community)\(^{10}\) of 376 registered _comuneros_ (Sp. community members). It is situated a brief walk from the Pan-American Highway, which snakes along the shoreline of Lake Titicaca as it makes its way from Puno city toward the Bolivian border. The village comprises a scattered patchwork of fields and houses and fields and is positioned in what people call the _zona media_ or _zona pampa_ (Sp. middle or plains zone), a vast, flat expanse of land opening out to even vaster skies. A view of Lake Titicaca and its shores is obscured by a series of low hills on the horizon line, and the community itself is nestled at the foothills of a mountain range which comprises the _zona alta_ (Sp. high or mountainous zone), dividing the department of Puno from that of neighbouring Moquegua. Many of my interlocutors were born in thatched-roofed, adobe-walled houses on the lower hillsides, and grew up planting potatoes and herding animals up and down its _andenes_ (Sp. terraces) and steep inclines. In the contemporary village, however, most of these houses have fallen into disrepair as children grew up and migrated to flatter land on the _pampa_ (Ay. plains) proper, motivated primarily by land pressure and the introduction of tractors, which made tilling the hard land of the _pampa_ a more attractive prospect. One of my key interlocutors, Tïa Isabel, claimed that her father had been the first person to migrate to the _pampa_, though other families disputed this and suggested their parents and relatives instead held the honour.

\(^{10}\) While the concept of community has been variously critiqued as a methodological fiction and ideological construct of “dubious analytic utility” (Amit 2002: 1; see also Cohen 2002), it has continued salience as an ethnographic category—in this case both as a popular term and as a legal designation. It is in this sense that I have used the term community throughout the dissertation, while remaining mindful of its limitations.
The history of human habitation in the region is much older, however. A number of chullpas (Ay. funerary towers) sit behind the right flank of the village, dating back to the pre-Incaic period. “We are Qullas” people said, when I asked about their history, meaning they asserted a direct link with an ancient independent Aymara kingdom, who were incorporated into the Incan Empire during the 16th century, forming the southernmost of the empire’s four suyus or provinces (Pärssinen 2015). This kind of recourse to an ancient past is a common way of reckoning history and claiming originary status in contemporary Peru (see also Canessa 2012: 67). They also pointed to Chuqiqullu, a solitary hill which loomed large over the eastern flank of the community. This was a telluric ancestor being, which some referred to as being like a grandfather and which had to be treated with similar respect.

Beyond this ‘present’ and potent ancient past, most people only recalled what had been part of their own, or their parents’ and grandparents’, living memory. Many archival records pertaining to the history of the region were lost in a fire in the mid-1990s, making this method of historical reconstruction particularly difficult. A key moment in the living memory of most, however, was the destruction of the nearby hacienda (Sp. estate), which incorporated part of the territory of the present-day community until the 1960s. Many of my interlocutors explained that their parents and grandparents were compelled to work for the local hacendados (Sp. estate owners) for a few coins and scraps of food (see also Chapter Two). This feudal-style system ended after the Agrarian Reform, a political process of mass mobilizations across Latin America. In Peru this took place under the Velasco and Belaunde governments between 1969 and 1982, effecting the forcible ejection of hacendado families. The now-infamous slogan of land reform, first coined by Emiliano Zapato in Mexico: “the land is for those who work it (la tierra es para quien la trabaja)”, was still quick on people’s lips during my fieldwork, and Suma Marqueños proudly recalled participating in a series of local tomas de tierra (Sp. land occupations, literally “land taking”) on the hacienda.

Following this the government created a series of state-owned cooperatives, including the nearby 6 Rio Grande in the zona alta between Puno and Moquegua, which several community members worked in. Workers in 6 Rio Grande, like those many state-mandated cooperatives created during this period, suffered from poor management on behalf of the bureaucratic functionaries, resulting in low productivity (Mayer 2009). The cooperative was eventually disbanded and the land parcelled out (unfairly, according to some of my interlocutors) among its members.
Alongside lasting misgivings about state-controlled cooperativism, the most enduring impact of the Agrarian Reform was the formal integration of the community as a legally incorporated comunidad campesina in 1977, commemorated in an anniversary fiesta each year (see Chapter Four). This legal construction fixed and demarcated community boundaries. It specified which land pertained to the community, a total of 340 hectares which includes contiguous land in the community proper, and an additional tract of land in the zona alta, around a 4-5 hour walk or half hour drive from the main community site, used for pasturing sheep and llama. It instituted a property regime of corporate land ownership, which sits alongside other usufruct-based concepts (detailed at length in Chapter Two). It also incorporated community members within a set of nested political representations by instituting a rotating cargo (Sp. office) of President and Tenant Governor (see also Lazar 2008). The President is responsible for the organization and management of the community, while the Tenant Governor functions as an instrument of the state authority and represents the community in district government, who in turn represent the community in regional government, and so on. Finally, it enshrined a principle of equality through equal representation and democratic participation in the community: “we are all equals in the community”, people routinely reminded me (see also Chapter Four).

The ‘local’ economy in Suma Marka can be described as a mixed agrarian economy. Subsistence is an important ethic in this rural community, but people have also been participating in market exchange since the colonial era (Larson et al. 1995; Angé 2018). Agricultural strategies form part of a dynamic livelihood system which incorporates a high degree of flexibility (in periods of abundance, at least) about how to make use of one’s resources. Agriculture can ensure a steady cashflow and act as a launching pad for economic opportunities, but primarily operates as a source of food security, which can be vital in times of need.11 Consequently most households in Suma Marka presently combine agricultural work, which is mainly performed by women on a day-to-day basis, with waged labour. Waged labour is usually men’s labour, and the Suma Marqueño men I knew were engaged in a range of occupations including schoolteacher, tractor driver, medical assistant, builder,

11 For example, in the current COVID-19 pandemic, Peru has witnessed reverse migration from the city to the countryside on a massive scale (Chávez Yacilla and Turkewitz 2020). As my comadre noted when I called to check how she was doing, “we don’t need to go into the city, we have everything here, we can just eat potatoes and chuño and habas, we are good in the countryside”.
itinerant miner and labourer, store supervisor, combi, motocarga, or tricycle driver, and politician and public administrator. Often however, many of these are short or shorter-term contracts, and most households have experienced significant periods without a family member in employment. One or two women in Suma Marka were also employed in waged labour—my comadre Carmen, for example, was contracted by the district council as a childcare assistant at the local wawa uta (Ay. nursery). However, the majority of women were engaged in part time work in small, self-directed businesses, such as running market stalls or selling trout, combining a number of income streams which both incorporated and complemented their agricultural labours.

The current gendered division of labour in the community is a key departure from my interlocutors’ parents’ generation. At that time very few men had employment outside the village and so men and women farmed together, occupying complementary roles (see for example, Harris 1982, 2007). Nowadays, most households own and farm between 1-5 hectares of land (see Chapter Two for further details), on which they pasture animals and plant crops, though depending on the labour capacity of the household much of this will lie fallow and be used as pasture. Animal husbandry in Suma Marka includes predominantly
Brown Swiss cows (for milk) and sheep (for wool and meat) in the village proper, and some households also keep llamas, pigs, chickens, and occasionally guinea pigs to fatten and sell. In the past most households’ flocks of sheep numbered well over 100, though women are decreasing flock sizes to between 15-25 as they age and their children leave home. A small flock can be tethered to a field for a day, whereas larger flocks instead tether their pastors, usually women or children, as they need to graze for between 8-10 hours a day and it is difficult to stake 100+ sheep. In my experience, pasturing was a difficult and mind-numbingly boring task. Not much happened, but it nevertheless required a high degree of vigilance to ensure the flock stayed together and did not stray too far or into others’ fields, and to avoid being headbutted in the backside by oversized, overstuffed, aggressive rams called Oso (Sp. bear). In addition to keeping animals, Suma Marqueños also practice a system of rotational agriculture on an annual cycle, beginning with tubers like potatoes (the staple crop) or less commonly oca (Sp. yam), followed by chenopods such quinoa or kaniwa, legumes such as habas (Sp. Lima beans) or less commonly tarwi (Ay. Andean lupin), and grains such as wheat, oats, and barley, before the land is fallowed for three years. Planting usually occurs around September-October, with harvesting in February-March. As in most small-scale agrarian communities, production is directed in the first instance to the subsistence needs of the immediate, and then to the extended household (through sending sacks of potatoes or grain, meat, and cheese to more distant kin).

Surpluses are sold (or very occasionally, bartered) directly at markets in the nearby towns or cities, or through one of the community’s multiple associations. These include: two separate sheep and llama associations, who employed an older couple to pasture communal flocks in the community’s high pasture; an artesania (Sp. knitting and crafting) group; a milk collection for cheesemaking organised by a dairy association in the nearby town, whose motocarga tore down the roads six times a week excluding Sundays, steel cannisters rattling, to pick up between 20-30 litres of milk from clusters of 5-6 neighbours; a savings and loans group which met once a month; and most recently, a quinoa cooperative called Suma Jirwa which consolidated in 2015 to take advantage of the international boom in prices. Most households are members of at least one, and often multiple groups, which act as a point of commercialisation for their agricultural products in local, national, and even international markets, and also serve as a key sites for hosting a number of governmental and NGO development interventions and projects. Nevertheless, they are also what Gabriela Vargas-
Cetina (2015: 129) calls “ephemeral associations”, meaning they wax and wane over time, as opportunities come and go, and conflicts emerge among the membership. Thus, for many Suma Marqueños, at least some of their economic fortunes were bound up in projects which depended in part on their kin, neighbours, and community members for success (or failure – see Chapter Five).

Suma Marqueños were also members of other similar organisations outside the village, such as combi drivers’ associations, artisan collectives, and market stallholding groups, meaning that the associativity of economic life is not specific to Suma Marka, but mirrors broader trends in Peru and elsewhere in Latin America (see Antrosio and Colloredo-Mansfeld 2015). Thus, while I have been describing this as a ‘local’ economy, it should by now be evident that this is both importantly emplaced in a particular rural agrarian context, and significantly bound up in processes and practices extending far beyond the community. It is also important to note Suma Marqueños are themselves highly mobile. In other parts of Peru, such as Ayacucho, intense violence perpetrated by both the government and guerilla fighters during the Civil War of the 1980s and 1990s forcibly displaced some 600,000 people (Schubiger and Sulmont 2019). However, the Aymara-speaking region between Puno and the Bolivian border was not as directly affected by the violence, and consequently much Suma Marqueño mobility instead follows broader patterns of seeking out economic opportunities in the city (Martínez 1980; Altamirano 2010; Ødegaard 2013). Accordingly, many Suma Marqueños’ residence in the community has not been permanent and enduring, but encompassed periods of living in nearby and distant cities.

Tío Gerardo’s father Miguel, for example, purchased a plot of land near what is now the hospital in Puno City, and each of his children had, at one point, lived in the house while completing further education in the city (see Chapter Two). As a young couple Tío Gerardo and Tía Teresa raised funds to purchase a city house of their own, which they in turn gave to their youngest son Ricardo when he started a family of his own, returning to their house in the countryside. My comadre Carmen also invested in urban land. She was one of at least 6 others I knew of in Suma Marka who had purchased tiny plots in Jalihualya on the outskirts of Puno, a former invasion-made-good that had only recently received electricity and still had no running water. Carmen’s property was a single concrete shell in a state of partial construction in contrast to her modest but well-established house compound and fields in
Suma Marka. It nonetheless served as a foothold in the city which would mean that her daughter Ofelia did not have to travel far for school. Nevertheless, she adamantly asserted that she would “never leave her farm”. Ongoing commitments to farming produced situations of co-residence and reverse commuting, where women would travel from the city to the countryside on a daily basis to tend to crops and animals. Consequently over the life course, a pattern of circular migration emerges. People spent their childhood in the country, moving to the city for additional opportunities in education and work in late adolescence and young adulthood. Some chose to stay and establish families in the city (every family had at least one sibling residing elsewhere, in places such as Puno, Moquegua, Lima, Ilo, and Tacna, Arequipa, and even as far away as Houston, Texas). However, many had chosen to return to the countryside to reside permanently once their children had left home and begun to form families of their own.

Finally, it would be remiss to conclude a section on economic activities without mentioning religion and belief. Peru is a majority Catholic country, which both incorporates and is exceeded by significant syncretic traditions drawing on older beliefs about an animate landscape (e.g. Orta 1999). Since the 1970s, Peru has also witnessed a flourishing of Protestant evangelical denominations alongside other countries in Latin America (Buechler and Buechler 1978; Gros 1999). Most of my interlocutors were nominally Catholic, though some participated in other churches, such as Seventh Day Adventist, Mormon, and even the Unified Korean Christian Religious Association of Peru. This participation was not always consistent, however. Members of the same household might attend different churches, and many people would attend evangelical churches with reasonable regularity for a period of time before changing churches or reverting to Catholicism. Some derided this practice as being akin to shopping around for religion, while others claimed it was a canny way to hedge one’s bets. Nevertheless, when questioned Suma Marqueños would state that they believed in a God, and many subscribed to the idea that God influenced one’s fortunes (economic and otherwise). They suggested that if they had faith, God would provide for them and their families, if He were willing (“si Dios quiere”). Consequently, people often secured a blessing for new cars from priests, other large purchases (such as a fridge or a new sofa) were

12 Comprising approximately 76% of the population according to the 2017 census.
13 One of my goddaughters, following the lead of different family members, was first baptised as a Catholic, and attended Seventh Day Adventist services as a child for several years. I became the godmother of her hair cutting (a key Andean ritual, which in this case happened very late, at age 11), and also attended her Mormon baptism during my fieldwork.
inaugurated by a godparent “so that it lasts”, and anniversary celebrations for some organisations included attending a service or special Mass and blessing. People also engaged in more routine acts of inviting good fortune: small business owners would place a fresh bunch of the herb rue outside their shop or stall to invite good custom, and people customarily bought others a meal when they had received a significant loan or other windfall, to ensure that more money would come their way. The role of religious belief and practice in economic life is not the primary focus of the dissertation, however. Consequently, I have analysed elements of religious belief and practice where these were articulated in the course of everyday moralising about problematic economic action (see especially Chapter Four). Nevertheless, there is more work to be done to consider how religion informs and intersects with negative ethics and economic life in Suma Marka.

Fieldwork in and around Suma Marka

Although this dissertation deals with community economics and negative ethics more broadly, my initial route into fieldwork was via one of the community’s economic associations: the quinoa cooperative, Suma Jirwa. I had arrived with the intention of doing fieldwork on quinoa commercialisation, and it was the cooperative’s manager Eber and the cooperative membership who facilitated my fieldwork in Suma Marka. Even as my topic shifted away from a focus on quinoa specifically, I worked closely with Suma Jirwa throughout the duration of my fieldwork and its membership of 32 formed a core group of interlocutors. My fieldwork was thus not bound primarily by spatial constraints, as in a classic village ethnography or other “arbitrary location” (Candea 2007: 169). Rather, I followed the cooperative’s members as they moved between different physical spaces and economic activities. This chiefly involved agricultural labour in the countryside but was also complemented by shopping and selling trips to local markets, occasionally tending stalls, and numerous administrative meetings and capacity-building workshops with Suma Jirwa in particular, which took place in Puno city and around the department.

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14 I also gained permission from the community’s then-president, Luis, who was happy to oblige as many of the cooperative members were his kin, including his aunt Teresa who was also his godmother by marriage.

15 With particular thanks to Dr Sian Lazar for her sage counsel in suggesting this approach, and to Professor James Urry for suggesting that I endeavour to “get in” with a group of older women specifically.
One especially noteworthy feature of my fieldwork was that I resided in multiple houses throughout the 18-month duration. I would spend anywhere between one and several weeks in one household depending on the invitation, inserting myself with varying degrees of gracefulness into the daily rhythms of family, association, and community life, before moving on to the next household. In many cases, I circled back for repeat visits. This arrangement was not of my own making. Rather, it was a methodological innovation introduced by the quinoa cooperative who decided they would “share me” among their members. This commitment to sharing arose out of twin, yet seemingly contradictory, concerns: firstly, as an unknown, white outsider, people voiced half-joking, half-serious worries that I might be a *kharisiri*, a vampire-like creature who had come to steal their fat (Ay. literally “one who cuts” – see also Wachtel 1994; Canessa 2000; Weismantel 2001). Secondly, if I did in fact turn out to be a) not a *kharisiri* and b) useful, people were also concerned to prevent envy among their members (see Chapter Four). Unsurprisingly, there were few takers at our initial meeting to decide where I would live, until Tía Isabel (who we will meet in Chapter Two) offered to host me first. People refused payment for hosting, hence a major ethic that guided my approach to fieldwork was to make a material contribution through my labour to the households I was staying in. Consequently, I was an observant, but particularly enthusiastic participant in the daily rhythms of life in Suma Marka. Once word got around the community that I was prepared to work and would eat everything that was given to me – two attributes that people said made me “different from other *gringos*” – I received further invitations from other families. In total I lived with nine different families, across three different sectors of the village. Living with multiple families in this way, including often sharing a bedroom with one or more family members, meant I was privy to intimate spaces of domesticity, within which much gossip, reflection on, and critique of others’ unethical behaviour took place.

These households were predominantly comprised either of single women or families whose husbands worked elsewhere, and who wanted help and companionship during the day. Each of the women, bar two, were over 50, and many complained that they were not as strong as they used to be when they were younger. This meant that I often spent time alone with one

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16 It’s unclear the extent to which I was an asset in anything other than some form of vaguely-amusing-in-my-incompetence companionship and the exotic novelty of whiteness. My potato peeling in particular was atrocious. No matter how hard I tried, the peel would always come off far too thick, showing a lack of thrift and conclusively demonstrating to the women of Suma Marka that I would never make anyone a good wife.
woman, helping out with all daily tasks, including preparing food in dark, smoky kitchens, milking cows and carrying the full pails to the collection point, putting sheep out to pasture, pulling bucket after bucket of water up from the well, sowing, weeding, ridging, and harvesting different crops, building adobe walls, restacking rock fences, digging ditches and holes, running messages and tools between houses, whatever was required. Because much of this social contact was one-on-one, most of these conversations were conducted in Spanish, in which I am conversationally fluent. Although Aymara is the first language of most, if not all, Suma Marqueños, everyday life is conducted in a mixture of Spanish and English, depending on the context, though this is a more recent and generationally-inflected shift. Children and young people understood Aymara but were often embarrassed to speak and would usually respond to their parents in Spanish. By contrast, many everyday conversations between older adult members of the village took place in Aymara. Nevertheless, all community members I encountered aged between 5 and 70 spoke either fluent or conversational Spanish, as much of their primary and secondary education in Peru takes or took place in Spanish, and people are therefore accustomed to code-switching. For older community members and those who may not have had much access to formal education, Spanish language competency is more individual. Almost all public meetings with outsiders (such as NGO workers or local government officials) are conducted in Spanish, as many visitors to the community do not speak Aymara, whereas internal meetings within the community take place in a mixture of Aymara and Spanish. I learned basic Aymara and could follow the thread of many simple everyday conversations. In contexts where rapid and complex Aymara was used, the people I was with often acted as stand-in interpreters.

Chapter overview

This final section offers a breakdown of the dissertation chapters. My central argument is that the negative is not solely an epiphenomenon of the good but an important element of everyday ethics in its own right, and moreover that it occupies a perversely vital role in Suma Marqueño economic life. Each chapter considers complex relationships between the bad and

17 Although Peru has had a bilingual language education policy in place since 1973, this was primarily aimed at incorporating indigenous people within a hispanic majority (Hornberger 1988). Moreover, Suma Marqueños I spoke to about contemporary schooling in the village noted that most teachers travelled in from Puno to teach each day so were not from the community, and few if any were Aymara speakers.
the good, moving from an examination of interpersonal settings to collective economic endeavours over the course of the dissertation.

The next two ethnographic chapters explore how negative practice and positionality complicates people’s pursuit of the good, in the context of close interpersonal relations of kinship and lending. Chapter Two details moral breakdown in the context of sibling relations. Through a case study of the Charka Ramos family, I explore how their kinship obligations have endured through protracted and entrenched antagonism. This demonstrates how people endure the bad in pursuit of the good, and how the bad is in turn is reframed within people’s understanding of themselves as good kin in spite of others’ poor actions. Chapter Three picks up on one particular element of obligations to kin—lending money. In this chapter I compare and contrast two different forms of debt relationships in the village: interpersonal loans of money between kin, neighbours, and friends, and apxata exchange of crates of beer at fiestas, illustrating how the negative moral emotion of shame emerges in loan solicitation. This demonstrates how ostensibly good actions, such as the empathetic recognition of another’s material suffering, can unwittingly produce bad subjects, casting debtors as potentially lazy and willing to “live off others”. The chapter also traces the shifting nature of apxata exchanges over time, from gifts of money to gifts of beer, and considers how the ethical affordances of money and beer as material objects have different implications for the full return of a debt/gift.

The final two chapters continue the overall focus on complex intersections between good and bad, but also highlight the strategic invocation, mitigation, and suspension of concerns about negative in service of other, more instrumental ends: the material-moral good of getting ahead, to circumvent critique, and to keep collective projects afloat. Chapter Four explores Suma Marqueños concerns about others’ envy and ambition. I suggest that identifying others as envious is a form of moral critique which fixes others’ complaints or criticism within a register of moral and material lack, thereby discounting the original critique and positioning the person envied as successfully materially and socially advancing. This demonstrates how the bad intentionality of others can be invoked to gain the upper hand in disputes and to imagine oneself as good. The second half of the chapter focuses on envy mitigation in collective endeavours as both a moral and pragmatic concern, aimed at maintaining fragile consensus. I also demonstrate how attempts to produce a fair distribution of community
goods can paradoxically give rise to the envy and ambition these actions seek to circumvent, which is in part due to the properties of the object divided (sheep). In this context, ethical striving is not for the good, nor the best good, but for what is ‘good enough’ to ensure the pragmatic continuance of collective projects.

Chapter Five, the final chapter, continues the focus on negative ethics in collective endeavours, in a discussion of the contingent ethics of lying among members of the Suma Jirwa quinoa cooperative. I explore the salience of lying as a moral category before and after the cooperative’s organic certification and (failed) attempt to make a sale, showing how lying shifted from being a pragmatic and permissible response to the pressures of certification, to being morally problematic and a register for apportioning blame once the sale fell through. It raises the possibility of moral contingency and considers opportunity-seeking and pragmatism as ethical orientations. This demonstrates how moral concern about bad actions can be suspended in pursuit of other goods, then strategically reinvoked if these fail to materialise. The conclusion summarises central arguments from the dissertation, and draws out some key contours of negative ethics, including: the role of negative comparison and positionality, the instrumental use of negative ethics in service of other ends, and the seductiveness of ethical transgression.

Viewing these strands together, a partial picture of everyday life in Suma Marka emerges: a complex assemblage of livelihood-making replete with evaluative judgements, ethical concerns, and moral contestations. In this community, making a living – especially with proximate others – involves not only significant cooperation, but also guarding against routine envy, selfishness, lying, defaulting, and malicious talk. At the same time, identifying (or ignoring) morally questionable behaviour can be strategic, depending on the circumstances, and engaging in morally questionable behaviour can even be pleasurable – particularly when put in service of the greater telos of getting ahead. More often than not, however, pursuing the good means simply settling for what is good enough, and invariably someone misses out. Thus negative ethics, while keenly felt to be problematic by Suma Marqueños, also significantly animates their social and economic lives.
Many ties of close kinship (notoriously siblingship)… subsume rivalries and latent hostilities that are as intrinsically built into the relationships as are the externally-oriented amity and solidarity they present.

— (Fortes 1969: 237-8)

Prelude: an introduction to the Charka Ramos family

Step off the bus from Puno at a nondescript corner shop on the Pan American Highway and press onwards up the road which marches in a straight line through the fields to the very edge of the village of Suma Marka. Turn right at the junction, which leads you toward a cluster of houses on the outskirts of Suma Marka’s western flank, neatly lined up along another dusty road extending over a small hillock toward the village centre. Somewhat unusually for residence patterns here, these houses are owned by the Charka Ramos18 siblings. They comprise an older brother, Rodolfo (74)19 and sister, Manuela (73), who are full siblings and whose parents were Miguel and Carmela, and their three younger half-siblings, Gerardo (65), Laura (62), and Isabel (60), who were Miguel’s children by his second wife Raquel. Miguel and Raquel also had two other children, Luz (66) and Arturo (50), who no longer reside in Suma Marka. The current spatial and social organization of the Charka Ramos siblings and their houses in the village is the culmination of a long series of processes initiated before the deaths of their parents, but sedimented in their wake. It speaks to the construction of separate households over the life course out of a single family home, in close but not easy proximity, and to the multiple solidarities and tensions generated within this arrangement.

The first house is Tío Rodolfo’s, a large collection of bedrooms and outbuildings painted a dull yellow where he lived until recently with his wife Facunda. She broke her leg in the summer of 2015 after a fall chasing one of her cows and spent the subsequent year

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18 Peruvian last names, including indigenous names, follow Spanish conventions. This means every person has two surnames: a paternal surname followed by a maternal surname.
19 As of January 2017.
convalescing with their eldest daughter’s family in Puno city, while Rodolfo remained in the
countryside to tend to their animals and crops. Rodolfo is a slight man with dancing eyes and
an unusually upright bearing in spite of his age, the legacy of a career with the Peruvian
National Police force and military service during the Civil War in the 1980s following an
early, but failed, attempt at becoming a priest. Rodolfo was a regular on the fiesta circuit and
on these days could usually be found close to whoever was inviting people to drink, passing a
cup and a bottle back and forth around the drinking circle (see Harvey 1991). Outside these
spheres of conviviality, however, repeated run-ins with his siblings, extended family, 
neighbours, and other villagers meant Rodolfo was not well-regarded by many Suma
Marqueños (see also Chapters Two, Three, and Four). At the time of my fieldwork, which
took place in the aftermath of the death of the siblings’ parents, Miguel and Raquel, he was in 
a protractedly antagonistic relationship with at least two of his three younger half-siblings,
Isabel and Gerardo.

Rodolfo’s full sister Manuela’s house sits immediately to the right of his, but for most of the
18 months I was living in the village it remained empty and shuttered. Manuela was only a
shadow presence in Suma Marka. Her relationship with other community members was also
fractious, although for different reasons than Rodolfo. She lived with her husband Roger and
family in a large house in downtown Puno city. Her younger half-sister Isabel once pointed it
out to me on our way to the bus depot, with a mixture of admiration and resentment at its
impressive size and central location. Firmly established in the city, the limited scope of
Manuela and Roger’s involvement in the community culminated in their exclusion from the
public works project that brought running water to village households in late 2016, prompting
an angry outburst from Roger at a community meeting and the couple’s further distancing
from Suma Marka. Following this, I only caught sight of Manuela once more, when her half-
brother Gerardo and I were up on a stepladder rebuilding and rethatching the large adobe
fence which runs along the boundary line between their two houses, walling the siblings off
from one another. Gerardo studiously ignored her as he worked, and she did not return my
greeting when I waved. This was a profound omission on both sides of a foundational gesture
of recognition and respect, and clearly marked the tense relationship between the siblings.
This is not the way Gerardo would like relations to be with his older half-siblings, but he
feels he now has little choice in the matter.
Gerardo is an energetic worker with a keen sense of moral correctness and obvious devotion to God. Prone to long, impassioned expositions at community meetings, he was also a flamboyant dancer at fiestas, both of which occasionally provoked irritation on the part of other village members. Gerardo shares the house with Teresa, his wife of 35 years. Teresa is a short, rotund woman with an easy laugh and stern temper. She considered her occasional outbursts to be a justified response to bad behaviour: the recipients of her ire were not always equally convinced (see Chapter 3). Teresa had a difficult childhood. She was indentured to her mother’s compadres (Sp. co-godparents) in Tacna (today around a 7-hour trip by bus) as a five-year-old in return for her family’s access to pasture in the village. She did not return to Suma Marka until fourteen, fluent in Spanish, but having forgotten her native Aymara and without any formal education. She shares her husband’s sense of propriety and prides herself on being an adept manager of her household—thrifty, sensitively attuned to her animals, and an excellent cook.

The couple’s homestead is fashioned out of part of Gerardo’s parents’ original home which has been divided up between three of the five younger siblings. Isabel and Laura also own part of the original homestead, while the two youngest, Arturo and Luz, migrated permanently to Ilo and Lima respectively, and sold their share of the property to their brother and sisters. Unlike the clear boundary which demarcates Gerardo and Manuela’s houses, the younger siblings’ houses are more permeable, a reflection of their closer and more harmonious relations. While Gerardo had fashioned a U-shaped homestead out of his section of his parents’ home, he left a small gap between the buildings, creating a passageway which the siblings used to move back and forth between their properties. Often when his younger sisters would arrive from the city, they would make a beeline for their sister-in-law’s kitchen, where they would sit swapping news and sharing food, before retiring to their own quarters.

The remaining section of the original homestead belongs to Laura and Isabel, though a separation of properties is somewhat difficult to discern. Laura maintains two buildings: a single room used as both sleeping quarters and storage shed, and a dilapidated thatched adobe building, which was the original kitchen for her parents’ home. Like her older sister Manuela’s house, Laura’s quarters were not often in use. She occasionally slept in the room during harvest and after community meetings but spent the majority of her time at her house in Puno with a revolving assortment of her six adult children and four grandchildren. She was
gifted the Puno house by her father before he died. Each of her siblings had, at some point, spent time residing there before leaving to build their own houses in the city and stake out their claims in the countryside, but Laura was the one who stayed, most likely because she was the main breadwinner of her family and could not afford to strike out on her own. At the time of her father’s gift, she was singlehandedly keeping her children afloat through a job as a receptionist at a hospital in Puno. Her husband was away working in the mines and—according to her siblings—did not always “remember his family” and send money home. Laura occasionally appeared a little slow on the uptake and could be easily led by others. Her sister Isabel suggested she had a “weak character” as she did not often stand her ground. However, this may have just as likely been the result of being perpetually overworked, underslept, and in debt.

Isabel owns the room adjoining Laura’s and a new L-shaped breeze block house behind her parents’ original quarters, which she built with a loan from her adult daughter in 2014 and planned to retire to once their remaining two adult children had coupled up and begun to form their own separate households. In contrast to her sister, Isabel was headstrong and outspoken. Tall and solidly built like her mother reputedly had been, she was—by her own reckoning—both a “strong character” and physically strong, able to “work like a rented donkey (trabajar como burro alquilado)”. Isabel had originally trained to be a teacher, but motherhood and her husband Jefry’s illness had forced her into chasing a series of odd-jobs and opportunities. She had previously worked as a nanny for a couple in Chile, and as a chef in a small restaurant which she established in the front porch of her house in Puno. During my fieldwork however, Isabel divided her time between Puno city, where she had a kiosk selling handicrafts at the Puerto Muelle (Sp. docks on Lake Titicaca), and the countryside where she had a hand in almost all of the community’s economic associations and grew crops for family subsistence.
Map 2. Author’s map of the Charka Ramos siblings’ houses.
Introduction

This chapter considers sibling relations in Suma Marka through a case study of the Charka Ramos family, in the wake of the tragic and untimely deaths of their parents, Miguel and Raquel. Using life histories gleaned from family members, in addition to close observation of and participation in their present-day interactions, I trace sibling connections and disconnections through a series of three ruptures over time and in space. Some of these are routine (domestic exploitation of younger siblings in childhood and a contemporary absence of respect), others are sudden and catastrophic (the events leading up to the death of the siblings’ father by poisoning), and others are based in ongoing material concerns (disputes over land). While the Charka Ramos case is at the more extreme end of family breakdown, it is common in the Andes for disputes to emerge between siblings at the point of succession (see also Van Vleet 2008). My approach takes inspiration from the work of Michael Lambek (2011), who uses a discussion of sibling relations in Madagascar to argue for the importance of considering kinship across the life-course and particularly during succession, rather than just at the point of birth. Somewhat paradoxically, however, I argue that in Suma Marka, the death of the parents and the culmination of generational succession processes is precisely the point at which birth—or more specifically, who your birth mother is—becomes particularly salient. This shift to the normative dimensions of “true kinship” is thrown into sharp relief by the particular composition of the Charka Ramos family, where the ‘half’-ness of the siblings affords a window onto the importance accorded to blood relatedness in Suma Marka which might not otherwise be readily apparent. The shift is even more acute as all of the siblings, half and full, had grown up together from childhood, and had all been raised by Raquel as her ‘own’ children.

It is not my intention, however, to revisit the great debates about the nature of kinship, which have been already more than amply covered by leading scholars in the field (see for example Schneider 1980 [1968]; Sahlins 2013; Shapiro 2014). Rather, my aim is to consider how relatedness is generated and endures through protracted, entrenched and sometimes evolving antagonisms. In this respect, the account below departs from studies of kinship which have attributed a positive valence to kinship relations. As Edwards and Strathern (2000: 162) suggest, such “Euro-American” accounts assume a “sentimentalised view of sociality and kinship (‘family’) as community”. Instead, the chapter speaks to a re-emergent tendency in kinship studies to elucidate the ‘darker’ side of kin relations, differentially glossed as
ambiguity (Peletz 2000), coercion (Carsten 2019), and theft (Lambek 2011), among others. Specifically, I am interested in relational breakdown as a particular subset of moral breakdowns (Zigon 2007, 2008; Yan 2011). Relational breakdown might be understood, broadly, as the impairment and or disintegration of a relationship as measured against particular social or individual aspirations and ideals for the relationship. People gloss this locally as being ‘not good’ (no estamos bien) with someone, which could be translated in English as being ‘not on good terms’. What can an examination of kinship-in-breakdown tell us about the moral basis and practice of kin relations? As Rupert Stasch (2009: 136) notes for Korowai kinship: “kinship belonging is an impossible standard: the ideal includes its own failure”. More generally, Harri Englund (2008) has recently argued that the anthropology of ethics should take the concept of moral obligation into reconsideration, or the question of what we owe to others. In this chapter I ask a related question: what do we owe to intimate kin when a relationship has turned sour?

It is my contention that the breakdown of a relationship—particularly one of kinship—should not be confused with the relationship ending, especially at a categorical level. While these relations are “fragile” (Van Vleet 2008: 69), they are not easily or completely dissoluble. As the chapter demonstrates, some relations between the Charka Ramos siblings were ongoing, in spite of attempts on both sides to cut or limit relations (Beattie 1971) and cultivate a stance of detachment from one another (Candea et al. 2015). In part, this was because of the siblings’ ongoing proximity to one another in community space—-attempts to limit or foreclose relations are best conducted at a physical distance. On its own, however, proximity is not sufficient to explain why the Charka Ramos siblings felt compelled to continue to lend one another money, to engage collectively in land claims in other villages, and to take steps to protect the family name from harm, among others. Attending to what endures and what is lost in the breakdown of kin relations in Suma Marka, I suggest that kinship obligations are, in practice, very difficult to divest. This is because people retain fidelity, at a categorical level, to the idea of brotherhood or siblingship and to the family name, even when the practice of this falls far short of the ideal. The Charka Ramos siblings’ ongoing interactions encompassed situations of individual and mutual benefit, but interestingly also included instances where estranged kin were actively disadvantaged by their continued engagements with their siblings, such as in lending money that was not returned and having to endure negative, sometimes volatile, interactions as a consequence. These formed part of people’s
ethical self-constructions as good kin, and had significant and enduring affective resonances. Ultimately, attending to moral breakdown (Zigon 2007, Yan 2011) in a relational context demonstrates a capacity to endure repeated bad actions on the part of relatives while in pursuit of kinship obligations and support as an acknowledged good, though not without intense emotional strain.

As will become clear, the narratives presented below are uneven. More attention and weight are given to Gerardo, Teresa, and Isabel’s accounts than to Rodolfo’s or those of other family members, and the chapter largely centers around their experiences. Some of this is a reflection of the absences of particular siblings who lived elsewhere (in Puno, Ilo, and Lima). But this is also because I began my fieldwork long after the ruptures detailed below had occurred and relations had already soured. I gained a degree of trust and intimacy early on in fieldwork with Isabel, Gerardo and Teresa, which to a degree prevented me from gaining equal proximity with Rodolfo and Manuela on the other side of the schism. I did, however, maintain friendly relations with Rodolfo, and had the opportunity to interview him formally about his family on one occasion. I also often spoke to him in passing when I was travelling to and from Gerardo and Teresa’s house, including several occasions where he complained at length about his younger half-siblings. While a fuller account from the perspectives of all family members might produce a more nuanced depiction of the conflict, it is not my intention to reconstruct a complete account of what ‘actually happened’ between the siblings (insofar as that could be achieved). Rather, I am interested in what different siblings say happened, how they theorise and enact relationship breakdown, and what these interested narratives might tell us about negative ethics and the moralization of kinship relations in Suma Marka.

**The Charka Ramos siblings: a potted history**

The history of the Charka Ramos siblings is bookended by parental death. Miguel, a native of Suma Marka, married and had two children with his first wife, Carmela, who was from the neighbouring community of Jawira Marka. The marriage was short-lived however, as Carmela passed away following complications from childbirth along with her baby, leaving behind two young children—Rodolfo, then 4, and Manuela, then 3. Following Carmela’s death, Miguel married her prima hermana (Sp. first cousin), Raquel. Raquel had large tracts
of land, many of which were adjacent to those of his first wife. His children described this as a pragmatic move, for in doing so Miguel consolidated and extended landholdings which he was able to work and benefit from as part of the joint household. He also ensured that there would be someone at home to cook and care for his two young children under the age of five, who had been left “orphaned” without a mother. As Enrique Mayer (2002: 7) has noted of the central Peruvian village of Tangor, where he conducted his PhD fieldwork in the 1970s, “in Tangor terms, a man cannot live alone because he has no-one to cook for him, whereas a lone woman can obtain male help for productive tasks”.

Raquel and Miguel had twelve further children, of whom five survived: Luz, Gerardo, Laura, Isabel, and Arturo. They raised the seven children together as brothers and sisters, and because Raquel and Carmela were first cousins and shared the same last name, all seven children carried the same name—Charka Ramos. Raquel’s younger children stated that Raquel, a good, hardworking woman, “had loved and attended to [Rodolfo and Manuela] as if they were her own. I ask you, what step-mother does that?” Gerardo recalled a particularly vivid example of this. When Rodolfo had decided to enter the Peruvian National Police, Raquel had sold her own cows, alpaca, and sheep to pay the registration fees. She also went to the patrones (Sp. masters) of the local hacienda with baskets of eggs and a plucked chicken to ask for a loan, secured with the promise of Gerardo’s labour on their farm to repay the debt incurred. In addition to financial sacrifices such as these, Raquel also performed other routine acts of domestic care and nurture which Weismantel (1988) and Van Vleet (2008) have suggested contribute to making kin in the Andes. Teresa, her daughter-in-law, remembered how Raquel could spend “all day cooking” for the eldest children who, as young adults at the early stages of forming their own households, were still eating in their step-mother’s kitchen: “Rodolfo would arrive home and say “I haven’t eaten, Mamá” and she would jump up and quickly make him something. Then Manuela’s husband, her son-in-law, would arrive, and she would get up again and cook for him as well”. This care even extended to their animals – Teresa recalled her mother-in-law “falling over in the dark” to go and feed Manuela’s guard dog. The younger children, particularly Gerardo and Isabel, were somewhat

20 People often described themselves in Spanish as being “orphaned” when one of their parents died, which I understood as being situated within a broader context where the ideal of dual parenthood is an extension of the concept of chachawarmi or male-female duality, and also as a recognition of the social salience of their loss (for further complications of this category, see Leinaweaver 2008a: 61-80).

21 Had Carmela and Raquel not been first cousins, the children would have shared their father’s surname and had different second surnames.
resentful of this situation, even into adulthood, feeling as if their mother had overlooked her
own children in her care for her step-children: “everything was for the two older children”,
Isabel recalled, “us little ones, they didn’t pay us much attention”.

Nevertheless, the family grew and prospered over time. Miguel was insistent on all of his
children gaining further education, including his daughters which was unusual at the time,
and sent them away to secondary school in Puno. Each of the children completed their
education, found partners, married and had children, and set up separate households. Some,
like Gerardo and Rodolfo, maintained a primary residence in Suma Marka, while Manuela,
Isabel, and Laura moved to nearby Puno city. Luz and Arturo migrated to Lima and Ilo,
permanently establishing lives away from the countryside.

Rupture one: a history of exploitation

For Gerardo, the broken relationship with his half-siblings was the culmination of a litany of
“abuses” and “failures of respect” since his childhood, that had ultimately led to a loss of
what Gerardo glossed as their “friendship”. This was especially acute for two reasons. First,
the two brothers had, at particular junctures, been more socially and spatially proximate than
their younger siblings. As the eldest of the second set of siblings and ten years behind
Rodolfo in age, Gerardo felt he bore a lot of responsibility for tasks performed for his older
brother and sister while growing up, although Laura and Isabel also recalled “running after
[their] eldest brother”. Likewise, as both Rodolfo and Gerardo had returned to the village
full-time in their older age—Rodolfo after retiring from the police, and Gerardo who had left
his house in Puno to his younger son and his family—they again lived and worked as
neighbours, separated only by Manuela’s empty house. Second, Gerardo and Teresa felt the
breakdown of relations particularly keenly as Rodolfo and his wife Facunda had served as
padrinos mayores at their wedding some thirty-five years prior. Padrinos mayores are the
“senior godparents”, a relationship of fictive kinship known as compadrazgo (Sp.
godparentship) which is inaugurated through the wedding rites, alongside the creation and
formalisation of the couple as a single unit known as chachawarmi (Ay. male-female pair).
Relations of fictive kin can be used to strategically extend connections to people with wealth
and important social connections, however in practice older, more established and wealthy
family members are often also asked. As Stephen Gudeman (1971: 45) notes, compadrazgo
relations are directed at either “creating new ties or solemnising and sanctifying existing ones”.

On the day of the wedding, the responsibility of the padrinos mayores is to provide significant financial support for the event, including the purchase of a full set of wedding clothes for the bride and groom, and to contribute to the new household through a large gift such as a wardrobe or couch set. They also accompany the bride and groom throughout the duration of the wedding, ideally never leaving their sides, and steer them through the intricacies of the ritual events. However, the compadrazgo relation is expected to also extend far into the future. In Suma Marka as elsewhere in the Andes, compadres, particularly of marriage, are expected to act as spiritual exemplars, providing a young couple with guidance in appropriate conduct. In more prosaic terms, they are people that can always be called on for reciprocal relations and support. It is a particularly important social relationship of voluntary engagement, and ideally should be one of solidarity, affection, “respect and mutual help” (Gascon 2005: 192, my translation; see also Mayer 2002). Lambek (2011: 3) has noted the importance of ritual acts in instantiating and substantiating commitments of kinship, where a departure from this would symbolise a “specific kind of fault or failure”. The compadrazgo, effected through Rodolfo and Facunda’s sponsorship and participation in Gerardo and Teresa’s wedding, thus doubly bound the two brothers as ‘true’ and spiritual or ritual kin. It also made the subsequent breakdown of their relationship, through an accumulation of what Gerardo and Teresa considered to be Rodolfo’s poor behaviour over time, even more egregious in their view.

Gerardo recalled how as an adolescent, he lent his labour to his older brother and sister, often at the behest of his mother. This included working in their fields, shepherding their animals, and even feeding their children and changing and washing their soiled nappies. Such a hierarchical relation is not uncommon between siblings in the Andes, and as Van Vleet (2008: 67-8) suggests, is in fact crucially important for maintaining social relationships: “as part of these relationships of hierarchy, the subordinate (younger) acts respectfully toward the superior (older) person”, thus in practice “continuous reiterations of respect and authority, as

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22 These were among the most common gifts given by padrinos mayores at weddings in and around Suma Marka during my fieldwork, and would usually cost around S/. 1000-1500 (£250-300). In wealthier urban areas like Puno and Juliaca, padrinos mayores may even gift new cars costing upwards of S/. 20,000 to their godchildren.
much as nurturing and caring, are required in everyday interactions to maintain relatedness”. The hierarchy between the siblings was further accentuated when Rodolfo became a police officer and Manuela a nurse, social positions of high standing, education, and engagement with urban life which effectively ‘whitened’ them in contrast to their younger siblings in the countryside (Weismantel 2001; De la Cadena 1995). Teresa explained:

before when they were young, as he [Rodolfo] was a police officer, they [the younger siblings] had to work for his wife, for their nephews. Because he was a police officer, he would bring something [money] so they worked like his hired help. For Manuela they were also her servants, they raised her children. That’s how they were able to educate themselves.

Teresa was particularly sensitive to this, as she had found herself in a similar position with her older brother after he retrieved her from working as an empleadita (Sp. little servant, literally ‘employed’) for her parents’ compadres in Tacna. She recalled having to cook, clean, and look after his children, and also how her sister-in-law would “pinch” and scold her when her brother was not looking. Teresa was frustrated when subject to similar dynamics after she and Gerardo began courting and later, living together in his family home. At that time, Gerardo took up paid employment as a storeroom supervisor on a building site in Puno and the responsibilities of attending to his older brother and sister were passed on to her. Teresa recalled how she used to take Rodolfo and Manuela’s animals, along with her own, to pasture in her own fields. This treatment had also put a strain on their marital relationship, as Teresa still felt—some thirty-five years later—that Gerardo had not stood up for her against his siblings: “he [Gerardo] has to understand, he has to make them respect me (él tiene que hacerme respetar a mi). I’m his wife, aren’t I? It’s not the [right] thing that I should be running along to his sister’s place every day”. Unusually, Teresa’s conflict was not with her mother-in-law, which is a common point of tension among affines in the Peruvian Andes (Harvey 1994), describing her as “always very good with me”. In contrast, relations with her siblings-in-law were tense: “they totally hated me”.

Gerardo was at pains to point out that he laboured willingly for his older siblings in his youth, and that he had “always respected” them. However, both he and Teresa compared their early relationship with Rodolfo and Manuela to one of servitude, and the language they used implicitly and explicitly cast their relation in the idiom of (colonial) domination: “they
Rodolfo and Manuela] exploited me a lot”. They suggested that the older siblings had learned this behaviour from los mistis. This was a local term for the mestizo (Sp. mixed, white) population, often used in Suma Marka to refer specifically to hacienda owners who perpetuated numerous abuses against the Aymara, wielding what Ticona (2012: n.p) terms “despotic power” (my translation; see also Starn 1999; Canessa 2012). When talking about their history, Suma Marqueños often spoke of how things were “before”, during the period of hacienda agriculture which began in the colonial period and extended until the Agrarian Reform began under Velasco in 1969. They recalled the cruel and “abusive” treatment that their parents and grandparents underwent at the hands of los mistis, a kind of collective or folk memory of suffering where separate incidents in and around Suma Marka condensed over (and out of) time into a repertoire of “disgraceful” behaviour. This included abuses of the villagers’ labour and property, such as making people work on hacienda land in exchange for a few coins or a stick to beat quinoa with23, selecting one of their peons’ best animals and tossing them a few coins in return, and taking people’s land during a famine in exchange for mere scraps like the jipi (Ay. chaff) of the quinoa. It also included acts of violence—whipping villagers caught passing through their fields or wearing Spanish clothing, the rape of young servants who were then sent home from the patron’s house with illegitimate children, and one particularly extreme case where a young boy from a neighbouring town had his eye cut out as punishment for learning to read.

For his part, Rodolfo suggested that he had provided for his siblings’ material wellbeing while they were growing up: “They were poor. I made sure [they] ate”. While not conceived of as an explicit ‘return’ for their labour, this for Rodolfo nevertheless constituted more than adequate compensation within a familial context. Carol Stack (1974: 36), writing on African American kinship networks in an impoverished area of Chicago, observed that “close kin who have relied upon one another over the years often complain about the sacrifices they have made and the deprivation they have endured for one another”, though as Peletz (2000) notes, she did not interrogate this analytically. Yet if complaints and ambivalences are routine in kinship relations in many parts of the world, likening one’s situation to a highly racialised form of economic and political abuse under colonial domination was a particularly powerful

23 As there were few trees on the pampa and most were owned by the hacendados, sticks were difficult to source, but were useful for separating grain from bushels of quinoa and wheat.
form of critique. This was not of a critique of relations of hierarchy per se, but rather of an abuse of power.

Gerardo and Teresa eventually “rebelled” from this treatment, in what they described as a gradual process of awakening where, through education and experience, they realised that their relationship with Rodolfo and Manuela “shouldn’t be like that”. Notably, they used the same language of “rebellion” to describe the Agrarian Reform and other historical shifts in Suma Marka, when peasants had “woken up” and freed themselves from the tyranny of los mistis. Gerardo and Teresa’s rebellion from Rodolfo took the form of a refusal to defer to the older siblings’ authority or afford them the obsequious treatment they had previously displayed. This was, according to the couple, what ruptured relations with Gerardo’s older siblings: “now that we don’t like [their treatment of us] and we defend ourselves, it seems that that has annoyed them”. Their annoyance was particularly galling for the couple as they believed that Rodolfo’s behaviour demonstrated he had failed to recognise the work they had done for him over the years. Gerardo recalled a recent altercation with Rodolfo several weeks prior to our interview, explaining: “he comes to shout at me when I am here working with my godchildren, with my compadres, and he comes here to yell at me in front of those family members”. His statement is revealing, demonstrating the distance which had developed between the two brothers over time, to the point where Rodolfo—his actual kin—could embarrass him in front of his “cherished kin” (Angé 2018: 52). Fundamentally, Gerardo suggested that Rodolfo and Manuela’s repeated “failures of respect” had led to his own obligatory respect for them to falter and eventually terminate.

Rupture two: poisoning

Rodolfo’s narrative differed substantially from Gerardo’s. For him (and potentially also for his sister Manuela), the belief that his younger siblings were responsible for their father’s untimely death conclusively broke their relationship. From spending time with Isabel, I was aware that both Miguel and Raquel had passed away, however it was not until after living for several weeks in Teresa and Gerardo’s household that I first learned of the tragic circumstances surrounding their deaths. One night, when Teresa and I were cooking alone in her kitchen, she asked if Isabel had told me about the “terrible accident that happened to our family sixteen years ago”. Isabel had not, which surprised Teresa. Her telling—of what was
clearly a very difficult and sensitive subject for the whole family—was likely intended in part to fix her particular narrative of events, and to ward off gossip from other people in the village. I would hear several further versions of the incident from neighbours and more distant kin before I left fieldwork, differentially positioned to dwell on particular aspects of the story which showed the speaker and their kin in a positive light, or alternately served to condemn the actions of others, as a modality of “evaluative” talk (Van Vleet 2003: 493).

Teresa began by explaining that her mother-in-law Raquel died after a short illness in early 2000. In Suma Marka as in other rural communities in the Andes, the death of a family member entails that close kin and in some cases, neighbours, spend the evening before the burial at the velatorio, a vigil “accompanying” the body of the deceased as their soul ascends to Heaven. This involves chewing coca and drinking long into the night. The velatorio is followed by a more public funeral, often attended by the whole village, where after a short ceremony all attendees pitch in to backfill the grave, before continuing with further drinking. Following Raquel’s death, Miguel asked his two daughters, Isabel and Laura, to supply the alcohol for the velatorio and the funeral. According to Teresa, they transported the alcohol in an old 25-litre plastic drum, which had previously been used for storing pesticides for the farm. Others who recounted the story suggested that Laura and Isabel had, in fact, sourced medical-grade alcohol from the regional hospital in Puno where all three of them worked at the time: Gerardo as a medical assistant, Laura as the first point of call at the reception, and Isabel cooking meals to sell to hospital staff. A neighbour, Tía Eva, who was present at the funeral recalled that the liquor tasted unusual, as if something was wrong with it: “when I drank it, it stung and burnt my throat… I only had a little, but the others, particularly the men who’d been drinking since the velatorio the previous night, asked for more and more”. One by one, people began to sicken and were taken to hospital, where depending on the person telling the story, between eight and eleven people died, including the siblings’ father Miguel and several other family members. According to Eva, who lost her brother in the incident, the dead were buried “all lined up” in the local cemetery, where “there was a new grave dug daily”. Long after, these graves, painted in bright colours and only a short distance from the heart of the village, served as a reminder of the tragedy.

The deaths attracted the attention of community authorities including the then-village president and the sector leader. They accused Gerardo, Laura, and Isabel of intentionally poisoning their father, and threatened to take their father’s land away from them, thereby
removing their allegedly ‘ill-gotten’ gains. The authorities’ assumption is unsurprising, as suspicion of foul play often accompanies sudden deaths in rural Peru. During a single four month period of fieldwork Papponet-Cantat (1991), who worked in a small village in the Canchis province of Cusco, recorded information on two attempted murders by poisoning, and was present in the village when one successful murder took place. This involved the poisoning of the community president’s wife by her envious brother through a neighbour’s child who was paid to drop a “lethal substance into the breakfast plates” (p. 352). The death of a local governor on the Pan American Highway outside Suma Marka, which occurred several months prior to the start of my fieldwork, was considered similarly suspicious (Diario Correo 2015). Although officially designated as a transit accident, the result of a hit-and-run while walking home drunk in the dark, my comadre Carmen reiterated a popular rumour that he had been murdered by his political opponents. She said that she had gone to look at the site where his body had been found, but seen no blood on the road, and claimed that he had likely been moved there from elsewhere to make it look like an accident.

In her retelling of the story, Teresa suggested that her husband Gerardo had managed to prevent the authorities from confiscating their land, and thus their livelihoods, by crying and explaining that his father’s death was nothing more than a tragic accident. But although the Charka Ramos siblings managed to retain their land, the taint of suspicion endured, marking the family’s interactions with others in the community many years into the future. During the quinoa cooperative’s anniversary celebrations at the end of 2015, Teresa was tasked with bringing a small bottle of alcohol to include in an offering for Pachamama (Ay. earth mother). When she arrived and presented the bottle, this prompted long stares and someone muttered under their breath to “be careful with that alcohol”. Several neighbours who recalled the episode said the siblings should have been put in jail for their actions, but suggested that they had been able to avoid this fate by virtue of their connections with well-placed doctors and other notables at the hospital, who had not registered the deaths as suspicious. Tia Eva further claimed: “those who had money had their stomachs pumped and lived, and those who didn’t died”. While this particular rendering is probably unlikely, such accusations stemmed from ongoing resentment that the Charka Ramos family had retained

24 It wasn’t clear to what extent higher authorities, such as the Peruvian National Police or the coroner were involved in investigating the deaths. I attempted to track down this information through newspaper clippings and other public documents, but could not find these records as the regional archives were in some disarray following a fire in the mid 1990s and a move to a new building.
their land-holdings, which were larger than those of many other comuneros. Moreover, Eva claimed the Charka Ramos family had allegedly not adequately compensated other affected families for the deaths. Eva’s brother died during the incident, forcing her sister-in-law to sell most of her land to other members of the village (excluding the small plot around her house) and move in with relations in Tacna, as she had been left with “nothing but debts”. Tía Teresa was, however, at pains to point out to me that the episode had been nothing more than a deeply tragic accident. Nevertheless, she lay blame at the wilful stupidity of the sisters who had put the alcohol in the contaminated pesticide container. “Women shouldn’t be meddling with alcohol”, she told me ruefully.

The tragedy clearly had broader reverberations for the family in the community, but it also effected a more intimate rupture within the family itself. During an interview I undertook with Rodolfo, when I asked about the tense relations with his younger siblings, Rodolfo did not recount the full story but instead referred to the tragedy in the abstract: “did you know she [Isabel] killed my father? I can never forget that. There is no way to come back from that”. In his reckoning, his sister’s actions during Raquel’s funeral effected an immediate and lasting schism in the family, a definitive point of rupture in which their relationship was irrevocably changed. Moreover, as Gerardo supported Isabel, Rodolfo felt he could no longer trust his half-brother. Rodolfo also intimated that Isabel was lacking money around the time of his father’s death, thus appearing to side with the suspicions of others in the village. Although he did not say so directly, it is possible that the issues over security of land may have contributed to Rodolfo distancing himself from his younger siblings, due to not wanting to share culpability and thus potentially have his share of the land taken from him by the community authorities. Interestingly, Rodolfo placed most of the blame on Isabel, rather than on Isabel and Laura together. Unlike her siblings, Laura maintained reasonably cordial relations with Rodolfo and would very occasionally go to visit him at his house, upholding a model of respectful siblingship and deference toward her older brother (see below), which appeared to have softened his attitude towards her. For Isabel, this was further evidence of her “weak character”, although Laura’s continued involvement with Rodolfo did not appear to have a lasting or significant impact on the sisters’ relationship.
Rupture three: land and blood

This history of ongoing resentments and tragic ruptures coalesced in a series of disputes between the siblings over land that took place following Miguel’s death. Miguel died intestate, meaning on death his property potentially became subject to both the Peruvian Código Civil (Sp. Civil Code) and customary inheritance practices. However, as family funds were limited the siblings could not legally effect the division and partition of his estate through the court system. Most of the disputes were eventually settled extra-judicially, by the siblings themselves in occasional conjunction with community and regional authorities. These disputes, although cast in the idiom of possession and ownership, essentially amounted to contests over usufruct rights. In Suma Marka all land is held collectively under a communal title encompassing the village’s 740 hectares of territory, following the 1987 Ley de Deslinde y Titulación del Territorio de las Comunidades Campesinas (see also Goodale and Sky 2001 on similar forms of allyu ownership in Bolivia). As such, very few, if any Suma Marqueños hold individual titles to their land, though they may have other documents (e.g. of sale) which act as proof of ownership. The community recognises individual claims to particular plots of land on the basis of inheritance and acquisition, which can include both the purchase of land from other members in the village, and trueque (Sp. barter, but more appropriately glossed as a ‘swap’) where one plot is traded for another in a more favourable location. As for rural communities in Bolivia, land-based property in Suma Marka amounts to a “set of continuing relationships regarding access to agricultural products” (Goodale and Sky 2001: 185).

Land is inherited individually in the community, as in other parts of the Aymara-speaking Andes. While couples combine land for the purposes of household agricultural production and grazing, they nevertheless retain a conceptual separation of, and individual claim to, their inherited plots. As Collins (1986: 658) notes:

landholdings in Aymara society never become household property, and their transmission is not governed by relationships within the household. Men and women retain the property with which they enter the household at marriage. They work the

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25 I was told this was an issue of funds, but suspect that retaining an arrangement that was not legally formalised allowed for greater flexibility, both in terms of potentially limiting the extent of familial conflict by retaining a degree of ambiguity about plot boundaries and land allocation, and also affording the possibility to re-open claims if needed in the future.
land together and, on the basis of common investments of labour, have joint rights to
the product, but this does not extend to the land itself.

In present-day Suma Marka, all children ideally equally inherit land from both parents, yet
can and routinely do specify which parcels were originally their mother’s and which were
their father’s. By contrast, land which is purchased together during a couple’s marriage is
considered the property of both. It is possible that the current regime in Suma Marka is a
transformation of older inheritance practices in line with changing property and inheritance
regimes under the Peruvian state. Collins (1986) notes that in the 1940s, Aymara-speaking
communities in Moho practiced a form of parallel inheritance where sons inherited land from
their fathers and daughters inherited land from their mothers. Whereas current Peruvian law
in cases of intestate succession provides equally for the surviving children in the event that
there is no surviving spouse (Código Civil, Art. 815).

Inheritance in Suma Marka and other Andean villages does not begin at death. Rather, it is a
slow process which takes place over many years leading up to the death of a parent (see also
Van Vleet 2008). Most parents begin to allocate particular parcels of land to their children
while they are still living, as the children come into maturity and begin to form their own
separate households with their own children to feed. Thus children receive partial
inheritances before the death of their parents, and often begin to farm these separately as they
start to form their own households. The division of inherited land can take one of two main
forms: either separate parcels are allocated to each child, or a single parcel of land is divided
up equally between the siblings. Suma Marqueños acknowledged advantages and
disadvantages to each practice of division. While separate allocation of parcels ensures the
transmission of larger and thus potentially more productive landholdings overall, the
differential qualities of each parcel in terms of soil fertility, water retention, susceptibility to
frosts, proximity to the house and ease of access, among other considerations, generates a
series of potential inequalities among siblings—particularly in terms of crop yields. While the
equitable division of parcels may avoid some of these issues, at least theoretically, this
contributes to an ongoing process of parcellation which diminishes yields over time and has
been well-documented in the literature (e.g. Collins 1986). As Gerardo lamented, “each time

26 I did, however, record several complaints among Suma Marqueños about land that had been divided up in this
way, who suggested that their particular section of the parcel was not as good as that of their siblings: “my part
doesn’t yield very much (no tiene salida)”.

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the land goes on getting smaller (*cada vez se va enchicandose*). People keep on being born, and the land doesn’t grow”.

Where the second form of division occurs, the parcel is most commonly divided into vertical sections following the ridges and furrows used for planting crops, and allocated left to right from oldest to youngest child. In this way, kinship can be read directly from the land, which Teresa explained was useful in cases where it is difficult to remember exactly where a parcel is situated: “it’s the family, isn’t it? That Uncle is working that plot, he’s the brother isn’t he, he’s his cousin, so that must be my mother’s land over there. When we don’t know [the land], but we know [the people], we find it without documents, without anything, through the family”. This is a more common form of division after the death of a parent, a time when it was considered particularly important to maintain as close to an equitable division of land as possible, to prevent the emergence of friction among siblings. Historically, residence patterns were patrilocal, and the youngest son would usually inherit the house and be responsible for taking care of his parents in their old age (see also Van Vleet 2008). Teresa suggested that this was done in order to keep the family name connected to the land through generations: “the man needs to stay there because he carries the surname […] as if to say, the family keeps existing here”.

Crucially however, landholdings are only divided between ‘true’ kin – that is, kin considered to be related by ‘blood’, which is one of several idioms used for talking about this form of relatedness in the Andes (see also Leinaweaver 2008a: 137). As Lambert (1977) notes, affines do not have inheritance rights, but in practice will often retain use-rights to a deceased spouse’s land until any children are old enough to receive land.27 This is a key point at which customary inheritance departs from the Peruvian legal system (see Código Civil, Art. 815). The spouse’s maintenance of access to land until the children come of age may mask this element of possible legal pluralism, however. In the case of the Charka Ramos family, while most of the remaining land still farmed by their father until his death was divided equally between the siblings, following the second pattern of internal partition of each parcel, a point of tension arose over land that Miguel had purchased during his marriage to his second wife Raquel. Rodolfo and Manuela wanted this to be divided up into seven equal parts between

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27 In the absence of children, possession may revert to parents, other surviving consanguineal kin, or the community.
the siblings. However the others refused, suggesting that their older siblings were not entitled to an equal share “under the law”. Rather, they argued that each parcel should be split in two, each half representing one half of the married couple. Miguel’s half was to be divided equally between his seven heirs, while Raquel’s half should be divided between her five “legitimate” children. As Isabel noted when I asked her about the dispute: “I haven’t inserted myself in his mother’s land. They shouldn’t, for anything, be inserting themselves in my mother’s land (emphasis hers). Our father’s land, yes, but not our mother’s”.

These disputes culminated in multiple shouting matches during which the siblings traded insults and on occasion, violence. Gerardo recalled how he refrained from resorting to violence, even though Rodolfo had baited him, saying “hit me, hit me”. Isabel had, however, come to blows with Rodolfo on one occasion. She recounted, with visibly apparent pride at her own physical strength and strength of character, how in one argument she had knocked her brother to the ground where they had fought “like men”. While violence was denounced by many as immoral: a sad and troubling expression of a divided family or community, gaining the upper hand in such a dispute—especially as a woman—engendered its own satisfaction, exemplifying the perverse vitality of the negative. Many Suma Marqueños I spoke with suggested that episodic outbursts of violence such as this were relatively common in disputes over land in Suma Marka and surrounding villages. They were also a regular feature of local news stories (see for example Trome 2019), though I did not witness any myself during fieldwork. Yesica, now in her early 30s, recalled how, as a 10-year old, she had witnessed a dispute break out into violence between her mother and a neighbour over land which the neighbour accused her mother of appropriating. The two women had thrown rocks at one another, and she recalled the terror she had felt witnessing her mother dodge these with her baby sister still swaddled in the awayu (Ay. carrying cloth) on her mother’s back. The threat of violence was also present at an inter-community negotiation over pasture boundaries that I attended early on in fieldwork. Amid suggestions that the neighbouring community had been moving the stone itus (Ay. boundary markers) to grant themselves access to more favourable pasture, a number of Suma Marqueños had turned up to the negotiations carrying quwaras (Ay. woven slingshots). These were usually used for slinging rocks at a distance when herding animals, but could also be wielded as a weapon. People kept these in their hands throughout the negotiation, even as the matter was peaceably resolved by the presidents of both villages by matching the itus to maps of community borders.
Yet while violence was locally understood as a possible (and indeed likely, if undesirable) outcome of disputes over land, what was particularly interesting about the Charka Ramos case was the way in which the younger siblings mobilised tropes of non-relatedness via blood to argue for the complicated division of land that they advocated. When I asked Gerardo why the parcels under shared ownership should be divided first in two, and then according to each sibling’s genitors, he explained that there were “two classes of siblings” who were “not of the same blood”: “we are not legitimate siblings, you see. Through our father nothing more, we are brothers. They have a different mother, different blood”. On this occasion, Gerardo emphasised non-relatedness. However, at other times (see Rupture 1 above) he noted how they had been raised as kin from a young age, emphasising how he and his mother had acted as Rodolfo and Manuela’s “legitimate” brother and mother—in short, how they had all engaged in flexible, processual, and performative kin relations over time (Carsten 2004). Teresa further suggested that Rodolfo and Manuela’s propensity for engaging in disputes over land was a result of their mother’s “quarrelsome” blood. She came from a neighbouring village called Jawira Marka: “The blood from that side, from Jawira, they are peleanderos (Sp. quarrelsome people, literally “fighters), that’s where their mother is from. And they are from that blood (de esa sangre son pues). That’s why they like to argue about land”.

As Leinaweaver (2008a) has observed in her discussion of adoption practices in Ayacucho, blood is an important and enduring metaphor for understanding relatedness in the Andes. Van Vleet (2008) elaborates on this in the context of Sullk’ata kinship in Bolivia. She suggests that blood kinship—particularly between a mother and her children—is understood as important in Sullk’ata because it is through blood transfers in the placenta that a mother nurtures a child. This is not, however, the only or the primary way in which relatedness is practiced, and Van Vleet devotes the rest of her chapter to discussing the ways in which the making of relatedness in Sullk’ata transcends genealogical or birth relations. While sympathetic to this approach, I suggest that the point of generational succession is one context in which relations of consanguineal kinship become particularly important and consequential. Miller (2007: 537-8), citing Finch and Mason’s sociological examination of inheritance practices in the United Kingdom, remarks that “inheritance practices show an almost obsessive concern with kinship as formal and normative. An often almost desperate desire to repudiate experience in order to remain consistent with the expectations of that formal order”. Miller suggests that when it comes to inheritance, UK families work very hard to “do the right thing” and
maintain equality among family members by dividing property equally, regardless of their specific relationship to them. By contrast in the Charka Ramos case, a retreat to normative kinship in the context of blood relations, and more specifically the affordances of half-relations, were mobilised to exclude certain members of the family from access to land that they “shouldn’t” have.

While Rodolfo and Manuela were ultimately unsuccessful in pressing for the equal division of Miguel and Raquel’s purchased land among the seven siblings, Rodolfo did also sell some of his father’s land in the pampa, without informing his siblings of the sale or offering them compensation. Not wanting to perpetuate further in-fighting, they eventually accepted the loss of their part of the parcel Rodolfo sold, but not without taking additional steps to prevent further losses. Isabel had documents drawn up by a civil engineer which clearly delineated the boundaries of her, Gerardo, and Laura’s plots, at a cost of nearly S/. 300 (£75.00) or S/. 10 per page—she still remembered the figure, five years later, suggesting that it was a significant sum for her to part with. She saw this documentary evidence as a form of security against future incursions on her land, and she believed it would also help her to recoup land in the future from her brother (and any others who chose to dispute her landholdings) if necessary. Thus, while the specifics of their land disputes had effectively been settled for the time being, Isabel projected a potential future of ongoing antagonism onto her relationship with her older half-brother and sister.

Not relations, but not relations? Siblingship in practice

It should be evident from the discussion above that these cumulated ruptures over time produced significant frustration and bitterness, and a sadness in the apparent foreclosure of the possibilities for having a good relationship on both sides of the sibling divide, contributing to what I am calling kinship-in-breakdown. Teresa and Gerardo, for their part, did not have particularly lofty goals about what a good sibling relationship would constitute—simply that they would occasionally spend leisure time with one another, share food, and engage in reciprocal and supportive relations more generally. This is, perhaps, what Gerardo meant by a loss of “friendship” with Rodolfo and Manuela—the desire to spend respectful, constructive, and enjoyable time together. As Teresa commented: “we’ve never said, with Rodolfo or with Manuela, let’s cook together, let’s spend time together, let’s play
volleyball or football together… nothing! Everything is land, land, this land is mine, “hon hon hon” they come by like a little mouth, the other comes by “hon hon hon”, can we have any [mutual] understanding with that kind of people? (con esa clase de gente nos sabemos comprender?).

But it was not only Rodolfo’s friendship that Gerardo and Teresa lost. After a final, bitter argument, Gerardo decided to end the relationship with his brother. During the argument, Rodolfo had called him “negro” (Sp. black, in reference to his complexion which was darker than that of other family members), implying that Gerardo’s mother had been unfaithful, and he was not in fact Miguel’s son but an illegitimate imposter. “After that, I thought, that’s enough, no more. I don’t have a brother anymore (ya no tengo hermano)”. The attempt to ‘cut’ relations in this manner was a repeated trope in Suma Marka. Coincidentally, this also occurred in another dispute with Rodolfo. Tía Dominga, Rodolfo’s first cousin on his birth mother’s side, had an arrangement with Rodolfo where she would often collect his cows and return them to his shed overnight—a courtesy she extended to him during his wife’s illness, when he needed to travel to visit her in Puno. On one occasion, she had not been able to return the cows to his shed and so decided to shelter them in her own shed for the night. Arriving back late at night to find his cows missing, Rodolfo had come to yell at her and over the course of the argument, had accused her of stealing his cows. Having extended him a favour at personal cost and being on the receiving end of what she considered a vastly unfair dressing down, Dominga sought to terminate the relationship. In her retelling of the altercation, Dominga articulated the breach in almost exactly the same way as Gerardo had done: “I don’t have an uncle (no tengo Tío)”.

Beattie (1971: 211), writing on Bunyoro kinship in Uganda in the 1950s, noted the existence of a ritual termed obwiko, where intra-clan consanguineal relations could be “voluntarily broken off” following a dispute or argument. This practice, which was reversible, meant that kin who enacted it would “not see or speak to one another” during their obwiko. In Suma Marka by contrast, relationship breakdown was not ritually enacted or affirmed, but instead

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28 In this context, the Spanish verb comprender carries more weight than its English equivalent – while it might be glossed as understanding, comprender is more indicative of a deeper mutual understanding and harmonious relationship. In narrating the histories of their relationships, Suma Marqueños often spoke about how recently-formed couples would undergo a period of violent arguments early on in a marriage, often resulting in the husband hitting his wife, and less commonly, the wife retaliating, after which a relation would either break down, or spouses would learn to comprender (see also Canessa 2012).
operated at the level of socially asserting a categorical shift or rupture. Denying that one had an uncle or a brother was an attempt to think and articulate oneself out of relations—a modality of detachment which sought to deny an ongoing social relationship (Candea et al. 2015). This, like obwiko, allowed people to operate in certain respects ‘as if’ these social relations did not exist in the present and future, and perhaps, should not even have existed in the past. For most of the time I was present in the village, the older and younger Charka Ramos siblings did not greet one another or stop to exchange a few polite words in passing. The intentional absence of greeting was perhaps the most significant ongoing instantiation of a breach among the siblings. In Suma Marka, as in many other village contexts in the Andes and elsewhere, greeting fellow villagers was a basic social obligation, a fundamental gesture of recognition and respect. It was something I was firmly instructed to always remember to do very early on in fieldwork, lest I risk offending people. Consequently, only in the most bitter of disputes would people refrain from greeting one another. For example, following what I initially took to be a particularly rancorous exchange between Isabel’s husband Jefry and the quinoa cooperative president Tio Jorge (detailed at length in Chapter Three), Jefry suggested that while the dispute would end the decent working relationship they had until that point, he would “of course, still greet Jorge, but nothing else”. It was perhaps unsurprising, then, that after a period of distancing himself, Jefry began to work with Jorge again.

Consequently, it was not that all disputes invariably provoked a cutting of relations in this manner. Certainly that would have been difficult to maintain, as disputes were a persistent feature of social life in Suma Marka—particularly when wayward animals were involved (see also Chapter Four; Goodale and Sky 2001). However, these often flared up in the heat of the moment and then were quickly forgotten. Teresa contrasted the ongoing and bitter dispute with Rodolfo to several other arguments she had recently had, which she considered to be qualitatively different. In one, her neighbor Eva had (with my inexpert help) tied up her sheep in the pen adjacent to Teresa and Gerardo’s house. As we worked, some sheep loosened their stakes and escaped into Teresa’s yard, where they began to eat some of the hay she had left out for her cows. Teresa chastised Eva for this, and then again when I hit my thumb with a rock trying to quickly re-stake the sheep, “but afterwards we were fine, we were laughing”. Teresa also mentioned Gerardo’s prima hermana (Sp. first cousin) Flor: “she can insult us about everything, and then really quickly we are good again”. As such, a cutting of relations
would occur in cases where people perceived an emptying out of the positive qualities ascribed to, and experienced within, particular kin relations—and thus where the contrast between the ideal and the practice of kinship was felt most acutely. Indeed, the expectation was that both positive and negative aspects of kinship experience were routine. However, in the absence of anything perceived as particularly positive, negative experiences could become acute and effectively all-encompassing.

Van Vleet (2008: 69), elaborating a theory of Sullk’ata kinship as forms of ayni or reciprocal exchange, notes the “fragility of bonds among siblings” in the Andes. Although siblings eat from the same pot as children and are thus “socially and materially intimate” (ibid) growing up, this breaks down over time. She suggests that siblings in the Andes typically do not feed one another as adults, unlike parents, partners, and children. Moreover, no particularly well-defined roles adhere to sibling relations in adulthood, and personal affection and proximity, as in the US or UK, is the defining factor in siblings’ ongoing involvement in one another’s lives as adults (see also Schneider 1980 [1968]). Elaborating how siblings can become dangerous for one another as direct competitors in contexts of material scarcity, she recalls an occasion during her fieldwork in which she witnessed two brothers come to blows over an inheritance dispute. Van Vleet cites this as evidence of the tenuous nature of blood relations, in contrast to feeding, nurturing, and ayni relations which create strong bonds—while acknowledging that these require active, ongoing maintenance and may also wither under certain conditions. Certainly, the multiple ruptures between the Charka Ramos siblings detailed above could be interpreted as further confirmation of shaky consanguineal relations. However, I would like to complicate Van Vleet’s notion of “fragility”, and to consider what happens after these disputes occur—that is, how sibling relations are lived once (or if) the dust settles. Having elaborated some threads of the siblings’ life histories and ruptures in their relations, I now turn to the contemporary period to explore the surprising ways in which sibling connections endure, in spite—and perhaps also because of—ongoing antagonism.

*Enduring obligation*

Rodolfo, Gerardo, Isabel, and Laura, the four siblings who lived and worked in relatively close proximity to one another, still felt and enacted a series of enduring obligations to one another, in spite of their ongoing negative talk about one another, and the apparent disregard
in which they held one another. Principally, this centered around managing the family reputation vis-à-vis neighbours and the wider community, land claims on their father’s side which required the siblings to band together, and ongoing debt relations. Continuing to enact such obligations to kin, especially when these were personally costly, left the siblings in a position where they had to endure ongoing bads in pursuit of the ‘good’ of kin relations.

Throughout my fieldwork in Suma Marka, the younger siblings undertook a number of actions in service of protecting the family name—a kind of reputational management which sought to mitigate any potential negative fall-out of the actions of their siblings. In cases where people had defaulted on bank loans and become significantly in arrears, employees from the bank would take action to make a person’s defaulting on loans public by painting a message on the side of their house or outbuildings, visible for all to see. This happened infrequently, but appeared to be an effective means of mobilizing the social stigma that adhered to being in debt. In April 2016, Rodolfo received such a message. Behind on his loans and seemingly making himself scarce, employees from the bank had driven out to the village overnight and painted “defaulter, pay your debts (moroso, paga tus deudas)” on the exterior wall of his house in bright red lettering so that it could be seen by anyone passing on the road. They also left a letter on his doorstep, outlining his repayment obligations, which his horrified kin quickly snatched up and read before guarding it for safekeeping. Rodolfo was out of town that weekend, and the family pressured him into returning to sort out the mess(age).

At the time I was staying at Tia Isabel’s house and overheard her on the phone, chastising him for bringing the family name into disrepute: “how is it possible that you have let it become public that the Charka family is getting into so much debt with the bank? Look at how you are making people look at us! People think of us as a good family. Our father, he never had debts! You are making the family look bad, first thing tomorrow you are going to erase that message”. Suitably chastened, Rodolfo returned to Suma Marka the following day and painted over the sign in paint which covered the red lettering but did not quite match the original paintwork, leaving a darker trace where the offending message had been. However several months later, when I brought up the incident, Tia Isabel informed me that Rodolfo had been in contact with the bank and had begun making repayments. She also suggested that the loan was not Rodolfo’s own, but one which he had taken out on behalf of someone else
who had failed to honour the debt. In doing so, I suggest, Isabel was attempting to ameliorate the negative effects of what the family felt was a publicly embarrassing episode.  

Isabel would also, on occasion, feed Rodolfo’s cows when they had been left in short pasture and were braying for food. Cutting large swathes of the yellow mostaza (Sp. mustard) weed from one of her nearby plots, she explained that hearing his animals go hungry “is a shame (da pena – literally, “it gives pain”)”. She also expressed worry at what other people would think about the family if they heard her brother’s cows mooing: “what are people going to say? They are going to say that the Charka Ramos family doesn’t know how to look after their animals”. Likewise, the family also managed Rodolfo’s relations vis-à-vis extended family members and neighbours. In March 2017, Tía Flor (a wealthy cousin on the Ramos

29 Not everyone was equally as concerned about painting over the signage, however. Over the course of my fieldwork I saw several more of these, painted on outhouses in neighbouring villages and on the sides of buildings in the city, some weathered with age.
side) came to Gerardo and Teresa’s house to complain about a small loan of S/. 100 (£25) she had made to Rodolfo a month prior. When she stopped by his house to retrieve the cash, he denied the loan, claiming she had never made it. Flor suggested to Gerardo and Teresa that “he probably spent it on beer”. Gerardo and Teresa repaid Flor the S/. 100 Rodolfo owed, to ensure that the family “did not fall out (para no quedarnos mal)” with Flor. In a later interview, Teresa vividly recounted how she had chastised Rodolfo for this: “I told him, I said look Rodolfo, with all the bad that you do, you’re trampling the name Charka into the dirt”.

The siblings also banded together in a series of land claims. In late 2016, Isabel began attending meetings with community authorities in the nearby village of Jisk’a Marka, alongside Rodolfo and her other siblings. The meetings revolved around a series of plots which their father owned in Jisk’a Marka, through inheritance on his mother’s side. As was the case for many distant parcels of land which were only visited infrequently by their owners, these had been lost over time to the encroachments of neighbours who were now making use of the plots “as if they were the owners”. While aware of the existence of the land, the Charka Ramos family had not been able to pursue the claim until recently, when their cousin Juan had visited from Arequipa. He returned some documents to the family that their father Miguel had loaned to him before his death and failed to collect, which provided proof of ownership. Initially the siblings had enthusiastically pursued the claim. However, the process of recuperation had been slow and the siblings had only managed to recover some of the plots. When I interviewed Isabel about this, she suggested she did not want to continue with the land claim:

R: On the one hand, I say [to myself], what do I gain from making trials and complaints? It’s a bit fastidious, you lose money, and you also waste time. For my part, I want to leave it but other siblings say no, we have to recover [the land].

C: Who wants to recover the land?

R: My brother Rodolfo, more than anything. It’s complicated.

In other more informal discussions about the land claim, Isabel implied she felt compelled to continue because of obligations to both her own family (by which she meant securing the
land for her children), and to her father and the rights to land he had left her and her siblings, meaning she had a duty to see the process through, “we all have to be there, united”.

Finally, this sense of obligation also manifested in ongoing debt relations between siblings (see also Chapter Three). Teresa mentioned that she and Gerardo continued to loan money to Rodolfo on occasion, in spite of their fractured relationship:

One time he came to us, crying, saying that he had broken the windscreen on a truck. My husband hid himself away, but I said, “he’s crying, your brother, it’s your blood, lend him the money, here I’ve sold my cows, lend him the money”. But afterwards he becomes really rude and misbehaves (se pone malcriado – literally he becomes badly raised). And still I loan him money, I don’t know what I’m thinking (no sé que tengo en la cabeza – literally, I don’t know what I have in my head).

Although the siblings may not continue to feed one another (Van Vleet 2008; Carsten 1997), these acts of practical assistance affirm an ongoing relationship, even as the siblings made explicit, vehement statements to the contrary. But how these acts are performed is also particularly significant. As Isabel, Gerardo, Teresa, and to a lesser extent, Laura, continued to assist Rodolfo through acts that were often begrudging, with an air of not insignificant embarrassment and frustration, what can this tell us about the nature of kinship obligation? Englund (2008) makes a persuasive case for reinstating the notion of obligation, dismissed too hastily as a Durkheimian fantasy, in the anthropology of ethics. He questions the conclusion that “obligations are […] tied to rule governed behaviour and a concern with social control”, instead making the case for a Gluckman-inspired vision of obligation as comprising the “material and affective practices which constitute persons [which are] contingent on historically specific circumstances, evoking rules and norms that are entirely compatible with conflict and emergent relationships” (pp. 34-5). As Englund’s framing suggests, obligation at its most expansive is an umbrella category in the anthropological literature, used as a shorthand for a complex array of situated beliefs, motivations, and actions. In the Charka Ramos case, I suggest their ongoing performance of some siblingship obligations incorporate entangled instrumental and pragmatic, categorical, ethically self-cultivating, and affective elements. It is worth parsing these out in order to understand why the siblings still “owe something” to one another.
Firstly, acts such as tending to a sibling’s animals, removing offending signage, and pursuing land claims evidence a broader commitment to upholding the family name, which requires ongoing reputational management vis-à-vis the wider community. In spite of their attempts to limit relations, the younger siblings were keenly aware that they would still be viewed and treated by others in the village as Rodolfo’s siblings—that is, they remained socially connected to him from the perspective of most third parties. This was further complicated by their shared last name, Charka Ramos, which categorically marked them as siblings to others. Moreover, their shared corporate membership in the category of siblings also required an ongoing, pragmatic engagement with kinship obligations, which involved attempting to mitigate the negative consequences of corporate membership, and leverage the beneficial ones. The pursuit of beneficial corporate membership is especially evident in the pursuit of land claims, where something akin to a segmentary kin alliance forms, in order to assert a shared claim to land. Banding together in this way was broadly beneficial for the family overall, but was also reckoned as personally beneficial for each sibling and their immediate family (understood to be their children), as they would each receive a demarcated portion of the overall land allocated. Accordingly, there is an element of personal benefit or self-interest implicated in Andean kinship obligations. This should not be understood as the kind of self-interest which implies a Western concept of liberal individual possessive personhood oriented toward rational utility maximization (Stafford 2020). However, as Stafford (2020) argues, there are strategic calculations in maintaining obligations which mobilise resources that can be personally beneficial—where here personhood is understood in an expanded sense, incorporating one’s children and future direct descendants. Pursuing land claims was thus a way of ensuring a benefit to oneself and one’s nuclear household in the present, and simultaneously securing land and food security for future generations.

Secondly, the enactment of these kinship obligations demonstrates a retreat to the normative dimensions of kinship in the abstract, what I am calling a categorical fidelity—that is an enduring commitment to the conceptual ideas, moral principles and associated aspirational practices—to kinship relations. It is perhaps an obvious, but nevertheless important, point that categories and moralities of relatedness extend beyond the immediacy and intimacy of a given relationship. Miller (2007: 552) terms this “normative” kinship, and reiterating a fundamental anthropological proposition, notes that the word relationship “implies a basic contradiction between its own normative aspect—the ideal that we ascribe to that category of
person—and the actual entity that constitutes that person at the time”. Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002: 162), writing on statehood in Turkey, uses the notion of Lacanian cynicism to explain how the political is experienced. She documents the apparent ease with which people critique the state and its ideology, and at the same time, continue to engage in practices which “reinstated it by default”—though crucially, without “turning into believers”. I suggest a related process is at work for the Charka Ramos family, though unlike the Turkish case, a belief in the ideals of kinship remains. The siblings were keenly aware of the vast gulf between what their siblingship could be, and what it was. Yet, even as these relationships emptied over time of affective content and the practical exercise of reciprocity, the siblings maintained a degree of fidelity to the category of relations in which they found themselves. This manifested in their ongoing willingness to lend money to Rodolfo because he was their “brother”. Here, the question of whether they had a good relationship with their brother was subordinated to the category of the relation itself—regardless of his actions, the fact remained that he was, still, their brother. Poor relations with their siblings in practice did not cause the Charka Ramos siblings to question whether relationships with siblings were a good thing per se. On the contrary, the breach caused people to reaffirm the value of abstract ideals of siblingship and to lament how far they had fallen from them.

The abstract ideals of kinship are also enfolded within a third element of kinship obligation, ethical self-positioning. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that particular articulations and enactments of ongoing kinship obligations are also tied up in people’s self-constructions as good kin, and good people more generally (see for example, Mattingly 2010). In narrating the conflict, the younger siblings represented Rodolfo as continuing to draw, somewhat problematically, on kinship resources in spite of his poor behaviour—for example, by repeatedly asking for loans to fund his drinking. Teresa and Gerardo in turn narrated themselves as repeatedly having done the right thing by Rodolfo as his kin—offering him loans in times of need, and treating him with respect as young adults until his behaviour became too egregious. They thus drew a set of contrasts between their own actions and Rodolfo’s, using Rodolfo’s poor behaviour to aid in their ongoing relational self-construction as good kin. Consequently, Rodolfo became something of a negative exemplar for the younger siblings—Isabel told me categorically, “I am not going to be like my brother”. While elsewhere people might draw on heroic exemplars to fashion moral selves (see Humphrey 1997), the everyday actions and characteristics of others are also held up as examples not to
follow. This suggests that evaluation and judgement in everyday life also has a pedagogical element, and moreover that ethical selves in Suma Marka are fashioned *against* as well as through others. Rodolfo, for his part, contested these assertions, emphasising how he had provided materially for his younger siblings during their childhood, performing (more than) what was required of him as a good older brother. Finally, there is are a number of affective residues bound up in the siblings’ relational breakdown, a sadness mixed in with significant bitterness, anger, and frustration. Yet I suspect this is also inflected with a kind of (futile) hope that relations might improve in future. Gerardo and Teresa mentioned at the end of one of our many conversations about Rodolfo that they “wished things could be different (*como queremos que no sea así*)”. Thus we might speculate that through continued fulfilment of some key kinship obligations, the siblings aspired to the possibility, however remote, of a different future with their kin.

Robbins, reflecting on the nature of the good during the 2013 GDAT debate, and drawing on the work of philosophers Charles Lanmore and Iris Murdoch, suggests that the good incorporates both desirable and normative elements, in the sense of being something which is compelling and “magnetic”, and also “categorically imperative” (in Venkatesan 2015: 444). Kinship obligation incorporates a similar push-pull dynamic, which is illustrated in the Charka Ramos case. But it is not simply that kinship is both felt to be both desirable and obligatory. Rather, the affective content of the relationship influences how kinship obligations are felt and enacted. In its ideal and most desirable manifestations, sibling obligation appears to be like a friendship in which people willingly and sympathetically seek one another’s company (see also Overing Kaplan 1975: 71). When stretched to its limit through repeated failures and emptied of positive affective content, siblingship obligation appears much more like a burden, one that people do not necessarily always delight in shouldering, but nevertheless still feel like they must. The picture which emerges is not quite the “diffuse, enduring solidarity” of kinship that Schneider (1980 [1968]: 116) proposes, but something rather more partial and abstracted. Nevertheless, there were certain ongoing commitments that the Charka Ramos siblings still felt that they owed to one another, which were very difficult to shake.
Conclusion

This chapter has considered the negative ethics of the Charka Ramos siblings’ kinship-in-breakdown, through a history of abusive relations and parental poisoning which culminated in ongoing disputes over land, where tropes of blood and the affordances of half-relations were mobilised to circumscribe inheritance. Consequently, the siblings have resolved, in word if not always in deed, to cut relations—refusing to greet one another, and attempting to think and articulate themselves out of relations. Yet in spite of these powerful markers of discord, the siblings also performed ongoing acts of kinship obligation and support—lending money, participating in collective land claims, and upholding the family name through tending to animals and managing the siblings’ relations and image vis-à-vis other members of the community. As such, the Charka Ramos case demonstrates that kinship and its attendant obligations are a fundamentally difficult thing to fully divest oneself of. Some of the reasons for this are concrete, practical concerns—ongoing proximity, necessary and immediate care of animals, and to gain access to land. However I have suggested that people also maintain an abstract or categorical fidelity to the moral ideas and ideals of kinship relations—particularly ongoing ethical commitment to the obligatory offering of practical support. Moreover, fulfilling obligations also encompass aspects of self-formation and positioning against as well as through others, and leave enduring, often intensely negative, affective residues. Finally, I suggested that people’s experience of the desirable and normative elements of kinship obligation may be significantly mediated by the quality of the relationship. For Rodolfo, Gerardo, his wife Teresa, and Isabel, their siblingship was a relation which may be dislodged through some practices and not others, but ultimately, not in principle.

In recent discussions in the anthropology of ethics, Zigon (2007: 133; 2008) and Yan (2011, 2014) have treated moral breakdown as acts and situations which provoke reflection, “shak[ing] one out of the everydayness of being moral”. Yan has pushed this further, noting how breakdown and the reflective reckoning of immoral acts in the public arena can lead to moral change. Yet by considering moral breakdowns in the context of kinship relations, we can see how negative ethical acts can also accumulate over time to become an enduring state of affairs, marked by the siblings’ hitherto unresolved antagonism. While this did provoke significant reflection on and evaluation of the relationship on the part of the siblings, it did not necessarily lead to a reconsideration of or change in their kinship ideals. Rather, as I have suggested, it engendered a situation where people continued to expose themselves to the bad
actions of their siblings in their pursuit of good kinship practice—where pursuing the good was not primarily about avoiding, but withstanding, the bad. In turn, upholding aspects of kinship obligation and support in spite of others’ bad behaviour itself became a mark of being good kin. To return to the question that I posed at the beginning of the chapter: what do kin owe to one another when relations have gone sour? Fortunately or otherwise, still quite a lot. In the following chapter, I delve further into debt relations among kin and other social intimates, to consider the inverse situation: where the good acts of lending can unintentionally produce bad subjects.
CHAPTER THREE

DEBT TWO WAYS: INTERPERSONAL LOANS, APXATA, AND SHAME

This chapter details the inadvertent production of bad subjects through good acts, through a comparison between two forms of debt-like relationships in Suma Marka. Here, I examine the difference between “debt that disturbs” and “socially sanctioned debt” (Roitman 2005: 73). Suma Marqueños routinely loan money to kin, neighbours, and close friends, usually to help them out of a difficult financial situation. Being indebted to others in the community through informal, interpersonal loans is considered a welcome reprieve from financial stress, yet these loans are also shameful and embarrassing for borrowers, and subject to as much secrecy as they can muster. By contrast, other debt-like relationships—such as apxata, the reciprocal ceremonial exchange of crates of beer from guests to host at fiestas—are celebrated and status affirming. Both relationships are forms of mutual aid that generate ongoing sociality (Graeber 2012).

However while soliciting loans is itself morally troubling for borrowers, apxata debts primarily become problematic in the breach—that is, when they are not repaid. Moral concerns about the failure to repay a loan or return a gift have already been well-established in the literature (see for example Graeber 2012; Dudley 2000; Stout 2016), so I will not consider this in detail in this chapter. Rather, I am interested in what the ethical distinctions between different kinds of owing can tell us about practices of moral valuation, and how, following Munn (1986), positioned interests in exchange relations can problematise unambiguous conceptions of the good. As Holly High (2012: 365) has argued, “where one finds a context elaborating some kind of debt reasoning one also typically finds an alternative that is closely intertwined but importantly, even vehemently, distinguished from it”.

Following High and writing against the Maussian tendency to collapse “all distinctions into debt” (p. 371; see also Tesart 1998; Laidlaw 2000; Sneath 2012: 458-9; Graeber 2014), I demonstrate differing moral valuations of different loans, which I argue are predicated on the directionality of exchange (Mayer 2002), and ideas about suffering, hard work, hierarchy and subordination, and community contribution.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the broader context of borrowing money in Suma
Marka, including motivations for borrowing, and the different forms of credit available to Suma Marqueños. I then examine interpersonal debt relationships in-depth, showing that being a good lender means being willing to lend in solidarity with others and being circumspect about one’s lending, while borrowers achieve ethical legitimacy through active self-constructions as suffering subjects (Robbins 2013) who will put the money to ‘good use’ within their households. However, the recipients of episodic interpersonal loans, a real necessity in emergencies and when the household finances are overstretched, are nevertheless similarly concerned about others’ negative appraisals of their borrowing—whether potential or actual. I suggest that interpersonal loans hinge on a hierarchical exchange between borrower and lender (see also Malinowski 1922), generating situations where the act of “doing someone a favour” simultaneously incorporates elements of a very welcome empathetic recognition of need, and shame in being seen to “live off others”, leading borrowers to keep their borrowing as private as possible. This demonstrates the importance of positionality in self-other ethical relations, and how de-facto ‘goods’ such as the extension of mutual aid are often ambiguous, at once materially beneficial and morally troubling.

I then move to consider a much more public form of debt-like relationship, known as ayni, which has most often been discussed in the Andes in relation to labour exchange (for example Harris 1982; Walsh-Dilley 2017). This is declining however and has been eclipsed by another form of ayni or reciprocal exchange—gifts to hosts at fiestas. Originally these took the form of t’iri prestations of money to the fiesta host, but have over time been replaced by axpata gifts of 12-bottle crates of beer (from the Aymara verb apxataña, which means to put or place on top of something – see also Paerregaard 2017). Both t’iri and axpata act as a form of distributed credit, allowing the host to defray some of the significant outlay of fiesta sponsorship. Unlike interpersonal debts however, axpata debts are celebrated as a highly visible marker of status in the community—the more axpata prestations one receives, the more significant one’s social connections and esteem. Nevertheless, axpata prestations are subject to a number of material and ethical concerns, which centre around the erosion of the value of credit over the course of the fiesta, through over-consumption of the axpata beer, bottle breakages, and the rising cost of beer over time. The materiality of beer complicates ideal reciprocal exchange—as does the potentially negative ethics of overconsumption—while these concerns highlight and reinforce the import attached to strict equivalence. As two-way exchanges, axpata gifts are socially expansive and generative, a form of
colaboración (Sp. collaboration) which ensures the continuation of the fiesta as a social good. By contrast, interpersonal loans are significantly more morally ambiguous, contributing to the reproduction of the household in times of emergency and shortage, while subtly reconfiguring relations among kin and neighbours as unequal.

Borrowing in context

Suma Marqueños solicit loans for two reasons. Firstly, an absolute lack of income, and secondly, a lack of cashflow, where a household’s income might in absolute terms be sufficient to cover most expenses, but a complex arrangement of income streams coupled with delays in payments and other issues produce temporal gaps between income and expenditure (see also Krige 2019). Poverty in the community, like many other rural contexts with a strong subsistence base, was in material terms 30 not usually predicated on lack of food—unless their crops failed, the majority of people had enough to eat from what they cultivated for their households (see also Chapter One). Instead, poverty primarily centered around a lack of “timely money” (Sneath 2012: 458; see also Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). Most people in Suma Marka claimed to have experienced periods of extreme poverty and hardship, when they did not have sufficient income to cover their expenses. However, even when people would consider themselves to have a sizeable and steady income, usually through theirs or a family member’s participation in waged work or by combining a number of income streams such as agricultural and craft work, this did not always stretch to cover other expenses, particularly larger costs or those which would crop up unexpectedly. They were episodically cash-poor, a feature of rural precarity where income is at least partially seasonal (Kellett 2011; Sneath 2012).

“It’s difficult to come by, it goes so easily, and you can never save it”, my comadre Carmen sighed, referring to the money which she frequently ran out of despite her best efforts at cobbling together an income. Her situation was more precarious than some, as she was in her early 40s and supporting two children, one in high school and one at university, while her husband Arsenio was not in paid employment. Nevertheless, she experienced a number of common financial pressures which led others in the village to borrow money, and her

30 In cultural terms, however, proximity to the land and reliance on subsistence farming is itself an index of poverty throughout much of Peru (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; De la Cadena 1995).
situation can thus be taken as indicative. This was particularly acute for families who did not
have a consistent wage earner, and also included some who did, due to frequent delays in the
payment of wages. Carmen worked weekday mornings as a carer for babies and toddlers in
the neighbouring town’s wawa uta (Ay. preschool, literally ‘baby house’), for which she
received a weekly wage of S/. 125 (£31.25) during term-time, but no payment outside of
school term. She also got up at 2am on Sunday mornings to cook meals to sell at the Sunday
market in the neighbouring town with her mother—soup and a main meal for S/. 4 (£1). They
usually earned between S/. 200-300 (£50-£75) each Sunday, after materials and the hire of
the kiosk, which she split in half with her mother. With her husband, she owned several
machines (concrete mixers, diggers, steamrollers), which they hired out for local construction
projects in the neighbouring towns and villages. In one instance these netted her S/. 2500
(£625) over a two-month period, but they frequently broke down, and the council who hired
them did not always pay promptly. As of January 2016, these had been “abandoned” at a
friend’s house in a nearby village for several months, as Carmen and Arsenio did not have the
money for repairs. Carmen also sold surplus crops where possible throughout the year—
usually a bag or two at a time of potatoes or chuño in the local market, or through the quinoa
cooperative (see Chapter Five). Finally, Carmen was a member of Programa Juntos, a
government-sponsored programme supporting families with school and college-aged children
in the poorest parts of the country. She received a S/. 200 stipend from the programme every
two months in return for ensuring school attendance, regular medical check-ups, and
attending monthly workshops (see MIDIS 2019).

Her husband Arsenio, who she had put through university by knitting jumpers, raising
animals, and selling surplus crops, was performing an unpaid cargo in the neighbouring town
of Qhatu Marka throughout much of my fieldwork—president of his natal barrio (Sp.
neighbourhood). He hoped that his experience and connections with the mayor’s office would
open doors to paid work in the future. Arsenio spent between S/. 20-25 per week on lunch,
plus the occasional tank of petrol for their beat-up second-hand car which often sat unused,
cell phone credit, and buying the occasional round of drinks to butter up his friends in the
administration. Recently, her eldest son Jhon had enrolled in a private university in Puno,
meaning that Carmen gave him approximately S/. 100 a week (sometimes more, sometimes
less depending on what cash she had available) to pay for his travel to and from Suma Marka
on the weekends, his board including breakfast and dinner in a damp, windowless room at her
sister-in-law’s house in Puno, and his lunches for the week. She had also taken out two loans to banks in Puno, for which the monthly repayments totalled S/. 290, and had taken out another large loan of S/. 3,000 from her second cousin, Tía Flor, so Arsenio could finally apply for his university degree to be conferred, which would help his employment prospects. Carmen was due to “complete” one of the bank loans in March 2016, and was planning to take out an additional S/. 3,000 from the bank once her other loan had been completed, so she could repay Tía Flor in full. In addition to these weekly expenses, Carmen and her family also wanted to participate in the consumer economy, while conscious of the financial strain that this would pose: “Jhon makes me worry. He is a big expense (gasto es, el Jhon). He wants new clothes, good clothes, because he’s young too. I haven’t bought him a new piece of clothing all year […] when I have money, I’m going to buy him some good clothes that will last for the whole year” (see also Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). As such, Carmen performed a delicate balancing act. Some weeks she would have enough to cover all her outgoings, while on others she would have to turn to kin, neighbours, friends, and occasionally the bank, to make up the shortfall.

Carmen’s situation was typical of many in the Suma Marka, in that she relied on both formal credit through the banking system, and informal, interpersonal loans from community members. The routine use of formal credit in Suma Marka is, however, a significant departure. Until the mid-20th century, access to formal credit among campesinos in rural Peru was non-existent. People borrowed money from kin and neighbours, or occasionally, from hacienda owners (Starn 1999: 76). The situation changed under the Agrarian Reform from 1969 onwards, when farmers were able to gain access to credit through the Agrarian Bank. This was extended seasonally under special conditions (i.e. as an advance on the coming harvest), as they were prevented from using their land as collateral for loans under the newly-instituted regime of communal land tenure (Palacios Lozada 2001; Mayer 2009, see also Chapter Two). However, given that Suma Marqueños were primary involved in subsistence rather than commercial agricultural production, most access to credit during this period would have been communal rather than individual—i.e. mediated through the SAIS (state-organised cooperatives) and through the newly-instituted comunidad campesina. The situation changed again when then-President Alberto Fujimori’s neoliberal policy reforms closed the Agrarian Bank in 1992, cancelling the special credit arrangements previously extended to farmers. This meant that for the better part of the 20th century, Suma Marqueños
have been largely excluded from individually accessing formal credit.

Yet if Suma Marqueños were historically marginal in the formal credit sector, they have been subject to a number of credit-based development interventions in recent years. These build on a long history of microfinance programmes such as the Grameen Bank, first trialled in rural Bangladesh in the 1970s (Hossain 1988; Karim 2008). Similar initiatives have been repurposed within broader moves toward global financial inclusion in international development policy from the early 2000s onward, aimed at reducing poverty through extending access to banking products and other financial services (Chibba 2009; Taylor 2012; see also Demirgüç-Kunt et al. 2015). As Lazar (2004), writing on microfinance in Bolivia has argued, such interventions are not only aimed at extending access to credit. They also purport to socialise women into formal credit arrangements and attempt, but do not necessarily succeed, in instituting a model of liberal citizenship premised on an entrepreneurial subjecthood. In Suma Marka these have included organisations such as ProMujer, a microfinance organisation for women which has been operating in Puno since 2000. This attracted several participants from Suma Marka—including Tía Isabel, who was involved in a group with several friends from Puno, until one of the women skipped town with the loan. There was also the UNICAS, a savings and loans group which was set up during my fieldwork in 2017. Unlike microfinance-based initiatives, this operated solely on the basis of the socios’ own contributions. Finally, Suma Jirwa, the quinoa cooperative, also ran a small revolving credit scheme for its members based on the same principle, in order to generate funds for the cooperative. Both aimed to grow members’ money outside the banking system by pooling it together and lending it out on a short-term basis at comparatively low rates of interest, usually between 3-5% per month with the loan balance returned in full at the end of the month.

By the time of my fieldwork, these development interventions and microfinance initiatives coexisted with both informal, interpersonal lending and formal credit. All of the nine families I lived with had active bank loans or taken out a bank loan in the past. I also knew of a number of others who had bank loans in the village as I would occasionally run into people outside the bank, or encounter people on the roads around the community who were heading into town to make a payment on a loan. In recent years, the banking sector has made extensive inroads into rural areas and several banks specialise in rural lending, including Caja
Rural Los Andes (which provides agricultural loans) and MiBanco (a microfinance institution backed by not-for-profit Acción Comunitaria del Perú). Both of these frame access to savings and loans services in rural areas as development interventions, offering flexible criteria for approval aimed at incorporating rural inhabitants within the formal banking sector—Caja Rural’s slogan is “the bank of social inclusion” (Caja Rural 2020: n.p), and during my fieldwork in 2016-17, MiBanco’s marketing campaign was centered around extending lines of credit to people who earned as little as S/. 30 a day. For rural customers who did not have waged employment, both banks would also flexibly appraise assets such as houses and livestock. The banks’ credit was physically easy to access—there was a Caja Rural in the nearby town of Qhatu Marka, a five minute drive away or half hour walk. MiBanco’s nearest office was in Puno city, an hour’s bus ride away. However, I saw a MiBanco car visiting houses for appraisals on several different occasions.

Though engagement with formal credit was common and routine, Suma Marqueños were divided on whether it was a legitimate resource. Some people, such as Tía Dominga, a particularly circumspect woman in her mid-60s, preferred the anonymity of bank loans—by making trips into Puno to borrow money instead of borrowing from others in the village, she could avoid others’ involvement in, and knowledge of, her financial affairs. Others such as Tía Teresa, who in the past had been burned by high interest payments and an inflexible schedule, had sworn off bank loans for good. Instead, she worked on developing a pot of savings31, and would occasionally approach family members for money when needed. Most, however, saw both benefits and drawbacks to formal credit. A key motivation for accessing formal credit was that banks would offer significantly larger sums than most people in the village could or were prepared to lend. Moreover, visits from the MiBanco car notwithstanding, bank loans offered anonymity for Suma Marqueños, which could help avoid the shame associated with borrowing money from others (discussed further below). There were, however, significant drawbacks. Both Caja Rural and MiBanco charged significantly high rates of interest—as of August 2019, MiBanco was offering personal credit at rates of between 34.96 and 90.12% per annum depending on an assessment of income (MiBanco 2019). Many were not deterred by high interest provided the monthly repayments seemed manageable, however they were concerned about the additional charges and payments which

31 Suspicion of the banking system was common in Suma Marka and while people accessed loans, many were reluctant to leave their savings in the bank, preferring to keep them at home “under the mattress”.
were added to the loan in the event that a person missed a payment and became *en mora* (Sp. in default). The inflexible nature of bank loans was thus a significant drawback. Tía Teresa, echoing the concerns of others, recalled the stress that meeting the payment schedule for a previous loan had caused:

> We borrowed money one time to buy land in Puno, and with the bank we built my house, we took out a loan and *every month* we had to pay, sometimes my husband didn’t make any money, and I had to go from here to there offering potatoes, skins, wool, if not you end up in default (*sino con mora ya viene*), because of that I don’t like it, because from wherever you can (*donde sea*) you have to get [the money]. It adds up, and it’s not like you can say I’ll pay you tomorrow, no, hour is hour, day is day, it’s not like [borrowing from] people (*a caso puedes decir mañana te pago no más, no hora es hora, día es día, no es como la gente*).

Eventually, Teresa also borrowed money from others in the community to meet the repayments. Thus, while people had varying opinions and preferences about the legitimacy of formal credit arrangements, in cases of urgent need they solicited loans wherever they could—from development-based lending groups, from banks, and from kin, neighbours, and friends in and beyond the community (see also Lazar 2004). In the next section, I explore the key characteristics of interpersonal lending in the community.

*Interpersonal lending in and around Suma Marka*

I had decamped from Suma Marka and was accompanying Tía Isabel one evening in Puno, as she walked up and down between *Parque Pino* and the city’s central plaza, attempting to sell hand-knitted and Chinese-imported jumpers to disinterested *gringo* tourists. We passed by a number of her *socías* from the artisan market in the port, drawing close briefly, sharing gossip, and celebrating or commiserating the evening’s fortunes, with one eye always trained on potential passing trade. Towards the end of the evening, Isabel and I spotted Señora Maria’s distinctive pink wide-brimmed sunhat and stained apron from a distance, making a beeline in our direction. She wasn’t carrying her *awayu* (Ay. *carrying cloth*) on her back, which suggested she had not been out selling that evening. I already knew Señora Maria from spending the occasional day with Tía Isabel at the artisan market. She was an Aymara-
speaker, originally from Moho (the opposite side of Lake Titicaca to Suma Marka), and often stopped at Tía Isabel’s kiosk to chat. Isabel was not particularly fond of Señora Maria however, seemingly resenting the association which shared language gave the two women. Señora Maria drew closer and took Isabel by the arm, speaking low and gentle into her ear while I attempted to hover unobtrusively in the background. “Kullakita (Ay. sister), you are my countrywoman. You see me in the market every day. You know my leg is bad, please, lend me S/. 50, only 50 little soles (solo cincuenta solcitos), so I can continue my treatment”. Isabel shook her head sadly, “no, I don’t have it, I haven’t sold anything tonight”. As we walked away, Isabel said to me “her life is sad, it’s pitiful (triste es su vida, da pena). But”, and here Isabel’s expression changed to one of annoyance, “she is always asking for money, that’s how she lives”. Although Señora Maria was not successful in securing a loan from Tía Isabel on this particular occasion, loans were routinely sought and extended to kin and neighbours in a similar manner, for emergencies and when people were “lacking money” through poverty or poor cashflow. This episode of loan solicitation, one among several that I witnessed or participated in during fieldwork plus many more which I discussed with close interlocutors, incorporates several key characteristics which define lending in Suma Marka: borrowing and lending hinges on relationships of trust and an assessment of character, meaning it only occurs between conocidos (Sp. people who are well-known to one another); borrowers should give a “good” reason for asking for money; most loans are small sums, lent on a short-term basis and with the expectation that repayment should be made in full; and lenders typically loan money without or at very low rates of interest. These are ideal-typical (Weber 1949 [1904]), but nevertheless are useful for sketching the contours of informal, interpersonal loan-making and receipt.

When considering who in and around Suma Marka to borrow from, people’s calculations emphasised a combination of practicality and the strength of pre-existing social relationships. “We ask to borrow money from people we think have money”, Hector explained matter-of-factly. This could be a person in employment, with ample livestock or crops, or someone who had made a recent sale—for example, of a bull—which meant others knew they had an influx of cash. Hector, for his part, often borrowed from his neighbour, who ran a profitable iron-mongering business making picks and shovels from her home and had a steady income. Likewise, Señora Maria’s request to Tía Isabel was made at a time when she might have made a sale—Isabel observed that Señora Maria had sought her out in the street where she
knew she would be selling, and suspected she had also asked the other women from the association who were out that evening. However, it was not solely the availability of money but also a question of “trust”—most people would only ask to borrow from those who they considered to be in their confidence, which could include kin, a close neighbour, friend, or overly-friendly anthropologist. Others suggested that they only ever borrowed from kin because they did not trust other people to keep the arrangement secret. Occasionally, however, need would, as it routinely did in Señora Maria’s case, outweigh concerns about reputation and propriety. Lenders likewise considered the “character”, “personality”, and “heart” of borrowers when deciding who lend to, including whether they were trustworthy enough to repay the debt (see also Firth 2004 [1964]). For Tía Isabel, Señora Maria was not sufficiently trustworthy, nor was there a relationship of sufficient intimacy, in spite of their shared language. She did not particularly enjoy Maria’s company, and most crucially, had in the past loaned some small amounts of money (between S/.5-20 soles) to Maria and found it difficult to recover, with Maria consistently attempting to defer the repayment or being conspicuously absent from her kiosk when Isabel turned up to collect it. Having established the parameters within which loans are made in Suma Marka, I now turn to consider the moral valences of interpersonal borrowing and lending. I first consider how borrowers construct themselves as worthy loan recipients and how this in turn enables lenders to position themselves as good people extending help to others. I then complicate this by examining the negative moral emotion of shame which also routinely accompanies loan solicitation.

**Good borrowers and good lenders**

As Señora Maria’s (unsuccessful) attempts at persuasion above indicate, soliciting a loan required a particular kind of moral performance on the part of the borrower, which incorporates notions of legitimate expenditure and legitimate recipients. This in turn, allowed lenders to construct themselves as good people, doing a favour for their fellow community members in a time of need. When soliciting a loan, my comadre Carmen explained, the most important thing was explaining to the would-be lender what the money was for—it was not possible to gain access to credit without this. “They have to know what you want it for, I have to explain everything, it’s for this, for this, they want to know everything”. Likewise, Tía Isabel, describing her own practice of soliciting loans, explained that they have to know “whether you really need it or not, I have to explain what problems I have, what I need it for,
it has to be an emergency”. Unlike Detlev Krige’s (2019: 15) mashonisa neighbourhood moneylenders in Soweto, who were unconcerned with how prospective borrowers spent their loans and instead emphasised a pragmatic stance of “just wanting money” returned to them, lenders in Suma Marka wanted to know that their money was going to a ‘legitimate’ purpose, broadly defined.

Over the course of my fieldwork, people successfully solicited loans from others in the village for the following legitimate expenses: for university fees, for school supplies and uniforms, to purchase a block of land, to pay wages to workers for agricultural tasks, to pay the monthly repayment for bank loans, to pay back an ayni at the upcoming fiesta, for house repairs, for car repairs, to cover the costs of a hospital treatment, to help finance a fiesta, to pay workers for harvesting potatoes, to pay for the transmission of documents for a university title, to purchase more products for DXN (a direct sales-based pyramid scheme), to ‘buy’ a position as a nurse in a medical post in San Martín, and to purchase a flight to the United States to attend an agricultural internship programme. Most of these were small loans, in the region of S/. 100-500, borrowed from a single source, with payment normally expected in full anywhere between two weeks and several months’ time. This was because, as Tía Teresa explained, “if they return the whole amount to you can buy something if you want. But if they give you S/. 10 here, S/.5 there, a watch or something, the capital goes to nothing (se va a la nada), and that’s not very good for us”. Nevertheless, part-payments and deferring payments until a later date were common, and required further negotiations. For larger expenses, people would usually combine money from multiple sources, including multiple lenders in the village and bank loans. The largest single loan I heard of was for the sum of S/. 40,000 (£10,000) which Luis, the then-president of the community, borrowed from Tía Flor and Tío César, and was paying back at a rate of S/. 1,000 a month over three years and four months.

Requests for a loan would often be accompanied by a visible, affective register of sadness and distress, designed to elicit sympathy from the would-be lender. I encountered this first-hand when Tía Andrea came to visit me one weekend. I had run into her crying outside the Interbank in Puno, and asked if she wanted to stop by my house for a chat. When we arrived, I offered her tea and a sandwich, and we retired to my room for greater privacy as she was wary of others in the house overhearing what she had to say. She explained how she had “lost
everything”. She was a vendor in the second-hand market in Puno, selling clothing and shoes on Thursdays and Fridays. The week prior, she had gone to her lock-up to find that all of her merchandise had gone. She suspected that someone in her association had stolen her goods, because they were “envious” of her success (see also Chapter Four). At this point she let out a sob, explaining that she was substantially in debt for the house that she owned in Puno, and was already three months en mora (Sp. in default). She had made a police report, but did not think that this would prevent the bank from charging the next instalment of the loan, which was due in two days’ time and which she and her husband could not afford to pay. She was, therefore, very concerned that the bank would take action to repossess the house. Andrea explained that her husband was working as a combi driver for one of the many vans, but the money they were making was not enough to keep up with the repayments. With the loss of her business they were in a dire situation. Initially she asked if I would buy the house in Puno from her. I demurred, saying that although I wished to help her, I could not afford to purchase a house on my student budget. Then, she implored me to loan her S/. 15,000 (approximately £3,750) to cover the debt and the cost of purchasing more product to keep her business going, “please, help me Señorita Corinna, I don’t know what I am going to do” (her emphasis). I explained, as kindly as I could, that I did not have that kind of money to spare, and offered to loan her S/. 500 toward her next loan repayment, leaving the money on the fridge for her to collect when I left for the countryside the following day.

As such, borrowers appear to construct themselves as legitimate and worthy recipients of a loan on two counts: that they are hardworking (which I consider in the section below), and crucially, that they are suffering. Suffering in Suma Marka was an expansive category, incorporating a multitude of misfortunes and difficult circumstances that one might endure over the course of a lifetime—poor harvests, poverty, illness, death, parental or spousal abandonment, excessive violence at the hands of a partner, difficult relations with kin—all of these could contribute to a person’s suffering. To suffer was moreover considered to be intimately and existentially related to life on the land: across much of the Andes, rural life is considered to be difficult, precarious, and full of hardship (Harvey 2018: 120; see also Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). Gina Crivello’s (2011: 406) interlocutors put this bluntly: “the chacra is hard, it is suffering”. Accordingly, suffering was a key trope of people’s biographical narratives, in everyday conversations and in interviews, bringing women and men to tears as they recounted the many misfortunes that had befallen them. “I have suffered
a lot”, Yesica, a young 20-something mother exclaimed between sobs, her six-month old
baby heaving up and down on her back behind her, as she recounted to the savings and loans
groups the frequent criticisms her mother in law meted out, including that she was lazy and
was using her participation in the village groups as an opportunity to meet other men. This
had caused her to argue with her partner, who had hit her, and she sought to resolve the
situation by removing herself from the group (see also Harvey 1994). Likewise my comadre
Carmen explained how she had “suffered immensely (total he sufrido)” in her lifetime,
particularly when she was trying to put her husband Arsenio through school, and would
routinely do a day’s labour in the fields then sit up at night knitting until the small hours of
the morning, sleeping for only a couple of hours. Lack of money in the household meant her
children had “also suffered too”, in particular her “poor little Jhon, [who] never even knew
what vegetables were, he had never even tried fruit”. Here, Carmen is highlighting her
extreme poverty—money being so scarce that she could not even afford to spare S/. 1 to
purchase fruit and vegetables in the market—as a condition of her children’s suffering. In a
small study of women in a highland Aymara community in Puno, Winifred Mitchell (1994:
186) argues that enduring suffering (Sp. aguantar) is a gendered form of prestige, conferred
on women who have managed to “keep [their families] together against all the odds of
Peruvian peasant life” (see also Lazar 2002). By contrast, she suggests that men were more
likely to be valorised for their productive qualities.

In Suma Marka, however, both men and women engaged in performative narratives of
suffering (see also Ødegaard 2010). Tío Eduardo, Eber’s father, wept as he recounted how he
had been mistreated by members of the community, accused wrongfully of mismanaging
funds, and prevented from running for president of the dairy cooperative. Thus, suffering
subjecthood (Robbins 2013) and the capacity to endure was an active self-construction in
Suma Marka, a weighty form of moral claims-making premised on negative circumstance,
that could be mobilised to secure a loan. Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld (1999: 115), has noted
how in Andean Ecuador, yangas cosas (Qu./Sp. humble things) can be used to “foreground
collective obligations and identities”, and to gain authority over others. Likewise, suffering-
speech was a significant feature of loan solicitations. Even when loan requests did not
explicitly invoke suffering, they mobilised elements commonly recognised as suffering–
lacking money, sadness–which discursively positioned their claims within the broader idiom.
For example, Tía Teresa recounted how her godson Luis had come to borrow money the
previous year:

“Godmother, I’m lacking money to buy my plot of land”, he told me, he appeared very sad. “Although I’ve sold all my cows and all my sheep, I’m always lacking in money (siempre me falta plata). I’m always lacking in money, he told me.

The grammatical construction of always lacking, emphasised by Tía Teresa’s repetition is, I suggest, intentional, implying that Luis’s hard work in raising his animals for sale (itself a source of suffering) was constantly coming up short against a broader condition of lack—in this case, a lack of land (another source of suffering – see also Chapter Four). Tía Teresa and Tío Gerardo were aware of Luis and Claudia’s meagre landholdings and sympathetic to his predicament, and agreed to loan the couple the S/. 3000 needed to purchase the land. In Suma Marka, good borrowers were people who would were in need, would put the money toward a legitimate purpose, and would return the capital in full, on-time if possible (see below).

Would-be lenders could deny someone a loan, and sometimes did, when they did not have the money to spare, when the borrower was considered untrustworthy, or when the reason for the loan was not considered legitimate, as Tía Isabel’s refusal of Señora Maria implies. Occasionally, the legitimacy of a loan would be questioned after it had already been given. Tía Teresa recalled one particularly fraught encounter when she had loaned S/. 100 (£25) to her brother-in-law Rodolfo, to pay four workers for a day’s labour harvesting his potatoes. Initially she refused, suggesting he could instead ‘pay’ his workers in minka. This is a formalised exchange of labour for crops, such as a sack of potatoes or quinoa, usually of slightly higher value than a day’s wage, and also includes the day’s meals and drinks for the workers (see Mayer 2002; Walsh-Dilley 2017). Tío Rodolfo protested that his wife was sick and convalescing in Puno, meaning she could not cook for the minka, and he needed those potatoes for his children. While Tía Teresa was incredulous, “is it the case that they’re wawitas (Ay. babies, that is not adults who can feed themselves)?”, she nevertheless reluctantly agreed to loan him the money because she felt “sad” for his wife, Facunda. However, when she later asked Facunda to return the money Rodolfo owed: “she responded really ugly to me. She said “why do you loan him money? That will be for his other women”,

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32 Here Teresa elongated the “a” in plata, a speech convention which indicated emotional distress.
that’s how she spoke to me, as if to say he was renting a woman with this money”. Thus, people claimed they found it difficult to refuse what they considered to be legitimate loan requests, provided they had the money available to give. This was because witnessing someone else in distress, particularly close kin, “is a shame” (Sp. da pena, literally “it gives pain”).

Tía Flor, one of Suma Marka’s wealthiest women, felt she was particularly susceptible to others’ suffering. Explaining her S/. 3000 loan to Carmen (noted above), who is her second cousin on her mother’s side, Flor claimed she had not even consulted her husband because she was worried he would refuse. Also, she explained that Carmen had “cried a lot, and how could I say no? (comó la puedo negar?)”. Flor was a self-described bocona (Sp. big-mouthed) woman in her late 50s. She had an occasionally sharp tongue and walked with a pronounced limp, the result of an ongoing illness (see Chapter Four). This meant she often turned up to community meetings in slippers. Despite her present ill-health, Flor claimed that in terms of her household finances, “we have been lucky, we have been blessed”. By happy accident, she had been born one of only two children to a mother and father with extensive landholdings. Her brother left the community in the 1980s, settling in Sicuani near Cusco, where he had a job as a music teacher. This left Flor managing both hers and her brother’s plots, totalling “around 10 hectares more or less” (she would never disclose the exact amount, and others in the community suspected it may have been closer to 20 hectares). Her husband César, a slight, sombre man, had held a steady job as a school caretaker several villages over, meaning the family had a consistent income stream. Turning much of their land over to crop production for sale had allowed the family to purchase two tractors, which they rented out at a rate of S/. 48 an hour, and they also owned several properties in nearby cities of Puno and Ilave. Flor fielded so many loan requests that her kin and neighbours called her, jokingly, the “bank of Suma Marka”. Flor and César’s wealth aroused significant envy (see Chapter Four). However, by consistently extending loans Flor could position herself as contributing to the community. She was, by her own account, someone who liked to “help people”, responsive to the needs of kin and mindful of the obligation to give.

Lending was also framed by regular lenders as an opportunity to emphasise solidarity with

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33 This would have been a particularly slanderous and shocking accusation in a context where sexual propriety is important.
the borrower within the context of *mutual suffering*. Many Suma Marqueños who lent money that I spoke to emphasised that they loaned money to others because they had also, at different points in their lives, “been without”. Tía Teresa recalled a particularly bad El Niño drought in 1983, when the pasture in the village was failing and her cows and sheep were dying. She did not have the money to purchase feed in the market, meaning she had to walk several hours to the lakeside to cut *totora* reeds to save her animals: “We know what it’s like, it’s sad to live without money”. While Flor had perhaps not “lived without” specifically, she was not immune from suffering. Part of her motivation for “helping others” rested on a set of tragic circumstances which had befallen her family. Several years prior, her eldest daughter Juana had died in a bus accident. At the time of her death, Juana had been working as a school teacher and had not yet had children, meaning that Flor had been left with one surviving daughter: Yeli, a young woman in her twenties who lived with Flor and her husband César in the village, and who had an intellectual disability. Yeli was an adept and resolutely tireless worker on the farm, but Tía Flor worried constantly about how she would cope in the future when her and her husband died, with no other close kin to take care of her in their absence. As such, Flor was amassing money through sales of crops, animals, and some assets such as land and tractors, and extending significant lines of credit to her kin, to ensure that Yeli was provided for in her parents’ absence: “I do it [offering loans] so people will remember me, one day maybe they will do a favour for me and remember that I have been good to them, and will be good to my little Yeli, and look out for her”.

Loans then, were extended by lenders within an idiom of constructive empathy, positing a mutuality of need, whether this was situated in past experience or envisaged in an uncertain future. Joel Robbins (2009: 52), writing on gift exchange among the Urapmin in Melanesia, suggests that recognition—understood in Hegelian sense as the basis of self-conscious selfhood—is an organising principle of the Urapmin economy: “what is at stake in the constant exchanges that mark Urapmin life is the ability of people to construct one another as human subjects through mutual recognition”. I suggest that a form of recognition is also at play here, but constituted instead through the commonality of suffering. A willingness to be responsive to the needs of others and to extend material help in this way was what marked someone as a “good” person. For my *comadre* Carmen, her uncle Fernando was one such “good person”. “Yes, he always tells me [when I ask him for money]. When your *compadre*
was in the university [...] I was always lacking money. I would go to Tía Hilda [Fernando’s wife] and it seemed like she didn’t want to loan me money, and Tío Fernando would say “quick, lend her the money, you have it from yesterday”, he is a very good [person], I think (muy bueno es, para mí)”. She recalled how, at a time when money was especially scarce for Carmen and her family, Tío Fernando had purchased a tiny teddy bear for her daughter Ofelia, had invited them to drink hot chocolate and eat panetone with him on Christmas Day, and had offered her his pasture to graze her cows on. In this respect, the extension of loans formed one among many acts of help as “gestures of care” (Han 2011: 16) within and between families.

Part of doing someone a favour in this way also incorporated loans without or at very minimal rates of interest. Many people who loaned money in Suma Marka were at pains to point out that they did so without charging the borrower interest, which was conceptualised as “doing a favour (haciendo favor)” for the other person. This was particularly the case for smaller loans and those which were lent for short timeframes of between several weeks and a month. “I never lend money with interest”, Tía Flor told me. However, although Tía Flor claimed she did not charge interest, she did receive what she called “cariño” from several of the families to whom she had loaned money. On Sundays, Carmen would send three lunches which she had set aside at her kiosk in the market for Flor, César, and Yeni, and Claudia and Luis would also send her several fish to cook on a weekly basis from her trout farm. “Affection is worth more than money”, Flor explained. This cariño, then, was not understood by Flor as her return on the loan (though she did grumble about it in weeks where it was not forthcoming). Rather, it signified for a broader sense of the high esteem in which the borrowers held her and their relationship. As Graeber (2012: 86) has noted, the extension of loans as favours in this manner generates longer-term obligations, creating a web of mutual aid.

Other lenders in the village did charge interest, though this was usually at substantially lower rates than the local banks. When Tío Jorge received S/. 500 back from Eber that he had lent to the Suma Jirwa cooperative, I overheard him discussing a loan with Tía Isabel. He was considering returning the money to his bank account, but complained that it wasn’t making him any money, so Tía Isabel suggested he could loan her the money and she would “make his money work”. They sketched out some terms in Jorge’s faded notebook, but were
reluctant to let me look at these. Isabel later explained that they had settled on an interest rate of 2% per month over a two-month period, meaning she returned him S/. 520 when the two months were up. Thus, while charging interest on a loan was not necessarily morally problematic in itself (Graeber 2012: 232; see also Lazar 2004), lenders in Suma Marka claimed they preferred to keep these low, suggesting that there was some discomfort with being seen to be profiting substantially from a loan arrangement, particularly from others’ misfortune or distress. By framing their lending in these terms, as gestures of care and affection which empathetically recognise rather than exploit suffering others, lenders stand in solidarity with less fortunate kin and fellow community members.

*Keeping it private: debt as shame*

For borrowers, however, receiving a loan from another person was more complex, and more ethically troubling. Most borrowers similarly believed their lenders were “good people” (see above), and loans were a welcome (albeit temporary) reprieve from financial pressure. But being in debt to others was also a source of significant shame for many loan recipients. This is unsurprising, as a number of authors have noted a relationship between debt and shame. Krige (2019: 3), for example, suggests that “Sowetans […] are not averse to embracing seemingly expansive credit relationships that are both personal and socially legitimate, even if somewhat shameful”. Isabelle Guérin (2014: S44), in a discussion of the differential values applied to microcredit in rural South India, goes a step further, arguing that while incurring debts can be considered socially productive, shame and humiliation arise in debt relationships which are “too imbalanced”, though she does not detail further how this occurs. In these accounts, however, the corollary between being in debt to others and being ashamed of this condition is more or less taken as given, rather than something which requires further explanation and ethnographic specification.

Unlike in other loan contexts, where shame emerged primarily in the inability to repay (Graeber 2012: 390; see also Dudley 2000; Stout 2016), loans in Suma Marka carried shame both in their acquisition and in instances when people were unable or unwilling to repay. The vast majority of conversations about borrowing money in Suma Marka were conducted in private, in the relative anonymity of people’s houses, or at the very least, out of earshot of others (see also Lazar 2004). They were also the only conversations I was ever explicitly
excluded from during fieldwork. On the Wednesday of my very first week in the field, Tía Teresa and Tía Gerardo received a visit from Luis and Claudia, their god-children by marriage, together with Claudia’s older sister Angelica. Eyeing me warily as they made their way into the inner courtyard, they asked if they could speak with Teresa and Gerardo inside, and the five retired to the privacy of the living room. I made to follow but Teresa stopped me at the door and instructed me to wait outside where I sat on the porch, kicking my heels, until they had finished. It was not until I interviewed Tía Teresa, more than a year after this meeting, that she disclosed Luis and Claudia had come to request a loan. “They didn’t want everyone else to know”, Tía Teresa explained. “Suppose you had told someone else, it’s their pride isn’t it, they don’t want to feel bad, feel ashamed, feel less-than in front of other people (sentirse mal, sentirse vergüenza, sentirse menos delante de los demás)”. Likewise, when I asked my comadre what my goddaughter Ofelia had done with the t’iri (Ay. pin)35 money she had received from her first communion, she flushed with shame and looked visibly uncomfortable. She explained that she had had to borrow the money from her daughter to pay for Jhon’s application to college. Then she leaned forward and cupped my face in her hands, imploring: “you aren’t going to tell anyone, are you comadrita preciosa? They could laugh at me”.

Concern that others might find out about and be derisive of their situation was a frequent feature of conversations about debt with those who borrowed money. People who had solicited loans from others would only explain these to me on condition of my silence. “You’re not going to tell your comadre, are you?”, Tía Isabel asked me as we sat down for a formal interview about her debts. I promised I would not. “Take care that you don’t let her listen to my recording”, she warned. Similarly, there was an assumption that ‘good’ lenders would keep quiet about the loans they had made in order to protect the borrower from malicious gossip. When I mentioned in passing the large loan that Tía Flor had made to Tía Teresa’s god-children, Luis and Claudia, Teresa was quick to critique Flor’s loose lips: “how is it that you know that Flor has lent Luis and Claudia that S/. 40,000? Because she talks […] no-one has asked her, she’s just telling people herself. Other people do it [loan] secretly, that’s the way it should be. Why should people have to know that someone has borrowed money?”. She likened it to “being in the market square”, where everyone knew everyone

35 This is money that is pinned to a dress or suit, usually during a first communion or wedding celebration. T’iri comes from the Aymara verb t’iriña, to pin.
else’s business. Tía Teresa perhaps had good reason to be concerned, because she also occasionally borrowed money from Tía Flor. Borrowers desired secrecy, but were also acutely aware that this could not always be assured, particularly if they did not return their debts on time or if an argument developed in future. Some people preferred soliciting bank loans rather than asking people from the village, as these could usually be conducted without others’ knowing. As Douglas Hollan and Jason Throop assert, “first person knowledge of others in the context of everyday social practice is rarely, if ever, considered an unambiguously good thing” (2008: 389). Thus, the kind of proximity and intimate knowledge of others’ financial affairs discussed above, which animates loan-making and engenders the empathetic recognition of others’ needs, also carries with it the risk that this knowledge could be made public and could subject the borrower to critique.

Bernard Williams, writing on shame in Ancient Greece, suggests that shame is about “being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition” (2008: 78). Thus while it was necessary and important to have people to turn to in their time of need, this was tempered by a recognition that “getting by with others’ money” was the ‘wrong condition’ for people to be in. Olivia Harris (2007: 137) argues that for people in the Andes, work is “an affirmation of personhood and the community to which they belong”, and working hard, unlike the ambivalence which shrouds many discussions of work in Western contexts across several philosophical traditions from Greek ethics onward, is considered to be a value in and of itself. Like Harris’ Laymi peasants in Bolivia, people in Suma Marka valued hard work as a means to “live well” (ibid) and were accordingly disdainful of those in the community who they perceived as being less hardworking (see also Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). Repeatedly borrowing from others then, or as my interlocutors termed it “living borrowed” (viviendo prestado, see also Han 2011: 16 on a similar concept in Chile), carried with it the unwelcome connotation that one was not working hard enough, was lazy, or shirking their responsibilities to their families by profiting from the fruits of others’ labour—as Tía Isabel’s final, frustrated comment about Señora Maria above attests.

Another person considered to be “living borrowed” was Tía Fausta, who took over from Luis as president of the village in 2017. Following a meeting of the quinoa cooperative in late 2016, Fausta sidled up to me and, in a low voice, asked to borrow S/. 50 for her daughter’s schoolbooks, which I fished out of my pocket and handed to her as circumspectly as I could
manage. Clearly however, not circumspectly enough for other the eagle-eyed Tías who never missed a trick. On our way back to her house after the meeting, Tía Dominga eyed me suspiciously and demanded to know if I had lent Fausta money: “she has children at home but she is always borrowing from people, S/. 50 from you, S/. 20 from me, another S/. 50 from my comadre the other week, that’s how she gets by (así anda ella, literally “that’s how she walks”), that’s not good, that. Doesn’t she have hands (a caso no tiene mano), why can’t she work?”.

Clearly, recognition of suffering and hardship does not preclude people from also making judgements about others’ circumstances. Evaluations of their conduct as unethical or problematic, made by lenders themselves or by third parties, fosters shame among borrowers.

In addition to a correlation between borrowing and laziness, structural features of the loan relationship itself could also create space for the emergence of shame. Many anthropologists of the Andes have noted that reciprocity—“the give and take of connections and deeply embedded relations” (Leinaweaver 2008a: 80)—is a central feature of the ideology and practice of rural communities, a key linchpin of social and moral organisation. Catherine Allen (1988: 93) suggests that reciprocity occupies such a central position in community imaginaries that it can be described as a “pump at the heart of Andean life”. Consequently in Suma Marka, ideal exchanges are reciprocal and emphasise a formal equivalence between exchange partners—“today for me, tomorrow for you (hoy por mi, mañana por ti)” is the common refrain. This can be an exchange of like-for-like (like the ayni relationships discussed below) or comprise other exchanges, such as minka, an exchange of labour for payment in crops. In a classic analysis of Andean exchange, Mayer (2002: 116) distinguishes between reversible and irreversible forms of minka, suggesting that irreversible relationships institute a hierarchy between “social unequals”. These emulate asymmetric patron-client relationships dating back to the colonial period, which as Starn (1999: 76) notes, also incorporated the extension of small loans.

It is therefore unsurprising, I suggest, that contemporary loans in Suma Marka are ethically troubling for their recipients—for they also take on the form of a unidirectional, and potentially irreversible, exchange. Firstly, over the duration of a single loan transaction, there is no possibility of the borrower and the lender exchanging roles. Although a return is made with the repayment of the loan, meaning that a loan superficially follows the classic tripartite
gift structure of giving, receiving and reciprocating first outlined by Mauss (1990 [1950]), this is not conceived of as a reciprocation in kind. Rather, it is understood as a more straightforward return of money that remains someone else’s. Mauss’ concept of the hau of the gift, albeit critiqued as a poorly-interpreted over-reach (see for example Firth 1959; Sahlins 1972; Levi-Strauss 1987 [1950]), might prove relevant when theorising loan-making here. Specifically, his proposal that a gift retains “something of [the giver]. Through it the giver has a hold over the beneficiary just as, being its owner, he has a hold over the thief” (p. 12). In Suma Marka, money which had been loaned interpersonally retained a close association with its lender, even as the borrower had use of it and (at least theoretically) could dispose of it as they chose. As Tía Isabel explained categorically: “it’s not your money, however you can, you have to get it back to them”. Carmen, recalling a dispute she had with Tía Luzmilla and Tío Simón, cousins that she often borrowed money from, noted how Simón had shouted at her: “here you are, going out with my money (saliendo con mi plata; emphasis mine)”. Through the persistent association of the money with its lender, borrowers remained in the role of borrower throughout the duration of the exchange–through giving, receiving, and crucially, returning the loan–remaining in a subordinate position to the lender.

Secondly, the specific condition of receiving a loan as a favour also contributed to borrowers’ shame. Even though a loan could be completed and the particular monetary debt discharged, the ‘favour’ one had incurred might linger, making the borrower doubly indebted: first to the loan, and then to the favour. Indeed, in certain cases lenders wanted it to–recall Tía Flor’s hope above that people would remember that she had loaned them money and would look out for her daughter after her death. However, this hinged on the possibility that the borrower would be in sufficiently solvent circumstances to be able to reciprocate when the lender was in need. Tía Isabel acknowledged this when she discussed the credit and debt relationships she maintained with her brother and sister: “favour by favour we loan each other money, that’s the way it should be” (favor a favor nos prestamos plata, así debe ser). Some fifteen years prior, when she was working as a cook in the hospital in Puno, she had money available and was able to make loans to her older brother Gerardo and his wife Teresa when they asked. However over the years, episodic employment and precarious finances meant she had become, in her terms, someone who “only borrows, I don’t lend”. Leinaweaver (2008a: 80), writing on orphanages in Peru, has suggested that these are considered to be immoral. “An orphanage only gives”, she notes, leaving its wards in a position of shameful dependency as
they are unable to return the gift. Likewise, being caught in a cycle of ‘only’ borrowing leaves a borrower stuck, unable to repay the favour. Although loans in Suma Marka are acknowledged to be ‘cancelled’ by the return of the money loaned, the ongoing “mutual implication” (Guyer 2012: 500) of the favour could contribute to an enduring feeling of indebtedness to others that was subject to the contingencies of future circumstance. In such circumstances, what should ideally be a relationship of mutual aid between kin and neighbours instead takes on the trappings of a hierarchical one between those who are in the enviable position of having money to lend (Mayer 2002; Graeber 2014), and those whose circumstances compel them to repeatedly borrow, leading borrowers to feel “less than”.

Reciprocity: from the ayni of labour to the ayni of things

While interpersonal loans were made within an ambivalent space of empathetic recognition and shame, other forms of debt-like relationships did not carry the same stigma in Suma Marka. In this section, I discuss the practice of ayni, a form of reciprocal exchange common across both Quechua and Aymara-speaking communities in the Peruvian Andes. Comparing interpersonal debt relationships and ayni exchanges illuminates the contours of different debt relationships (see also Ferraro 2004). Like an interpersonal loan, ayni was considered to be a form of debt as it carried the same connotations of owing (ibid). “There goes my ayni”, Magaly nudged me as we stepped out of the local kiosk and caught sight of a bowler-hatted Señora boarding a combi, meaning Magaly owed her a crate of beer. “We always have to remember our aynis, you’ve got it on your mind like a debt (lo tienes en la mente como deuda)”. However, as I will demonstrate below, where interpersonal loans are not necessarily good debts to incur, ayni debts are celebrated as a marker of social prestige, even as the latter have transformed significantly over time: from labour to objects, and from exchange of money to exchange of beer.

For most Andean anthropologists, particularly those active from the 1960s to the 1990s, ayni refers to a practice of reciprocal labour exchange. Peter Gose (1991: 43) defines ayni as an “interhousehold mutual aid relationship” primarily centred around the “exchange of working days” for tasks such as house building, field clearing and crop sowing, and herding. Harris (1982) complexifies this further, suggesting that ayni exchange emerges from “a shortage of labour defined as proper to one sex only”, using the example of a widow who enters an ayni
exchange with a man to plough her fields (ploughing being ‘male’ activity, while sowing is ‘women’s work’). When asked to explain the principle of ayni, most people in Suma Marka replied: “today for me, tomorrow for you”. As such, it differs from ‘helping’ relationships which take place between close kin without the expectation of return in kind (Harris 1982; Mitchell 1991: 65), from work for payment, and from other forms of asymmetrical labour exchange such as minka, the exchange of crops for labour (noted above).

Crucially, what distinguishes ayni labour from other forms of exchange is the obligation to return labour in kind (where kind can mean the same form of labour, or alternatively its gendered equivalent), leading many to describe it as a form of egalitarian exchange (ibid). This may take the form of large work parties (see Walsh-Dilley 2017), or a smaller-scale exchange between one or several people. Although some scholars have claimed that ayni is a form of generalised reciprocity (see Paerregaard 2017: 462), I suggest that this form of exchange is more akin to what Marshall Sahlins (1972) would call balanced reciprocity, meaning ayni—like most gifts in non-Western societies and many gifts in Western societies—is not simply given. People take account of who is giving what, and there are strict rules of, and felt obligations to, return in kind. Many anthropologists of the Andes, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, highlighted the positive aspects of ayni for group maintenance, social cohesion and solidarity, and the sharing of tasks (e.g. Isbell 1978; Allen 1988). Recently, Harvey (2018: 124) has noted that ayni is an affective form of labour which specifically generates a “sense of collective endeavour”. Others have deployed a critical perspective, arguing that the capacity to recruit labour through ayni is differentially distributed among households, and moreover that use of ayni indexes a level of relative wealth, as forming an ayni-based work party requires sufficient capital to be able to provide food and drink for the labourers, and enough labour capacity within the household to be able to return the labour in kind when required (Paerregaard 2017). By contrast, those who are less well-off are less likely to engage in ayni relations as they typically do not have large landholdings which would require this kind of collective effort. Finally, those who are more well-off may prefer to emphasise their distance from necessity by contracting labour rather than enmeshing themselves in ongoing ayni obligations (Mitchell 1991).

As Paerregard (2017) has ably demonstrated in his discussion of ayni relations among Peruvian transnational migrants from the Colca region, ayni patterns have undergone a
significant shift in contemporary Peru. Labour exchange is on the decline, but “while ayni is disappearing in some areas of social life (in agriculture and house construction, etc), it is re-emerging in another (*fiesta* sponsoring)” (p. 466). A similar pattern is occurring in Suma Marka, with a shift from the *ayni* of labour to the *ayni* of things—namely, the exchange of crates of beer at *fiestas*. Paerregard cites a number of factors influencing this transition in Colca, including out-migration (see also Altamirano 2010), the introduction of modern technologies such as the tractor, an ageing population and declining household size, and the emergence of a tourist economy, all of which diminish the pool of available labour, the time people have to dedicate to reciprocal exchange, and the need for particular kinds of labour. Very similar factors have influenced shifts in *ayni* exchanges in Suma Marka.

Indeed, the influx of cash into Andean villages through wage labour means that people have less time to devote to reciprocal labour, and more money to spend on occasional expenses, such as hosting and attending *fiestas* (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Paerregard 2017). Since the growth of cities in Peru after the second World War, many young men in particular began to leave villages in large numbers in search of opportunities to earn cash in neighbouring cities, a pattern which Teófilo Altamirano (2010) notes intensified in the 1980s and 1990s following the civil war, creating translocal households whose composition changes over time. Even among those men who still live in the village more permanently, many work in nearby townships and neighbouring cities like Puno or Juliaca, commuting up to three hours daily each way while their wives remain on the farm to carry out domestic and agricultural chores (see Introduction). This makes it very difficult for them to be able to return labour in kind—people are not always available when you need them, and many of the women, who are now getting older, claim they are “too old” to repay some forms of labour like-with-like. Tía Teresa explained, as she was winding a woven belt around her waist to hold in an old hernia, that certain tasks like mending rock fences required too much heavy lifting for women in their 50s and 60s, “we can’t do it like before when we were young”. Consequently, she would prefer to pay others to help rather than obligate herself to assist in a task that might now be beyond her physical capacities. Moreover, she could not mobilise other labour in her household to return the *ayni*—her two adult children lived in the city, and her husband Gerardo worked six days a week as a medical assistant at a hospital in Puno, so they “did not have time”.
People also increasingly wanted to be paid in return for their labour in the village, usually in cash, rather than have the burden of returning in kind. This was a common concern around harvest, when people required significant additional labour beyond the household (Walsh-Dilley 2017), and in housebuilding, both forms of labour which were previously undertaken through reciprocal exchange. As Hector explained in one of our interviews:

the work that people do now has a cost. Now people want to charge S/. 40, S/. 50, S/. 60 daily. Now there isn’t as much *ayni* like before, it’s disappearing. And now the houses are changing too. Now it’s no longer adobe with a thatched roof, it’s just bricks, breeze blocks, cement, concrete roofs, even corrugated iron roofs aren’t as common anymore [and] brick is more durable than adobe, with adobe you’ve got to recover it every so often, it needs maintaining. But brick is like stone, it lasts, it stays up.

As Penny Harvey (2010) argues, the material affordances of an influx of newer materials like concrete and brick can have unexpected social effects. Hector’s reference to the changing nature of houses indexes a much wider series of social and material changes, which mean that now people want to be paid for labour which they specialise in—like house building and rethatching—that formerly would have been part of an *ayni* exchange and something every adult could perform (see Gose 1991). *Ayni* exchanges also happen less often, because houses are built with more durable materials that require less maintenance, and therefore offer fewer opportunities for labour exchange.

*Apxata* as *ayni*: reciprocity and ‘the good’

Yet while the *ayni* of labour has declined in recent years, *ayni* has re-emerged in the exchange of things (Paerregard 2017). Specifically, this involves the exchange of red plastic crates of 12 x 250ml bottles of beer. The gifting of crates of beer as *ayni* is also known in Aymara as *apxata*, which comes from the verb *apxatana*, "to put on top of something"—in this instance, to stack a crate. *Apxata* are given by guests to hosts at all Catholic and secular festivals, marriages, baptisms, hair cuttings, and roof-raising events, which, alongside football and volleyball matches, are the main form of leisure activity in the rural Andes. The exchanges usually take place after a shared meal, to mark the onset of the main *fiesta* activity
of drinking and dancing, and follow a broadly similar pattern. The following excerpt of an *apxata* exchange is taken from my field notes at the wedding of José and Julia, a young couple from a neighbouring village now living in Lima, who were married on 22 October 2016:

By early afternoon, we returned from the religious and civil ceremonies in the town, stopping to take the ‘honeymoon’ photographs at the *chullpas* in Suma Marka before meeting up with the rest of the guests to process into José’s natal village, twirling white handkerchiefs as we danced in two lines down the long dirt road. The procession ended in the field outside José’s parents’ house, where they had erected a small stage for the band and a covered table for the wedding party. Several vendors from the township had arrived earlier in the day with their trucks to set up temporary kiosks with parasols around the edge of the field, selling crates of beer, soft drink, sweets, and even fried chicken to the wedding-goers. It struck me as noteworthy that even a wedding is an opportunity to make a sale, but when I mentioned this to Magaly, she explained that the vendors will have been invited by José’s parents so that people can give *apxata*—the crates are heavy and it’s difficult for people to purchase and carry them all the way out to the reception on their own. For a while people danced and milled about, then lunch was served: first a soup, and then a pork *asado*. After the meal, Hector made a toast, and we all drank to the couple. Then, the brass band started to play and people began to dance rhythmically in a circle, passing around a bottle of beer and a glass for all to share.

Gradually, the guests drifted toward the vendors to purchase crates of beer. Lugging the crates, one in each hand or shared between two, they jostled into position, forming a line of couples with women on the left and men on the right. Someone held up a hand to the band, which stopped so that everyone could focus on the exchange. “Come here, come here”, people called out, gesturing for Magaly and Hector to receive them—as the *padrinos mayores*, they were considered to be one of the ‘hosts’ of the *fiesta* alongside the couple, and therefore received *apxata*. At the head of the line were Magaly and Hector’s own godparents by marriage, followed by extended kin and then other friends and acquaintances, and finally single men and women—relational proximity and coupled status grants priority in the *apxata* queue. Each couple set down a crate of beer at their feet, which slowly grew into a small tower as successive crates were stacked, one on top of another. Magaly and Hector greeted each pair, bringing their gendered opposite in for an embrace and thanking them for their gift, receiving handfuls of *mistura* (confetti) on their heads from the guests, and then inviting them to drink two small cups of wine each
in a manner reminiscent of Communion, a feature of religious fiestas which was intended to symbolise the blood of Christ. Hector’s sister Vanesa—a non-drinker—hovered dutifully nearby with a pen and a notebook, in order to write down the names and numbers of crates given by each guest into two hastily-ruled columns because, as people explained, “the mind is fragile”. This record of crates owed was to be kept by the couple and used to ensure that the correct number of apxata would be returned to the giver/s when they were next hosting a fiesta. To complete the exchange, Hector removed a par (pair)—two bottles of beer—for each crate given, which was returned to the giver as the receiver’s cariño (Sp. token of affection). These were taken back by the guests to small groups of their “people” to pass around and drink in small groups, and continue the fiesta.

Unlike Paerregard’s (2017) Colca Valley migrants, the apxata ‘donors’ (his term) are not routinely heralded in Suma Marka beyond the quiet thanks uttered at the point of exchange. Nevertheless, the beer exchanged as apxata is understood as “collaboration” which supports the fiesta through a form of distributed credit.36 Each person gives one or more crates of beer,

36 I use the word credit intentionally here, following Peebles’ (2010) observation that credit is often viewed as productive. While apxata is also perceived as a debt to be repaid, at the moment of exchange when the crates are
and the combined total received by the hosts are on-sold during and after the fiesta, first to fiesta-goers and then to beer-sellers in the neighbouring town. This is done in order to recoup some of the many costs of hosting: booking, feeding, and watering the brass band, hiring a separate orquesta to play in the evening, preparing the greasy (and delicious) marinated meat asado, renting a venue if the fiesta is not being held in the village, buying hosts’ sashes and new clothes to wear, plus other smaller expenses which combined can stretch out into the tens of thousands of soles (and much more, in wealthier communities). Hosting a fiesta is a significant expense, far too much for one or two families to absorb alone without significant advance planning, saving, and/or going into debt (Mitchell 1991; Harris 1989). Tía Laura, as part of her role as delegate for her sector of the village for the year, was charged with hosting the fiesta of Carnavales in March 2016 alongside her older brother Gerardo. Their combined total costs for the fiesta were around S/. 16,000 (£4,000), which were split evenly between the two hosts. She had to take out a bank loan of S/. 7,000 (£1750) to cover her half of the costs, which she planned to pay back monthly over a 24-month term. Thus, the more apxata hosts received, the greater their capacity to discharge the expense incurred in hosting.

Yet having apxata was also about “having people (teniendo gente)”, as the larger the apxata stack, the greater the numbers of guests the host had been able to command. This is because apxata, like the classic Maussian gift (1990 [1950]), appear to be voluntarily given, but are in fact an obligatory condition of fiesta attendance. Fiestas in Suma Marka are public occasions, meaning that while invitations may be sent out to specific guests, anyone from the community can attend the drinking and dancing – provided they bring apxata. As Tía Azucena categorically explained, “you can’t just go to a fiesta, you have to come with apxata”. For Lisbeth, who hosted the fiesta of the Virgin of the Nativity in the nearby town of Qhatu Marka on the 8th of September, 2016, the initiation of an apxata prestation was a recognition of her social standing and esteem: “it will be the people that appreciate you, the people that think well of you, that come with their token of appreciation, which here we call “apxatas”, others come to fulfil their obligations, say if I’d gone to one of their fiestas or their wedding, and now they’ve returned that to me, and then there’s others who come that are going to host a fiesta later on, so I will go [to their fiesta] and return their apxata to them”. In comparison to wealthier areas, apxata prestations in rural areas like Suma Marka were small.

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stacked high and the wealth of the hosts’ social connections is made apparent, credit is perhaps the most appropriate term.
I heard rumours that in the neighbouring city of Juliaca, a city awash with mining money and the profits of untaxed contraband smuggled across the border from Bolivia, people would give as much as 20 or 30 crates of beer, which photos and videos of towering stacks of crates posted online confirmed (see also Paeregaard 2017: 469). By contrast, 1-2 crates was the norm in the community. In both contexts, however, the apxata stack was a manifestation of material and social wealth, a visible marker of status and prestige on the part of the host. Significantly, however, this extension of credit was not contingent on the same level of intimacy that marked personal loans. While acknowledging the significant financial undertaking of the hosts, they do not require intimate knowledge or disclosure of the host’s expenditure on the fiesta in order to make a contribution towards this.

Another significant aspect of ayni, in both labour exchange and the exchange of apxata, lies in the roles that people perform at the point of giving, receipt, and return. Unlike the interpersonal loans discussed above, these roles are interchangeable. When a person makes an apxata prestation, they do so as a guest at the hosts’ fiesta. The host receives the apxata as a host, yet when they return the apxata, they do so as a guest. Similarly, in an ayni work party, labourers are hosted by their ayni partners, and host workers in return. In most discussions of (balanced) reciprocity, a relative symmetry in what is given is what makes the exchange balanced. Sahlins (1972: 193), for example, in constructing a continuum of reciprocity, writes that “the stipulation of material returns, less eloquently, the “sidedness” of exchange, would be the critical thing”. To this, Mayer (2002) has introduced the concept of reversibility of exchange, that is, whether an exchange operates in two directions. Building on this and emphasising role performance, I suggest that we might consider that the interplay of positionality over the course of the exchange—in this instance, the capacity for both sides to act as hosts and guests—is a significant factor in ‘balancing’ a ceremonial exchange.

In the Andean context, being an alferado (Sp. host) and offering hospitality to others in the context of a fiesta is a particularly significant social role. It is a marker of adulthood and full community membership (Buechler 1980), the performance of a public service which “bring[s] happiness to the people” (Mayer 2002: 127), and in religious fiestas, an opportunity to demonstrate devotion to a particular saint or virgin (ibid; see also Paerregaard 2017). If gifts produce persons, then apxata exchanges specifically produce hosts and guests, through a public recognition of this social role and the costs incurred in performing it. This argument
may appear to reinstate the perception that *apxata* exchanges are fundamentally egalitarian, running counter to recent work such as Paerregaard’s (2017: 471) who categorically asserts that “ayni never took place on an equal footing for everybody, even though it has often been perceived this way”. He argues that *ayni* exchange in Cabanaconde is limited to a small group of migrants who have the financial capital available to host fiestas, generating forms of cooperation which are ideologically egalitarian, but which in fact produce a “schismogenetic rivalry” for status and prestige (p. 470). However, in Suma Marka, *fiesta* hosting was not concentrated in this way. The most significant *fiestas* in Suma Marka, which included the religious festival of *Carnavales* and the community anniversary, were part of rotating *cargos* held on an annual basis by two delegates from each of the seven sectors of the village (see also Chapter Four). These were a shared responsibility which would eventually be required of all adult *comuneros* as a condition of community membership. Smaller *fiestas patronales* (Sp. *fiestas* for patron saints of particular sectors) were considered ‘voluntary’, and did not occur on such a large scale. Thus, while mindful of differences in people’s economic circumstances and their capacity to host, I want to emphasise here the practices which produce and assert a formal equivalence between exchange partners, even as *fiesta* expenditure may vary. Moreover, as Lisbeth’s statement above implies, *apxata* exchanges are defined by the ongoing and multiple nature of these transactions. In any given *fiesta*, some people may be initiating a new *ayni* relationship, or returning an *ayni* already given. This temporal juxtaposition further complicates *apxata* positionality, implying cyclical relationships where people were at once extending and receiving credit across their social networks—that is, acting as both borrower and lender, gaver and receiver.

*Reciprocity’s discontents: changing ‘things’ from t’iri to beer*

While people conceived of *ayni* as ‘good debt’ and actively sought to have *apxata* partners at their *fiesta*, it would be disingenuous to construe the giving and receipt of *apxata* as entirely morally unproblematic. As more emphasis has been placed on the reciprocity of gifts rather than labour, there has also been a shift in the kinds of gifts which are given—from gifts of money to gifts of beer—which has allowed some of the tensions inherent in *apxata* exchange to become particularly evident. In my interlocutors’ parents’ and grandparents’ generation, when money was comparatively scarce, people brought coins to *fiestas* which were received by the hosts in a small cloth. Then, as incomes and inflation increased and notes became
more widespread, people would contribute to fiestas through t’iri (Ay. pin money): “[the host’s] jackets would be pinned from their waists to their heads with money, and the following day, we counted it out, how much, who had given it, we wrote it down just like we do today”. Hosts provided the alcohol, which was usually some form of distilled spirits bought from the market, or homemade liquor mixed with soft drink or boiled water. However over the past twenty-odd years\(^{37}\), enterprising vendors from nearby towns began to promote the consumption of commercial beers such as Trujillo, Cusqueña, and Cristal in the countryside, ferrying crates by truck to people’s houses in anticipation of fiestas. Tía Laura explained: “They gave us the beer for free, they would bring you 50 crates and they would leave it for you, and you didn’t even have to give them a cent. And if you drank it, then what you have drunk you had to pay for, and what you didn’t drink they would take. That’s how the beer companies did it, in order to profit more”. The consequence of this has been that beer or apxata, rather than money, is now the predominant form of fiesta gift. T’iri still featured, particularly among religiously-observant kin who may feel obligated to attend a kin-member’s fiesta but do not wish to contribute to or participate in the consumption of alcohol, and at particular celebrations, such as baptisms and communions where people wanted to give gifts to children. However, the vast majority of ayni at fiestas is given in the form of apxata.

The changing materiality of fiesta ayni has resulted in a new series of ethical affordances (Keane 2016). Harris (1989: 244) has suggested that money is “neutral” in the Andes, by which she means that it does not carry the same kind of baggage which permeates understandings of money in Western social theory: “the flow of cash in the ayllu economy is limited for practical rather than cultural or ideological reasons”. As such, I argue that embedding the gift in the object of beer for the duration of the fiesta, rather than abstracting it in money, produces moral concern. As a gift which is both intended to contribute to the festivities themselves and to be sold during or after the fiesta to recoup the costs of hosting, beer is uniquely subject to a reciprocal tension which emerges at the intersection of needing to both give and receive. Principally these concerns centered around the erosion of the value of the gift, which could occur in multiple ways. Of primary concern for hosts was their guests

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\(^{37}\) People I spoke to could not remember exactly when beer became a central feature of fiesta consumption, estimating that this had occurred somewhere between the 1990s and early 2000s. This tallies with Harvey’s (1991: 7) work, based on ethnographic research conducted in the 1980s, where she suggests that commercial beer was too expensive to form part of routine fiesta consumption at this time.
drinking too much of the beer they have gifted. As I have noted above, the accepted practice was to return two bottles to the giver as cariño, a token of affection. However, wanting equally to ensure a good party and be a generous host meant that people could feel under pressure to acquiesce to later requests for more alcohol, particularly from their relatives and compadres lest they be considered stingy in their affections, and from the band, lest they stop playing and ruin the fiesta. The consumption of alcohol is what makes the occasion a sociable one. As Harvey has noted, “drinking is of paramount importance to the ritual life of Andean people” (1991: 7), as it is the primary means of connecting with Pachamama and other divine cosmological beings (see also Harris 1989; Allen 1988). As such, being drunk was a necessary element of a good fiesta: “if the people aren’t drunk, they don’t dance”, Tía Isabel explained, “and if they don’t dance, it’s not a party”. Tía Laura found it especially difficult to refuse Tío Rodolfo during the 2016 fiesta of Carnavales:

with apxatas, they get used up, the people that give them they just drink them themselves. Somebody who likes a drink, for example, my brother Rodolfo, the ex-policeman, he likes a drink, and he gives you two crates of beer, and then asks for more than he’s supposed to get in return, two bottles, two bottles, another two bottles, and then he’s already drunk a whole crate, it’s gone. It’s so that they can drink it themselves, that’s what the people who drink are like … they come and you’ve got to give it to them, you’ve just got to give it to them (her emphasis). And the band came to ask for some more too, I’d already given them five crates, and they came and asked for more, and I ended up giving them another crate so that’s six in total, plus the ones my other brother had given them.

In the past, all of the alcohol for the fiesta would have been pre-purchased at a local market, and therefore a fixed cost to which t’iri or other gifts of money would contribute. Gifting beer, however, is a different material proposition: the expectation to consume, and continue consuming, is significant. In the evening after Carnavales, when all the family members had decamped from the field back to the house, I overheard Tía Teresa catch two of her nephews drunkenly attempting to steal some beers from the remaining crates that they had brought back to the homestead. She rebuked them strongly, telling them “here we respect the house”, and suggested that if they wanted to continue drinking, they could purchase the beer from her instead. Similarly, an over-zealous return of cariño can inadvertently erode the value of the original gift, so this must be managed carefully. Tía Laura estimated that after inviting her
guests to drink, she only received around a 1/3 of the value of each crate, meaning that the *apxata* “is not very beneficial”. As Candea and Da Col (2015: S1) have noted, the extension of hospitality hinges on tensions between “generosity and parasitism”, which are further complicated when the beer is at once the basis of a good party *and* the credit generated to offset the party’s costs.

Other people noted that the delay between the gift and the return of an *apxata* could cause imbalances. Tía Isabel complained to me, on the morning following her hosting of *Carnavales* in 2015 as we tallied up the remaining crates and reconciled them with the original list, that she could be waiting “years and years” to “complete” the return of each *apxata* to its original giver. In the interim, the beer would have gone up in price. She considered that the value of the *apxata* she was given would be less than what she eventually returned. Her fears of inflation were not misplaced, as a crate of 12 Trujillo, the cheapest and therefore most popular beer on offer, was a median price of S/. 49 at the first *fiesta* I attended in 2015, and S/. 52 at the last, almost two years later. Alongside the issue of delayed return is the more immediate issue of returning the plastic crates and glass bottles to the giver on the day of the *fiesta*. This is because these items have a monetary value in themselves, and need to either be purchased alongside the alcohol at a higher price, usually double the cost of the beer, or loaned and returned to the vendor before the end of the day, who keeps track of who they have loaned crates and bottles by list (in a manner not dissimilar from the *apxata* lists).

Usually this is managed relatively easily. One of the (seemingly endless) tasks before the *fiesta* is to dust off empty crates and bottles squirreled away in storage rooms in anticipation of these returns, and during the *fiesta* family members weave in and out of the circles of dancers and drinkers, snatching up empty bottles to complete sets of twelve which are returned to each giver and marked off on the *apxata* list. However, bottles routinely get smashed and crates lost in the hubbub of the festivities. The cost of replacing these is not significant in the grand scheme of *fiesta* spending, but nevertheless the thought of losing money unnecessarily can sting. Following the *Carnavales* celebrations in March 2016, which ended abruptly in the early afternoon as the sky opened out into torrential rain, Tía Laura lost the crates which she had handed out members of her brass band *Huaracán* as everyone ran to their cars and left the *fiesta*. When I spoke to her several weeks later, she was still smarting from the memory: “the rain started to come down and everyone ran, and they didn’t return
the crates to me, so I owe people around six crates, crates that I’ve lost this year […] and now I have to pay for them”. Consequently, while completed *apxata* exchanges emphasised mutual solidarity and respect through an interchange of the roles of host and guest, the production of slight imbalances—a consequence of the specific material and temporal configurations of *apxata* gifting—remained materially and morally troubling for Suma Marqueños. The persistence of these concerns, however, demonstrates the overwhelming importance of strict equivalence in reciprocal exchange, even when this is materially difficult to achieve.

**Conclusion**

Not all debts are created equal. This chapter has provided a comparison of two kinds of debt-relations in Suma Marka—interpersonal loans and *apxata* prestations. I have drawn on Mayer’s (2002) concept of exchange directionality to make a case for distinguishing loans from gifts on the basis of their differing moral valuations. The chapter describes how interpersonal loans operate at the ambiguous intersection of gestures of care, mutual recognition, and secretive shame, while *apxata* exchanges remain a central, highly visible, and celebrated feature of *fiestas*. In analysing why interpersonal loans are morally troubling and embarrassing for Suma Marqueño borrowers, I have suggested that the characteristics of these loans are double-edged. The intimacy which disclosure of need affords in interpersonal loans invites both empathetic recognition and uncomfortable proximity, meaning many prefer only to borrow from close kin and trusted others, or in more extreme cases, from banks to prevent the spread of knowledge about their financial affairs. Additionally, while a particular loan may be discharged through repayment, the favour of extending a loan in the first instance can often endure. This provides mutual obligation and support over the long-term, and potentially places people in a position where—depending on circumstance—they may not ever be in a position to return the favour. Finally, and most significantly, the form and temporality of the exchange positions borrowers in a subordinate status to their lender throughout and potentially beyond the exchange as they make use of “other people’s money”. This is an active self-construction of suffering that borrowers perform in the hope of securing loans, but they are nevertheless concerned about how these could be perceived by the lender and others, opening the door to shame and humiliation. These findings demonstrate how ‘good’ acts—such as lending to someone in need—can also produce ‘bad’ subjects,
stratifying well-and less well-off kin and neighbours, and tainting these relations with the suspicion that someone appearing legitimately ‘in need’ may in fact be lazy or shirking. Munn (1986), writing on Gawan gifting exchange, has observed that the negative is a constant potentiality in every transaction. In her formulation, this is exemplified by the figure of the “excluded other” (p. 223) – that is, “the person who might otherwise have received, but didn’t”. Whereas in this context, such negative potentiality is internal to participants in the ‘good’ act of lending itself, indexed by the shame that borrowers feel in loan solicitation.

By contrast, ayni exchanges, as ceremonial prestations, are more straightforwardly ‘good’ debts to incur. Unlike interpersonal loans, ayni are understood as tokens of esteem, which help to defray the costs of fiesta hosting. They provide a contribution to the public good of a “good party”, recognising the financial sacrifice the host has made in facilitating this good, but without requiring the kind of intimate disclosure of expenditure which might put someone’s social standing at risk. Rather, they actively reinforce the social standing of the host through their capacity to materially display the ‘wealth’ of their social connections.

While others have suggested this leads to rivalry, I have argued that it is also important to focus on the formal equivalence which apxata exchange produces between exchange partners. This is achieved not only through a return in kind of crates of beer, but also through the constant reversal of hosts and guests roles. As such, many of the concerns which Suma Marqueños express regarding ayni relations in the context of apxata prestations are not directed at the nature of the social relationship and their positionality within it. Instead, they centre on the erosion of the value of the gift, evincing underlying concerns about strict equivalence. This becomes particularly acute when the gift is embedded in the object of beer crates rather than in money. I have demonstrated how beer routinely atrophies in material value over time and especially through the negative ethics of over-consumption which shades into theft, via breakages and spillage, and through market inflation.

In this chapter and the previous one, I have explored complex relationships between the bad and the good, demonstrating the centrality of negative ethics to people’s pursuit of the good. The remaining two chapters extend this focus, and highlight how negative ethics can be instrumentalised in service of other ends. In the next chapter, I consider in further detail how the wealth which enables the extension of interpersonal loans is the subject of envy, and how claims about the bad intentionality of others are mobilised in people’s self-constructions as
advancing, materially and socially.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE OTHER NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK: ENVY AND AMBITION IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE

One of my last days of fieldwork was spent at Tío Gerardo and Tía Teresa’s house complex, where I had passed my first and many subsequent days in the field, until it became a home I kept circling back to in between visits to other people. The previous evening, we had stayed up talking long into the night, huddling under woollen blankets and drinking sweet mate (Sp. tea) with bread as the wind howled and the power flickered off-on-off-on in their kitchen. The conversation was wide-ranging, but we had lingered over their fraught relationship with Tío Gerardo’s half-brother Rodolfo, which was a source of much concern, heartache, and frustration for the couple (see Chapter Two). When I readied myself to leave in the morning, Tío Gerardo was waiting at the makeshift gate to the property. We had repacked the rammed earth walls which enclosed the complex up above eye-level several weeks prior, so the gate was now the only real vantage-point out from the confines of the front yard. I stood and looked with him out and down the road that leads from the sector, isolated on the village’s western flank, and over the hills toward the rest of the village. “I’m going to miss you all, you have been so good to me”, I said, a ham-fisted attempt to put my gratitude into words. “Yes well (Si pues)”, Tío Gerardo sighed, “but the bad thing about here is that we’re all envious, we’re all selfish (lo malo de acá es que todos somos envidiosos, todos somos egoístas)”. He lapsed into silence again and we stood together contemplating the road for several more moments before I gave him a hasty hug and made my final goodbyes.

Tío Gerardo’s claim about the ubiquity of envy was not an uncommon narrative in community life, though his pronouncement seemed to me to be a particularly final one, made heavy with the weight of my upcoming departure. These sentiments were further bolstered by outsiders, including sermons in the nearby Catholic church which exhorted people to overcome their envy and work cooperatively with their fellow community members and socios (Sp. partners or co-shareholders in collective enterprises), and local authorities, who claimed that infighting made it too difficult for people to work with rural populations plagued by envious behaviour. “They are not ready to cooperate, too much envy, too much corruption, it would be impossible to work with them”, one official working with unions told me when I enquired whether their organisation was also supporting rural cooperatives such as
the quinoa cooperative Suma Jirwa (see Chapter Five). But it was Suma Marqueños themselves, more than anyone, who routinely and repeatedly lamented the envy of their fellow community members in general, and specific others in particular.

In this chapter I explore the kinds of work that claims about others’ envy and related concepts of selfishness and ambition do as a modality of social explanation, moral evaluation, and ethical critique. Here, I demonstrate how negative ethics are mobilised in social disputes, where the compelling explanatory force of envy can be used to compare oneself favourably to others and also to ward off criticism of one’s own behaviour. I begin with a consideration of envy and ambition as morally troubling and undesirable. I then explore how envy is expansively attributed to others in the course of everyday social interactions in Suma Marka. Here, my work builds on De Montoya (1996) and Van Vleet (2003; 2008) in arguing that people’s claims to be the target of others’ envy of others are forms of explicit moralizing that seek to legitimate the speaker’s wealth and social standing. I further conceptualise such envy attributions as a yardstick by which speakers measure and assert their ethical and material progress relative to others, imagining themselves as saliendo adelante (Sp. getting ahead) through the prism of others’ negative intentionality. However, claims about others’ envy are also made in situations where material concerns are less obviously or straightforwardly at stake. In these instances, attributing envy to someone else in a social dispute seeks to delegitimise what might otherwise be considered a valid critique by fixing it within a register of moral-material lack. This highlights the ethical affordances (Keane 2016) of negative comparison, and the strategic uses to which this may be put in everyday social life.

There is, however, a tension between wanting to be seen as someone who is enviable, and wanting to avoid the negative social consequences that envy can engender. In the second half of the chapter, I consider how envy and ambition manifest in collective affairs. While Suma Marqueños mobilise envy attributions to various ends in their interpersonal interactions, concern with and attempts to mitigate the emergence of envy and ambition are an important feature of communal activities, in order to maintain the fragile consensus that keeps such projects afloat. This is particularly marked in a public sphere which asserts a formal equivalence between community members, with associated expectations about benefitting equally from their engagement in communal life. I consider several examples of the distribution of communal resources, through prizes during a dance competition at Suma
Marka’s anniversary celebrations, and through drawing lots for livestock at a sheep and llama association meeting, which demonstrate different approaches to containing envy and ambition: removing competitive elements, and acquiescing to particular demands as a ‘good enough’ proxy for a fair distribution. Where previous literature has focused on envy avoidance through levelling mechanisms such as the *fiesta* complex (Foster 1965a, 1965b, 1972; De Vidas 2007), I suggest approaches to containing envy are rather more partial and ad-hoc, and focused more on mitigating the potential moral and social ruptures of possessing and expressing “ugly feelings”, than levelling wealth per se.

*Envy*

Envious feeling in Suma Marka could be most readily parsed through complaints about what other people have, and in rarer, much more severe instances, destructive or violent acts of *hechicería* (Sp. witchcraft) or *maldad* (Sp. evil) which target the envied person or possession. Rumours of envious acts circulated far and wide, including one particularly popular tale which I was told several times over, of a family in one of the villages in the *zona lago*, who had purchased a beautiful, fat new cow. Some even thought it could have been a Holstein, the black and white spotted Friesian cattle breed known for its abundant milk production and much admired by people in Suma Marka, for whom the hardier but significantly less productive Brown Swiss was the ubiquitous staple. The purchaser’s neighbours, envious of the cow, placed a needle in the cow’s feed of hay, causing the newly purchased animal to sicken and die. In another example, published in the regional newspaper *Diario Los Andes*, Graciela Pilco’s house was burnt down in a small community in Chucuito-Juli, South of Puno city. She was accused of murdering her 8-year old nephew, following his death in suspicious circumstances, and kidnapped by her siblings and other community members with the intention of burning her alive. Rescued by the local *teniente* and another sister, she went to file a complaint against her siblings at the police station, and returned to find her house on fire. Graciela, for her part, insisted that she had nothing to do with her nephew’s death and was not near him on the day he died. She instead attributed her siblings’ actions to envy: “according to Graciela, her siblings were always envious of her (*siempre le tuvieron envidia*), and were in permanent conflict over land, a fact that would have led to reaching these extremes” (Diario Los Andes 2019: n.p).
At the less destructive end of the spectrum, envy could be recognised through a range of other actions, such as *miramientos* (Sp. dirty looks, literally “looking”, but it also incorporates a notion of looking askance at someone, or with hostility toward someone), a general feeling of ill will toward others, indirect verbal criticism of how someone is behaving or malicious gossip with the intent of disrupting particular social relations (see also Van Vleet 2003), and social discord and disputes. When I asked people to explain what envy was, they described it as a feeling of “why does he have and I don’t, I should have the same as him (por qué él tiene, y yo no? Igual también yo debo tener)”. This gives rise to other negative emotions—feelings of envy could cause someone to hate another person, to feel personally aggrieved by what others had and what they lacked by comparison, leading people to “look badly” at or criticise others in anger. Others’ material possessions were the primary source of envy: “land, animals, cars—what more do we have to envy?”, Tía Isabel explained. However envy could also be aroused by employment, opportunities for getting ahead such as education, and other, less material differences, such an attractive partner, or having fewer children, as I explain in further detail below. *Envidia* (Sp. envy) in Suma Marka thus incorporates notions of desire, the frustrations of comparative material lack, and the ever-present spectre of socially destructive impulses which occasionally bubble over into violence (Ngai 2005). While violent envy was particularly concerning, all forms of envy, even dirty looks, were a source of concern and were explicitly commented on by Suma Marqueños.

Although people were very quick to identify others’ envy, being called envious was considered a personal insult, demeaning the person so attributed. This was felt to be particularly problematic, and therefore Suma Marqueños would never publicly describe themselves as envious, echoing similar reticence elsewhere (see for example, De Vidas 2007: 222; Van Vleet 2008: 50). “Never”, my *comadre* Carmen exclaimed categorically when I asked if she had felt envious of other community members, “I don’t involve myself with the affairs of others”. Like the “corruption talk” which Lazar (2008: 110) identifies in community politics in Bolivia, envious talk “serves […] to highlight the moral integrity of the teller”, being “always somewhere else and perpetuated by someone else”. Consequently, only very few people in Suma Marka would admit to having felt envy when I asked them directly in private—whispering and taking on a confessional tone when they disclosed even the most benign of envious feelings. Tía Teresa shut the door to her kitchen and drew me in close when she admitted to having felt envy for other women in the community who had more
opportunities for educational advancement and were therefore more adept at engaging in the capacity-building workshops offered by NGOs through the quinoa cooperative. As I noted in Chapter Two, Teresa had been sent away at the age of five to work as an empleadita (Sp. little servant) in the house of her godparents and patrones (Sp. masters) in Tacna. This had occurred during a particularly bad drought when her mother, widowed and recently remarried, could not afford to keep her, and had traded her labour in exchange for access to pasture.

Leinaweaver (2008a: 151) notes that “child circulation” is a common tactic of social mobility and poverty alleviation in the Peruvian Andes, but one which for the children involved was “often overlaid with a wash of sadness” because of the absence of cariño (Sp. affection) from their birth parents. Tía Teresa’s case was particularly tragic—she was forced to work long hours as a domestic servant in her first patrona’s house, was told to sleep outside with only a thin blanket “like a dog”, and was hit when she invariably wet the bed as the temperature dropped in the night. Tía Teresa had not returned to Suma Marka until after she had turned fourteen or fifteen (she couldn’t quite remember which), where her brother paid for her to attend and complete the primary schooling she had missed out on: “I only just got my D.N.I (national identity card), only just managed to finish primary school. Sometimes, I think, ‘they have more [education], and can do more’, and if I was in their position, if I had grown at my mother’s side, I would get ahead even more. Everyone else [in the cooperative] has a secondary school education”.

In a similar vein, Tía Lorena said that she occasionally coveted the land of others, as her parents’ small landholdings had left her with a dearth of pasture for her large flock of sheep, which numbered well over 80 animals. This meant that she had to rent pasture from other people, usually those who held land in Suma Marka but lived in the neighbouring village of Jisk’a Marka: “well of course we always look [at what other people have], she has land and I don’t have land, I could have land like that and be out there pasturing on my own land. I would be so happy pasturing there, I say in my heart sometimes”. It was not necessarily problematic to be aware of what other people had—Suma Marqueños were exceptionally observant of and sensitive to the material wealth and social positionings of others. But looking with ill-intent, and particularly ill-intent which gives rise to envious action, was immoral. Accordingly, Tía Teresa and Tía Lorena were at pains to point out that such
feelings had not, and would never, give rise to envious action against others. Both women suggested that they had instead worked hard to improve their own lot. Teresa had steeled herself to achieve the same as her more-educated counterparts, and to do even better: “Why can’t I do it? (es el caso que no puedo?) I’ve got hands, eyes, I can do it. Of course, one looks [at others], but I’m going to get ahead, better than them, I say to myself”. Likewise Lorena had dedicated herself to raising animals and saving money to purchase land, rather than coveting others’. This echoes the psychological concept of benign envy, where one’s envy of others acts as a spur for self-improvement (van de Ven et al. 2009).

People also attempted to eschew envy out of fear of God’s punishment. Continuing to justify her admission, Tía Teresa said that she did not act on her nascent feelings of envy because “you shouldn’t look [badly] at people, you shouldn’t insult people, you shouldn’t have envy, because it can also fall on us, that’s how it is. God is listening, they say, and it could fall on us even worse (peor a nosotros puede caer)”. Concerns around envy were therefore partially connected to and informed by the Catholic church’s teachings on envy. People explicitly linked envy’s origins in the community to the biblical story of Cain and Abel, the first sons of Adam and Eve from Genesis in the Old Testament. In this story, Cain kills Abel because he is envious of the favour God shows Abel’s sacrifice, in contrast to his own less impressive offering. The story of Abel and Cain was a favoured choice of Bible reading when masses were held for community associations, with priests exhorting association members to overcome their envy of one another and work collectively to achieve common goals. In Catholic teachings, envy is a cardinal or capital sin, sin which gives rise to other sin, meaning they are considered especially serious (Cole 2011). While Catholic theology suggests a complex series of causes of sin (ibid), many Suma Marqueños and others—including their priests—were convinced that envy was a ubiquitous feature of social life in the Andes, and part of “human nature” more generally. Lazar (2017), writing on ethics in Argentinean trade union movements, has noted how essential characteristics are understood to form an important part of people’s ethical self-making. Essences are, she suggests, not necessarily elements of the self that can be worked on, as they are only “partly amenable to self-reflection” (p. 202). Nevertheless, they significantly inform people’s subjectivation. In Suma Marka, envious behaviour was similarly paradoxical—at once understood to be an essential part of human nature and something which could be avoided through correct behaviour. Yet while the sinfulness of envy was clearly troubling, particularly for the more religiously
observant, in lay terms envy was primarily shameful because it implied a lack or deficiency on the part of the envying person (De Vidas 2007; see also Ngai 2005).

**Ambition**

Concerns about envy were pervasive and widely expressed, but Suma Marqueños were also troubled by others’ *ambición* (Sp. ambition), understood as actions where people appeared to be actively seeking to profit at the expense of another, or the community more generally. The epithet was often attached to people who were already well-off, such as Tía Flor, who was locally recognised to be a person of means (*de tener*) because of her sizeable landholdings, tractors, small outgoings, and her husband’s stable employment (see Chapter 3). Even as they relied on her for loans, Flor’s wealth attracted ongoing and repeated criticism from her surrounding neighbours. My *compadre* Arsenio was a particularly fierce critic, noting as we piled earth around his potatoes in a small plot that looked out toward Flor’s housing complex, that she had two tractors that she didn’t even use: “I bet you everyone around here hates her for what she has”. According to Tía Flor, he’d even once asked her, jokingly, if she was a *kharisiri*—a vampire-like figure who steals fat from Indians. At the time, Flor had “borne” this insult without comment, but nevertheless remembered it years later. This was a particularly cutting ‘joke’, because it implied that Flor—because of her significant wealth relative to other members of the community—was an outsider, someone who lives by stealing and selling the fat of others rather than engaging in properly reciprocal relationships (Canessa 2000; see also Wachtel 1994). Others accused her explicitly of being “ambitious”. When I went to stay with her cousin, Tía Angelica, we watched and waved as Flor crossed the small patch of land in front of Angelica’s house in the early evening and collected her flock of sheep, who had been staked there to graze for the day. When Flor was out of earshot, however, Angelica turned to me and complained, “she already has [a lot], but she wants more (*ya tiene, pero quiere más*). She explained the plot of land was owned by someone who lived on the other side of the village. Angelica felt that Flor, being her cousin, should have encouraged her to approach the owner in order to rent the land as pasture for her animals. Instead, Flor had arranged to rent the land herself and would walk her animals directly through Angelica’s potato patch to reach the pasture. I asked if she challenged her directly, but Angelica said she couldn’t, because “she has money, we need her [to lend money]” (see Chapter Three).
Tía Isabel was also particularly fond of describing her half-brother Rodolfo as “ambitious”. His antics caused his wider family much embarrassment and consternation in being closely related to someone who appeared to so wilfully disregard convention and invite conflict (see also Chapter Two). In particular, they highlighted his habit of seeking out debts which he did not pay back, and attempts to usurp the land of others, as “ambitious”. This was all the more frustrating because, in their estimation, Rodolfo was a person of means who did not need the money. He had extensive landholdings, five adult children (some of whom held good government jobs in Puno and other cities), and was a retired police officer with the Policía Nacional del Perú who had served during the Civil War in the 1980s and later as an officer so would, according to his family members, be entitled to collect a state pension. During my fieldwork Tío Rodolfo became embroiled in several altercations over planting crops, interpreted by his family members as attempts to steal others’ land, emulating their own experiences following the death of their father (detailed in Chapter Two). This happened twice during my stay in Suma Marka. In the first instance, family members accused Rodolfo of trying to plant potatoes across several rows of land that belonged to their often-absent cousin Juan. This parcel, a very small plot of land up in the *andenes* (Sp. terraces), was split between several family members, who each held two rows. When challenged by family members, Rodolfo claimed his wife had in fact purchased the land in question some 10 years prior, meaning he was entitled to sow potatoes across the entire plot. Eventually, the community’s *teniente* (Sp. lieutenant) was called to sort out the dispute, who determined that it was not in fact Rodolfo’s land, and forced him to rip up his potato plants. This was, in part, because the money he suggested his wife had paid for the plot did not tally with people’s recollection of prices at the time.

In the second instance, family members accused Tío Rodolfo of trying to usurp a square plot of land behind Tía Gladys’ house, no more than 6m by 6m across. This plot, which Tía Isabel was adamant belonged to Gladys, was situated a short way up across the fields behind Rodolfo’s house complex, and adjacent to one of his plots of land. As we walked past the plot along the road, she pointed out to me how the plot had been sown not once, but twice. Small shoots of quinoa and wheat vied for space, growing haphazardly and ensuring that, come harvest time, conflict would ensue over entitlement to the crops that had been sown. Gingerly, as Tía Isabel was clearly incensed by her brother’s latest outrage, I suggested that it could have been a mistake. However, Isabel was adamant that this could not be the case as...
Rodolfo would have clearly seen the plot had already been sown: “that’s an ambition (es una ambición), he wants all the land around here, he wants to take it off the people, he wants to extend himself (él quiere ambiciarse – literally, “he wants to ambition himself”)”. This complaint was echoed by other family members, such as Tía Teresa and Tío Gerardo when Isabel recounted this to them after we had returned to their house later that afternoon: “I don’t know what he has in his head, this Uncle. He doesn’t know how to live with other people” (él no sabe vivir con los demás). This was not, she explained with a shake of her head, how a person should behave. In this context, Rodolfo again became a negative exemplar for his close family, and potentially for others in the community (see also Chapter Two).

Rodolfo’s inability to live properly with other people was a core characteristic of a person with ambition. This was neatly summed up in a story which Tía Teresa recounted to me when we were discussing Rodolfo’s ambition. She explained that there were two alferados hosting a fiesta, one rich, and one poor. The poor alferado was in a difficult situation, having few animals to cull and not knowing how he could possibly afford to fulfil his obligations to the community. At a loss for what to do, he went off crying up into the mountains, where he fell asleep. When he woke up, the apu (Ay. God-like telluric mountain being) was standing over him in the form of an old man. He asked him why he was suffering, and the poor alferado said it was because he did not know how he would be able to host the community fiesta. The apu told him to collect up all the flowers on the mountainside, and to take them home and fill his house and stable with them. On waking the next morning, the poor alferado and his wife found their stable filled with animals and sacks of food, enough to host a lavish fiesta for the whole village. On seeing this, the rich alferado decided to see if he too could benefit. While collecting flowers he was discovered by the old man apu, who turned him into a taruka (Ay. deer) for being ambitious. The man tried to return to his house, where his wife did not recognise him and shooed him away, and he was forced to flee and live in the mountains. It seems likely that this is a syncretic translation or reinterpretation of the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel within an Aymara context, given the structural similarities between the two opposing sets of men, God and the apu, and the punishment meted out to the envious party, which is to become a “restless wanderer on earth” (Genesis 4:10, King James New International Version). Significantly, however, while Cain’s downfall places emphasis on the insincerity of his devotion through his paltry offering to God and his subsequent anger in being compared unfavourably to his brother (Byron 2011), the equivalent relationship in the
Envy and ambition, then, are fundamentally related and relational categories. It is difficult to invoke one without calling the other into question for, as Marilyn Strathern (2011: 24) has noted, “concepts do their work in relation to other concepts”. Envy and ambition are also perspectival and thus situated constructs—complaints about the ambition of others could be understood as coming from a position of envy, while accusations of envy could countered by claims of inappropriate ambition. Occasionally, envy could even appear to cause ambition. My comadre Carmen, for example, told me how she was targeted by envy following their purchase of a second-hand car ten years’ prior, which was a very significant expense at the time for the struggling young couple. It was parked outside overnight, and they woke up in the morning to find that the front windscreen had been smashed with what she thought was a stake used for tying up a cow or a sheep. When I enquired who she thought had done it, she suggested it might have been her cousin, “he’s completely envious (total envidioso es). He’s my cousin, and I feel like he hates me”. She explained that she often hears him passing by her house at night drunk, shouting that “one day, he’s going to own all the land around here”. Envy could thus potentially lead people to commit destructive acts, or alternatively to ambiciarse (Sp. extend themselves inappropriately) in the community. As twinned concepts which conceptually shadow one another, envy and ambition revolve around the question of how to live with other people in an unequal society. Monica Lindh de Montoya, writing on a similar notion of envy and hambre (Sp. hunger, which she glosses as greed) in the Venezuelan Andes, suggests they represent “two sides of an ongoing struggle over the content of the moral core of economic life” (1996: 227).

In Marxist interpretations of envy, prominent in the literature in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars argued that envy was an expression of the discontents of capitalist modernity. James Dow notes that concerns about envy underscore “a realistic awareness of capitalism as a mode of production that inappropriately monopolises wealth without leading to increased prosperity for all” (1981: 363). Michael Taussig (1980: 16-17) similarly explains: “it is not growth per se but the character and immense human significance of a society geared to accumulation for its own sake that is cause for concern”. Taken together, these authors
espouse an interpretation of envy and related ideas as allowing people to consider and negotiate the social costs that material progress might entail, through the prism of those who have been left behind. However, this might be more properly attributed to concerns about ambition in particular, rather than envy more generally—as Sianne Ngai (2005: 34) has noted, envy is an affective ideology through which “a subject asserts the goodness and desirability of precisely that which he or she does not have”. Consequently I suggest, following later authors such as De Montoya (1996) and Van Vleet (2003, 2008), that discourses about others’ envy might be understood, paradoxically, as a means to legitimate the speaker’s wealth and good fortune. But in order to do so, it is important to first have an understanding of what wealth is in Suma Marka.

Getting ahead and legitimating wealth

Tíá Flor complained frequently of others’ envy. When I first went to visit her at her home, she was sitting inside knitting, a half-drunk bottle of warm Inca Kola nestled between her feet. She offered me a cup, and gestured toward a bowl of boiled potatoes, fried bread and habas which sat next to her on the couch, as a large flat-screen television blared in the corner. Flor explained she could no longer work in the fields as she had when she was younger, because she walked with a pronounced limp, the result of hechicería (Sp. black/evil magic). Several years prior, she had had several altercations with Tío Fernando, a neighbour who lived two houses away, over a pasture which she claimed she had rented for her sheep, but which he was regularly using to pasture his animals on. A few months later, when relations between them had soured, she was returning to her house with her sheep when Fernando passed by her in a car. Although he was some distance away, Flor felt a sharp blow to the back of her head, stunning her and almost causing her to lose consciousness. This had caused a kind of temporary paralysis, leaving her suffering for three nights: “I couldn’t even move my hand, my foot, nothing. I had to sleep upright in a chair, and couldn’t stop crying out”. Eventually, her family contacted a curandero (Sp. healer) who was able to restore movement, however her health had been poor since then.

Tíá Flor explained that she knew Fernando had caused her illness because of the disputes they had had, where he had yelled in her face that “he was going to get the better of her, she wouldn’t top him (él me iba a ganar, yo no le iba a ganar)”, his proximity to her when she
had been struck by the blow, and finally because his wife Hilda had told her cousin “without
disgust” that “the old woman is going to die soon, I did hechicería on her”. The root cause of
Fernando’s actions, Flor suggested, was envy. “He doesn’t have anything, that old man”. In
particular, she believed he was envious of her extensive lands and “the things we have” (two
tractors, a car and a motocarga), whereas she noted that Fernando and his second wife had
seven children between them. The implication here was that because they had many children
to support, they were not able to properly provide for them or “advance” like Flor or her
children had—her eldest daughter had been a teacher, working in a school in the city of Ilave,
before her death in a bus crash. Flor’s story about her envious neighbour indexes three central
features of wealth in Suma Marka: 1) wealth in land and animals, 2) wealth in education and
professional advancement, and 3) wealth in consumer goods. Much like Rudi Colloredo-
Mansfeld’s (1999) assessment of wealth among Ecuadorian weaving communities, wealth in
Suma Marka is multifaceted—older but enduring ideas overlap and commingle with more
recent concerns. Suma Marqueños often spoke of needing to superarse (Sp. to improve
oneself) or salir adelante (Sp. to get ahead, to advance materially and socially), which
Leinaweaver (2008b) suggests is a moral imperative for families in Peru (see also Ødegaard
2010). Saliendo adelante encompassed both desires to get access to more land and animals,
but also to advance socially and materially through access to education, opportunities for
professional advancement, and consumer goods.

Identifying someone as a person de tener (Sp. of means) most often implied that they had
extensive landholdings, usually the product of having few siblings. Land, on which to pasture
animals and plant crops, thus remains the most important form of wealth in the community. It
is at the heart of the Suma Marqueño subsistence ethic, as the physical and ideological basis
through which the reproduction of the household occurs. As Tía Isabel explained: “land is
very important because Pachamama Santa Tierra gives us food, if there was no land, where
would we grow crops? The land is what we eat from, what we live from”. Attachment to land
and to working the land was therefore significant. Late in fieldwork, I was helping my
comadre to clear out her half-finished dwelling on a small plot of land on the outskirts of
Puno. We were preparing for the possibility of her moving in while her daughter Ofelia
attended college in the city, which unfortunately did not eventuate as Ofelia did not get a high
enough mark on the entrance exam. That day, however, a move to the city appeared
imminent. As we cleared away the building rubble, I asked her what would happen to her
farm. Carmen exclaimed passionately, “I’ll go to the countryside every day. I might not have animals (ganados) but I will never leave the chacra”. Wealth from land is produced through labour and toil, which as noted in the previous chapter, carries contradictory valuations as both morally worthy and as “fruitless work” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999: 98). This means that while land reproduces the household, it does not easily or straightforwardly beget the material comforts of the mestizo world. However unlike other communities where land pressure is acute, Suma Marqueños have between 2-4 hectares of land on average, and some, like Tía Flor, have much more significant landholdings (see also Chapter Three). This meant that those with larger tracts of land could use these as a basis for generating an income, provided they were willing to labour: more land means more animals, larger harvests, which could—in good years—provide people with capital to invest in other income-generating opportunities.

Secondly, wealth in the community is measured in employment, and more specifically, in the professional advancement of oneself or one’s children. Having stable employment could afford a family disposable income, particularly when combined with subsistence production and few outgoings. Tía Lorena, who we met in the opening of the chapter, had very few landholdings. However, her husband’s stable job as a builder—where he was often booked up several weeks in advance—had allowed her to grow a sizeable flock of sheep on rented pasture, and she often loaned money to others. Yet while stable, paid employment in skilled and semi-skilled occupations was valued, education and professionalisation was another form of wealth—one which offered not only material wealth but the opportunity to advance socially. Leinaweaver has argued that “getting ahead” for Andean youth is primarily achieved through education and professionalisation: “most poor Peruvians believe—because they must believe—that education, in particular, is a viable way out of poverty” (2008b: 62). This was most commonly expressed in the repeated refrain that “my children have to be something more than me (ellos tienen que ser algo más que yo)”.

Tía Isabel, for example, told me with some embarrassment that although her father had sent her away from Suma Marka to study at a prestigious college in Puno—unusual at a time when many women remained in the village to help with domestic tasks—she had not been able to pursue a professional career: “I stayed behind (yo me quedado atrás)”. Here, Isabel is referring to not to staying behind at home, but rather to falling behind in her pursuit of the
moral imperative of material and social advancement, which did not match up to her more successful siblings. She had fallen pregnant just as she was about to take up a teaching position, at a time when women with children had been unable to stay in state employment. She nevertheless often took the chance to remark that her four children “had all turned out professionals”—her two eldest children were accountants working in Puno, and her two youngest were mining engineers. Interestingly, unlike other contexts where having more children signifies wealth and “social security” (Sentumbe 1995: 170), contemporary Suma Marqueños considered that having too many children could be problematic, as it could inhibit their prospects for future advancement. Fewer children meant that they would stand to inherit larger parcels of land from their parents, providing them with an enduring subsistence foundation. Having fewer children meant parents could also put more effort and resources into securing their material and social advancement through education. Flor’s derisive comments about Fernando’s large family above allude to this. Similarly, Tía Teresa claimed her sister was envious of her because she only had two children: “Yes, [she is envious] of my children too, she says “why does she only have two children? It’s another envy (es otra envidia) because I have two children, that’s how God gave them to me. I don’t have one loss, nothing. I’ve always had those two, nothing more. This annoys her”.

Thirdly, with rising incomes on and off-farm comes the opportunity for the conspicuous display of wealth through consumption (see also Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). In Suma Marka, particular material goods index wealth, including: two-storied houses made from material noble (Sp. literally noble materials, like brick and concrete) rather than adobe, emulating the size and style of houses in the city; vehicles such as cars, tractors, motorbikes and motocarga; participation in the “sensorial intensity and material excess” (Tassi 2010: 195) of fiesta celebrations, where the financial outlay on costumes and beer can be significant; and personal items such as fine pollera skirts which can cost as much as S/. 1500 (£375), not including the petticoats which are an additional expense. Young people in particular wanted the latest clothes and smartphones with internet connections so they could Whatsapp and Facebook their friends. As Colloredo-Mansfeld (1999: 40) notes, “costly houses and big parties get neighbours talking”. When others commented unfavourably on the success of the community’s then-president and her godchild by marriage, Luis, Tía Teresa was quick to ward off their criticism. Luis had recently finished constructing a rather grandiose blue two-storey house with large windows on the side of the Pan-American Highway, in the futuristic
style more commonly seen in urban centres. He also regularly drove his rally car (which he raced in the district on the weekends) to community meetings, streaming a plume of dust in his wake. De Montoya (1997: 205) has written about the specific importance of vehicles as a marker of success: “having one’s own ‘wheels’ can be equated with independence and with entering the modern world”. Almost all other vehicles in Suma Marka were work vehicles, but Luis’ rally car was a step beyond this. Local competitions offered some prize money, but he was racing primarily for leisure and personal enjoyment, almost unheard of in a context where even people’s leisure time consisted of side-jobs like Sunday market stalls. Yet on overhearing others muttering about his car and his jach’a uta (Ay. big house) at a community meeting, Tía Teresa barked: “Hasn’t Luis suffered? Doesn’t he know how to knit his little poncho?” (a caso Ernesto no ha sufrido? A caso él no sabe tejer su ponchito?). This invective was enough to silence Luis’s erstwhile critics, at least publicly, but Teresa was keen to discuss the episode further, saying “they shouldn’t be there criticising”.

As we plodded wearily back over the hillock toward her house after the meeting, Teresa explained that as a young married couple, Luis and his wife Claudia “had suffered, they had nothing”. He was only able to finish primary school and she didn’t think he had completed “even one year of secondary school” but rather stayed home to help his single mother on the farm. When he married Claudia, an abundance of siblings on both sides combined with their parents’ small landholdings meant they were left with very little land, and she and Luis had had to work knitting jumpers late into the night, tending a meagre flock of sheep on largely rented pasture during the day. Here, the gendered implications of Luis’ suffering were especially evident. Although some men know how to knit (see Harris 1982), in the period that I was in Suma Marka artisan groups were only attended by women. While knitting itself was not necessarily a gender-exclusive activity, for men to knit in the artesania group was indicative of poverty and a lack of other opportunities, as it implied they were not able to successfully pursue work elsewhere. With the money they saved from the sale of their jumpers and sheep, Ernesto and Claudia bought trout fry and rented a jaula (Sp. trout cage) on the lake. When the fish were ready, Tía Teresa explained, they used to carry them in the dark in water-filled tins, walking miles from Lake Titicaca until they reached the roadside where they could catch the first of several minibuses to the Bolivian border to sell the trout: “they worked like hired donkeys for years (años ellos trabajaron como burros alquilados)”. Initially, they were only making small amounts of money, S/. 20 here and there, which Tía
Teresa suggested was apparently “real money for them (era plata para ellos, dice)”. But gradually, their business grew until they were able to leave aside agricultural work and devote themselves almost exclusively to trout farming. Most importantly, according to Teresa, Luis and Claudia were able to secure wealthy and pious Bolivian godparents for their children with the contacts they had made through their business.

On the face of it, Luis and Claudia’s actions appear to encompass a particularly entrepreneurial ethic. In an analysis of Otomi peasants in Northern Mexico, Dow (1981) argues that envy accusations fall along two competing logics of accumulation: household and neocapitalist. He claims that household production is valued as contributing to the collective wealth of the community and is therefore ring-fenced from critique, while neocapitalist accumulation is decried and often attracts accusations of witchcraft: “the average person, producing in the domestic mode, is defended against envious neighbours” (p. 362). However, what constitutes legitimate wealth accumulation for the household and for the advancement of one’s children is precisely what is at stake here. Production ‘for the household’ and ‘for capitalist accumulation’ are not settled categories, nor do these analytics map neatly onto economic life in the community. Rather, as Teresa’s defense of Luis and Claudia demonstrates, these are subject to ongoing contestation and negotiation in contemporary Suma Marka, requiring rhetorical work to ward off criticism of oneself and one’s kin. Teresa achieves this by painting a picture of Luis and Claudia’s humble beginnings and leaving poverty through hard work, for the specific purpose of enhancing their children’s futures. Yet although concerns about wealth did feature in everyday Suma Marqueño discourse, attributions of envy to others were far more common. In the next section, I consider the work that these attributions of envy do as a modality of social explanation and rhetorical positioning.

“Your envy will be my progress”: rhetorical positionings and affordances

Ascriptions of envy (and, to a lesser extent, ambition) in Suma Marka extended far beyond what I would typically understand as being about wealth or possessions in a straightforward sense, occupying an expansive explanatory role in narrating and interpreting the actions and intentionality of others. Returning from a cooperative meeting with Tía Flor, we came across Tía Teodora, a neighbour who lived further up the hillside, sitting hunched over by the side
of the road. She looked if she had dozed off, with arms folded, her back to the stone fence and the brim of her hat pulled down low on her face. Most of the twenty-odd sheep she was pasturing were browsing along the roadside close to where she sat, but a few wily explorers had jumped the fence and were grazing in the plot of land behind it. As we got within speaking distance, Tía Flor yelled out, “look, your sheep are eating my pasture”. “Ah, they escaped”, Tía Teodora replied, appearing relatively unconcerned. She stood up wearily, fired a stone over the wall, sending the stray sheep scrambling back to join the rest of the flock, which she began to move down the road. As we turned to walk away, Tía Flor muttered to me under her breath, “she’s an envious one (envidiosa es, ella)”. I queried this, citing the fact that the woman looked as if she had been asleep and the sheep had momentarily escaped her notice. But Flor suggested that if she had wanted to, she could have easily moved the sheep on down toward her own parcel of land to ensure they had not been in a position to jump the fence and eat her pasture in the first place. The fact that she had not done so was proof of her envy. This was interesting as many people in Suma Marka, Flor included, spoke of their own livestock (sheep in particular) as rateros (Sp. thieves), willful creatures who seek to escape from their owners at every possible opportunity to nibble on the choicest piece of grass within range—people were perennially chasing them out of other people’s land. Yet in this context, Flor positioned the animals’ behaviour as an extension of the negative human intentionality of her neighbour, locating her minor misfortune of lost pasture in the ill-will of others.

Other issues expanded the framework for what counts as envy even further. Several months after I had returned from the field, I Skyped with Tío Jefry at his home in Puno. Wrapped up against the cold and sitting in bed, he began by saying: “I’m always remembering (siempre estoy recordando) how you helped me with the signatures and everything, but not only with me, with all the people from the community”. Initially I took this as a nice chance to reminisce about our former work with the quinoa cooperative Suma Jirwa. However, as the conversation developed, I learned he was in fact very upset about a disagreement he had had with Tío Jorge, the cooperative’s president. This was not altogether surprising, as before I left Peru Tío Jorge had been grumbling about Tío Jefry’s occasional absences from a series of NGO projects that they were working on together through their involvement in the leadership of Suma Jirwa. Both had been put forward as producer leaders (líderes productores) for the farmer field school that the NGO Swisscontact was running as part of its 2015-2016
‘Improving the Quinoa Value Chain as a Model of Sustainable Development’ campaign. This meant they had attended numerous capacity-building workshops together, and were given the role of inspectors in the NGO’s seed banking scheme. Swisscontact had provided a loan of 2kgs of *Salcedo INIA* or *pasank’alla* varieties of quinoa seed to each cooperative member, who was tasked with producing it separately to their other quinoa, using the production techniques which had been disseminated through the producer field school. On harvest, they had to return 4kgs of seed to Swisscontact, 2kgs of which would go back to Swisscontact for future projects, and 2kgs of which could then be stored by the cooperative and used for further projects.

As part of the agreement, the producer leaders from each cooperative would conduct four parcel visits over the six-month period, assessing the preparation of the soil, the quinoa’s development, and the methods of harvest, work for which they were being paid a nominal monthly rate of S/. 350 (£87.50) as a recognition of their contribution. Tío Jefry was at pains to point out that this labour was: “help, it’s not work, it’s voluntary, nothing more”, and the payment was an “incentive, not a wage”, to be used primarily for reimbursing expenses such as travel and lunch. Also, being the only two able-bodied men in the cooperative leadership, Jefry and Jorge had decided to work together as labourers to process the cooperative’s quinoa using a mechanical thresher on loan from Swisscontact. Problems arose, however, when Jefry was unable to attend a meeting convened between cooperative members and agronomists from Swisscontact in the countryside. Apparently, Jorge had been embarrassed in front of the Swisscontact agronomists when another member of the cooperative, Tía Hilda, had attended the meeting to return the seeds she had been given as part of the seed banking scheme, which she was supposed to have planted and which Jefry, in his capacity as a producer leader, should have been reporting back on.

Subsequently Jefry had received a phone call from Jorge, who was fuming, accusing him of not having done any work for the NGO and suggesting that Jefry had sent me to do his work in his stead. I had, in the months leading up to my departure, helped Jefry collect several signatures which were required for the initial round of parcel visits, as I was often out and about in the countryside and he was finding it difficult to catch people to sign the visitation receipts when he did make his inspections. Jefry told me that I must have let this fact slip to Jorge, but “not with bad intention (no con mala intención)”. When I asked why Jorge would
be so angry with him, Jefry responded, “it’s because of envy, I’m going to keep having opportunities but that old man, how is he going to be able to do that (ese viejito, como va a poder)”. Jorge’s criticism had clearly stung. He went on to explain that all of the producer leaders had sat an exam, which if passed would grant them opportunities to work in other cooperatives. No grades had yet been given nor opportunities materialised, yet Jefry was explicitly situating the exam and the possibilities for work elsewhere that it promised as the underlying source of Jorge’s rancor—rather than the issue of him being work-shy and/or the reputational damage of Hilda’s seeds, which appeared equally likely. “Now there’s no trust (confianza)”, Tío Jefry continued, “Of course, we say hello to each other but nothing more. While he’s president, I’m not going to be able to work in the cooperative”. He leaned forward in his seat as I began to ask further questions about Jorge, but then his wife Isabel cut me off, saying “that Tío Jorge, he’s old, he’s old”, placating Jefry and ending the conversation. Taking these ascriptions of envy seriously, this suggests that people in the Andes can discern the negative intentions of one another through their words and actions, and that envious intent can be parsed from the specifics of the material relations and social antagonism that exist between them. Yet by suspending the face-value of these claims, if only temporarily, we can see the other uses to which envy claims may be put, which I suggest fall into two categories: firstly, claiming others’ envy to imagine oneself fulfilling the moral-material imperative of getting ahead, and secondly, claiming envy to account for the negative actions of others, in order to fix a particular framing of an antagonistic situation that circumvents alternative readings.

Van Vleet (2003, 2008) has written on gossip as a modality of evaluative talk in the Bolivian Andes, which she suggests includes both theorising and moralising about others. She has argued that attributing envious motives to others, which often occur as part of people’s gossip, can be understood as people positioning themselves as being worthy of others’ envy. Claims to be a target of others’ envy generates a “moral stance” (p. 506) which indicates the speaker’s access to desired relationships and things, ensuring that the speaker “look[s] good” (ibid), “counter[ing] others’ perceptions of inequality or improper action” (p. 509; see also De Montoya 1996: 224), and allowing the speaker to “trace interpersonal envy backwards to a particular person or source” (ibid). Building on Van Vleet’s account, I suggest that accusations or ascriptions of envy work at multiple levels. Firstly, ascriptions of envy tap into a series of moral assumptions discussed above and in the previous chapter, about hard work,
success, and getting oneself, and more importantly, one’s children ahead, and an inability (or unwillingness) to work hard which leaves others languishing behind, unable to progress. Construing oneself as someone worthy of envy also discursively places the envier in a morally inferior position, as deficient or lacking in what is desirable (Ngai 2005). As De Montoya (1996) has noted, this can have the effect of conferring legitimacy onto people’s own wealth or ambition.

Additionally, claims of envy on the part of others are not only a legitimization of present wealth in the face of others’ criticism, but are also a means through which to imagine oneself as on the upward trajectory of saliendo adelante. Tío Jefry’s statement, “I am going to keep having opportunities” is not merely a legitimization of his current status, but a vision of a progressive future in which his ongoing success and material advancement is all-but-assured. Attracting the envy of others acts as a spur to keep advancing, neatly summarised in the saying, often repeated in the community, and emblazoned on to the back of the minibuses that wound their way past Suma Marka to nearby cities: “your envy is/will be my progress” (tu envidia es/será mi progreso). Envy in this context is also indexical, a yardstick by which to measure this progress—for the more progress one has made, the more envy one is likely to attract. As several authors have noted in different contexts such as Melanesia (Stasch 2008), and the Atlas Mountains (Carey 2017), refraining from commenting on others’ intentionality—known as the doctrine of opacity of mind—can serve to protect cherished values, for example, “moral and psychological autonomy” (p. 33) in the Atlassian case. By contrast in Suma Marka, people readily commented on the envious motives of others, as Flor’s assessment of Teodora attests. Locating envious intent in this way works as a prism through which to imagine the self as transcending others’ moral-material failings and shortcomings. The good, in this context, is realised through antagonistic comparison—I am saliendo adelante, and others are envious.

Taussig (1987: 394) has eloquently suggested that envy is a form of implicit social knowledge which takes shape as an “experimental activity, essaying on this or that possibility, imagining this or that situation, this or that motivation, postulating another dimension to a personality […] Envy is not so much the cause of sorcery and misfortune as it is the immanent discursive force for raking over the coals of events in search of the sense (and senselessness) of their sociability”. Yet I wish to suggest that envy claims in Suma
Marka are more than speculative statements of possibility, not least because they are invariably delivered without equivocation, as common-sense explanations for others’ problematic or injurious behaviour: “it’s because of envy, of course”, was a routine, and definitive, response to a search for motive. Rather, ascriptions of envy, such as Tío Jefry’s attribution of envious intent to Tío Jorge above, espouse a theory of motivation that attempts to determine what gets to count as legitimate critique. As Butler (2003: 11) has noted, when people are called to account by others, they can respond by “defending [themselves] against the attribution, perhaps locating the cause elsewhere”.

It is clear that Tío Jefry at least initially attempted to counter the claims made on Tío Jorge’s terms, by suggesting that the producer leader role is not really work, just a voluntary role, and that I was, in fact, helping out “the whole community” rather than just him. However, his recourse to envy in the latter half of our conversation shifted this framing substantially. By advancing a claim about the underlying envious motivations that guided Jorge’s critical stance toward him, Jefry effectively sidelined Jorge’s (potentially legitimate) critique about his lack of effort in their shared projects. Likewise, in the opening example Graciela Pilco offered an alternative theory for why her siblings set fire to her house—it was not her involvement in the death of her nephew, which she nevertheless disputed, but her siblings’ envy which led them to strike the match. Claims of envy in this vein suggest that critical perspectives or injurious actions do not result from the speaker’s problematic behaviour, but are ultimately ‘about’ something else: the discrepancy in material wealth or opportunity between the two speakers. As a mode of what Keane (2016: 85) terms sign-reading, the ability to “construct acts, events, or words as signs of intentions”, attributions of envy are selective, discounting alternate possibilities by asserting one overwhelming reading of a given situation. These accusations, much like the equivalent in English of saying someone is “just jealous”, work through the rhetorical displacement of a particular critical perspective into a context where the assumed motivations of the other are premised on a negative, morally problematic intentionality. In doing so, such accusations attempt to discount the validity of another’s critique. Whether these claims are successful is a matter for the listener’s interpretation, however the negative moral weight and presumed ubiquity which adheres to envy affords it compelling salience as a diagnostic of ill intent.
Robert Paul, in an edited volume on intentionality, asks “who stands to benefit from the way intent is assessed?” (1995: 46). I have argued here that those who claim others envy them can stand to benefit from this assessment of intent. In making these arguments, I do not mean to imply that actually attracting the envy of others is desirable—particularly in its most destructive enactments. More is at stake here than simply an evasion of criticism, though this is clearly an important part of the equation. While Castellanos (2015) has suggested that responding to the envy of others was an animating tension in the life of Aguabuena potters in Colombia, it is clear that in many instances in Suma Marka, hostility or presumed hostility on the part of others was not so much a welcome diversion as a preoccupation which required redress and a reassertion of oneself as progressive, getting ahead, and rising above the venal concerns of their detractors. Nor do I wish to suggest that claims about others’ envy should not, in fact, be taken seriously. Rather, I suggest that rhetorical claims of envy are effective precisely because the envy of others is a persuasive (if not always wholly convincing) explanation for their problematic actions, a way of making sense of the emergence of antagonism and hostility that may catch Suma Marqueños off-guard, even—and perhaps especially—as they work to rhetorically re-position themselves as good people who are getting ahead.

(In)divisible goods: public distribution, envy, ambition, and fairness

Although envy occupies an ambiguous role in interpersonal relationships, people were nevertheless sensitive to and concerned to respond to rumours of envy and related complaints about unfairness in public life. Suma Marqueños sought, through a variety of ad-hoc measures, to mitigate the emergence of “ugly emotions” (Ngai 2005) which could potentially destabilise collective projects. This section examines instances where concerns about negative ethics are attended to in service of keeping communal endeavours afloat and moving forward, illustrating how the suppression of negative ethics may be as much a pragmatic as it is a moral concern.

The question of avoidance was central to the debates about envy in peasant studies in the 1960s and 70s. In a series of landmark papers, George Foster (1965a, 1965b, 1972) argued that envy arose through a foundational assumption of scarcity, which he termed the image of limited good. Foster further identified four categories of envy reduction or avoidance
mechanisms, including: concealment, denial, symbolic sharing, and true sharing or the redistribution of wealth. He highlighted the South American fiesta complex as exemplary of the fourth category, as a formal, institutionalised “siphon mechanism, which serves to draw off excessive well-being from some people and to redistribute it among the less well-off” (1972: 185). In particular, he claimed that the significant and lasting debts which people incur in hosting fiestas (see Chapter Three) prevented them from accumulating wealth, in turn promoting social integration and solidarity. As other authors have pointed out, Foster’s argument about limited goods rests on circular reasoning and the flawed assumption of a closed system where the total wealth was limited (see for example Freeman 1972). Taking up the issue of the fiesta complex in particular, Kennedy (1966) has argued that fiestas may be a source of cementing prestige as much as wealth redistribution, and later authors such as Paerregaard (2017: 470) have similarly argued that ayni exchange among Peruvian migrants is a means of displaying economic dominance through “schismogenetic rivalry” among a small group who have the means to host fiestas.

Questions of envy avoidance appear to have lost favour in the contemporary literature, however.\(^{38}\) This may be partly due to skepticism that these really do constitute forms of envy avoidance rather than serve other purposes. For example, De Montoya (1996: 223) argues that practices of concealing gains by burying them, which Foster suggests are intended to circumvent envy, could also be interpreted as “simply mak[ing] good sense in light of the requirements of the house economy for a reserve”. But while Foster may have overstated the case for wealth levelling mechanisms, I suggest that his underlying acknowledgement of envy avoidance in public life merits further consideration. In Suma Marka, avoidance of envy in public life constitutes a series of ad hoc, situationally contextual measures, which primarily mitigate the negative emotional impact of envy rather than level wealth per se. Yet where attempts to ensure a fair or equitable distribution of communal goods and benefits fail, envy and ambition have the potential to re-emerge. As I will demonstrate below, this takes shape at the intersection of an ideological commitment to and assertion of equality and solidarity between community members, personal histories and temporalities of interpersonal inequality, and awkward, limited materialities.

\(^{38}\) De Vidas (2007) is a notable exception, though she is mainly concerned with forms of interpersonal envy avoidance that limit wealth accumulation, in a Fosterian vein.
As members of a legally-designated comunidad campesina (Sp. peasant community), Suma Marqueños are subject to a legislative framework which asserts their formal, legally-enshrined equivalence. Article 3 of the Ley General de Comunidades Campesinas (1987) provides for the “equality of rights and obligations of the community members”, and further mandates the “solidarity, reciprocity, and mutual aid among all of its members”. Suma Marqueños take this assertion of formal equivalence at the ideological level seriously, extending far beyond their participation with “voice and voice (voz y voto)” in the community’s general assemblies. Community members are also obliged to pool their labour to perform collective tasks, such as digging drains for the water supply, and attract fines when they do not participate (ibid; see also Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; 2009 for similar arrangements in Ecuador). In return, members normally expected to benefit equally from the distribution of shared material resources. Such an expectation does not, however, prevent people from trying to take advantage of collective resources for their own benefit, or from keeping quiet when the allocation of resources have unexpectedly fallen in their favour. In February 2016, I arranged for a friend and fellow anthropologist working with the NGO Bioversity to visit Suma Jirwa as part of a series of experimental games about quinoa conservation that they were conducting with communities across the Puno region. In order to incentivise participation, Bioversity offered a reward, which was tied to the choices that participants made during the game. This meant that depending on their choices, they would receive an amount between S/. 20 (£4) and S/. 25 (£6.25), which was sealed in unmarked envelopes. After the game ended and people had dispersed from the classroom to mill around outside, several cooperative members approached me to try and find out what others had received. Tía Daniela was particularly insistent, and while I wouldn’t disclose which amounts the other participants had won, I did confirm that she had received the top amount. “That’s good then”, she responded, eyes glistening, as she instructed me “not to tell” anyone else about her little windfall. Thus I suggest that broad ideological commitments to egalitarianism in principle manifest as a form of positioned or situated egalitarianism in practice—people were reasonably content to receive a larger share than others if this was kept private, but appealed stridently to the principle of formal equality when they felt they had received less. Indeed, Tío Jorge, the cooperative’s president, later grumbled that there should have been “one payment” for all who attended.
In their own community events, however, Suma Marqueños made more significant, albeit ad-hoc attempts to contain envy. In what follows, I draw on two key communal activities: Suma Marka’s anniversary celebrations, and the redistribution of livestock among the sheep and llama association members. When I first attended the community’s anniversary celebrations, held in May 2016 on the football field below Chuqiquillu hill, the major activity of the day was a dance competition between the seven sectors of the village. Each sector formed a conjunto (Sp. dance troupe) and drew a trajes de luces dance style out of a hat. Trajes de luces is a flamboyant selection of dances with spectacular shiny costumes, and was chosen because it would be “something different and exciting”, in contrast to the more typical danzas autóctonas (Sp. indigenous dances) whose costumes bore a closer resemblance to everyday Suma Marqueño dress. Santa Barbara, the sector I was dancing with, drew Cholita Marina, a relatively unknown dance of Bolivian origin with a distinctive side-to-side double-step coupled with a swishing of the woman’s skirt to expose the lower legs, which drew on classic tropes of sexual antagonism common in Andean folk music and in imaginaries of love and courtship more generally (see Canessa 2012: 142). The next few months were spent contracting bands and hiring costumes. Over the course of the weeks leading up to the anniversary, groups practiced in fields and in patios well past dusk, devising elaborate routines to rival the famous trajes de luces competition held for the Festival of the Virgin of Candelaria in Puno.

People were particularly enthused about the prizes that would be given to the three groups judged to be the best: first place was a young bull, second was twenty cases of beer, and the third-place prize was two alpacas and a sheep. As we were practicing, Percy lent over to me and said: “we’re going to beat everyone, we’re going to win that bull”. Sadly, it was not to be. Our conjunto placed third, taking home the alpacas and the sheep. These were sold later that week to water engineers working in the village for kankacho (Ay. a type of barbecued meat), and the money distributed equally among the dancers. Initially, this appeared to pass with little incident. There were some rumours circulating among our group that that the winning group from sector San Francisco, who had impressed with a burning archway and a particularly well-synchronised Diablada (Sp. dance of the devils), had hired a choreographer, which Tía Isabel suggested with just a hint of annoyance that she could also have done if people had been willing to pay for it—implying that we too, might have had a shot at the bull. On the day of the anniversary, our group garnered one or two snide comments. Someone
who I didn’t recognise drunkenly approached our small group after the competition had
finished, suggesting that Santa Barbara had only placed third because I was a gringa and
“because of that, nothing more, you all won and for us nothing”. Yet almost a year later, at a
community meeting held in March to discuss the upcoming anniversary celebrations in 2017
(which I was unable to attend due to illness), the community voted to cancel the dance
competition in favour of an exhibition. Tía Daniela explained on returning from the meeting
that this was due to concerns that the distribution of prizes had generated too much envy
between different sectors of the village, “those that didn’t win last year, they were getting too
envious (ellos estaban envidiando demasiado)... there are always dirty looks
(miramientos) between sectors”. She explained further that as the new presidential incumbent
was a woman, she would be unable to arrange sponsorship for prizes in the same way that
Luis had done the previous year, which would also generate unfavourable comparisons.

Although clearly not adverse to competing when the prizes were still there for the taking, I
suggest the sting of losing out relative to one’s fellow community members and the envy
which was subsequently generated was of particular concern in the community’s anniversary
celebrations because of the expectation of formal equivalence between community members
discussed above. The anniversary is a singular occasion, subject to different financial
arrangements and expectations than the other fiestas held in the village. For those fiestas
which have a religious origin, such as the community-wide fiesta of Carnavales or
eponymous saint’s days which are celebrated in each community sector, the costs of hosting
(which including supplying food, hiring the band, and in some cases, hiring costumes) are
shouldered by a pair of delegados (Sp. representatives), who raise funds, go into debt, and
recoup some of the costs through apxata prestations (see also Chapter Three). The role of
representative is then passed on to another community member the following year, to
distribute the burden and prestige of hosting across the community (Buechler 1980). The
costs of the anniversary, by contrast, are funded each year through the collection of an
obligatory cuota (Sp. share), amounting to S/. 100 (approx. £25) for participation in 2016.
Those who were not able to participate in the dancing due to age or illness paid a reduced
cuota of S/. 50 (£12.50), and would receive breakfast and lunch, and a share in the prize
money if their sector won. In this way, the cuota payment for the anniversary mimics the
shared distribution of costs that community members pay for other collective projects. It is
perhaps especially because of this kind of colaboración—the equal sharing of the cost of
participating among all participants—that people who lost out were so concerned about the unequal distribution of prizes during the \textit{fiesta}. Community members contributed more-or-less equally to the anniversary, but prizes were unevenly distributed, subject to a decision-making process where the judges’ subjective assessments of the dancing could be readily contested by other interested observers, leaving room for envy to fester over time. As the expression and enactment par-excellence of community solidarity and group participation, it was therefore especially important to avoid “too much envy”, which could threaten to destabilise the celebrations, leading to the vote for a dance exhibition over a competition.

Reasserting a formal equivalence among different sectors of the community by removing competition was one means of responding to envy in public life. But on other occasions community leaders sought to directly appease those who complained of unfairness, even as they were accused of being envious or ambitious by others. In these settings, envy and ambition took on a semblance of legitimacy, shadowing more explicit concerns about fairness and equivalence (see also Ngai 2005). In September 2016, I accompanied some twenty-odd members of one of Suma Marka’s two sheep and alpaca associations to their corral in the high pastures, where they were having their monthly meeting. They had made the decision, because of pressure on the pasture during a particularly dry El Niño year, to reduce the size of the then-250 head communal sheep flock by \(\frac{1}{5}\). Each person would receive two sheep to take back to the village and incorporate into their own flocks—one adult sheep, and one weaned lamb. They decided the best way to distribute the sheep would be to pull numbers of out a hat: “we’re going to do it like this, by lot. That way, no-one can be here criticising, here complaining, here envying”, explained Tío Hilario, the association’s incumbent president.

This was a physically demanding process. We herded the sheep into the round stone corral where they pressed tight together in the far arc, a writhing, amorphous bundle of bleating off-white. Dust clouds billowed as the sheep ran back and forth, choking the air as the association’s pastor dived in to retrieve his own personal sheep which he was running with the flock, and then the selection for the draw began. Several \textit{socios} (Sp. association members) advanced at a time, catching sheep by the legs and dragging them back to the far side of the corral where they held them down, wriggling, and slipped the ropes they had brought from home over their necks to hold them in position, waiting for the draw to begin.
Not long after the first sheep had been pulled to one side, a dispute broke out. Tío Carlos, a wiry man in his 70s with exceptional strength, had lunged into the flock and selected a beast of a sheep—almost twice the size of some of the others pulled from the flock, and nearly as tall as him when held up on two legs. As he struggled to move it into a position where he could get a better hold of it, two of the other men moved closer and began to argue with him about the sheep’s size relative to the other sheep that had already been separated out from the herd, which they considered to be an “ambitious” over-reach. He ignored them, pulling the sheep up by its forequarters and attempting to walk it on its hind legs back to the side of the corral. The others, increasingly annoyed by his refusal to listen, began to yell at him: “not that one, Uncle”, “it’s too big”, “that’s not fair”, and oddly – “and you never told me about that wheat”, which I can only assume was reference to an earlier dispute that had reignited as tempers flared. Tío Carlos manhandled his giant over the far side of the corral, where he slipped his own rope on the sheep and began to walk it out of the ring as others yelled for him to wait.

Carlos insisted that he was going to take it, and that they could not stop him as he had only received a “little one” last time. He had already complained to Tío Hilario who, as the president, had told him he could pick his own one next time, so it was “fair”. Annoyed, the men tried to wrestle the sheep from him, flipping it up onto its hind legs and holding on to it as they argued, while trying to slip his rope off. I asked one of the Tías sitting nearby what was going on, to get a better understanding of the situation. “He’s very stubborn… he won’t let go of that sheep for anything”, she told me by way of an explanation. When, after five minutes of struggle, it became clear that this was indeed the case, others called for the men to “leave him”, and move on with the draw. Carlos hauled the sheep off to one side where he sat some distance away from the rest, as Hilario began numbering the faces of each sheep with a large green marker pen before placing numbers into his cap and getting the draw underway. There was some minor grumbling about this—perhaps people felt that by placing their own ropes on the sheep they had already begun the conversion from communal to personal property—but aside from Carlos, everyone else acquiesced to participate in the draw.

But this was not the end of the conflict. Partway through the first round of the draw, Tía Eva drew the number of a sheep that she was clearly very unhappy with. As she moved reluctantly to retrieve it, I ran to help her, saying “it’s OK”. She spun around and angrily told
me, “it’s not OK. It’s chusco (Sp. a mongrel, mixed, not of ‘pure’ race) and also very small”.
She handed the rope to her daughter Carmen and walked off muttering that she “didn’t want it, better that I don’t get anything than have that”, while others began to criticise her both directly and to other people. Tía Luzmilla muttered “envidiosa (Sp. envious person)” under her breath, but audibly enough for those around to hear. One older man who I didn’t know began to shout at her: “that’s how the draw is. You don’t get to choose”. Others tried to calm him down, and they attempted to move on with the remaining lots. Once they’d finished, Hilario picked up a lamb—a merino with much finer wool—and said that “if she’d calmed down and was now ready to participate” Eva could have that one as well, but she would have to pay the association for it. She accepted the sheep, but when I talked to her afterwards was still very unhappy about her “bad luck”, and thought that they should not have included the chusco sheep in the draw. She also noted pointedly that she would still have to pay for the other lamb, and did not yet know how much the association would charge her. In contrast, those who had “good luck” in the draw were very pleased. Tía Teresa, who had been whispering to the sheep she was holding that it was “coming home to her house”, laughed and clapped her hands together with glee when she pulled out that sheep’s very same number from the cap. Similarly, my comadre Carmen positively beamed when, choosing a number on her behalf to “give her luck”, I managed to select a particularly fine and plump lamb in the second round of the draw. Others – particularly Eva – looked on with disdain, muttering under her breath. Ultimately, these difficulties were not resolved (nor were they, I suggest, ultimately resolvable). Tío Carlos got his way, and Tía Eva took the lamb and the chusco sheep home, where she continued to complain about it periodically when we were out pasturing.

Tío Carlos’ “ambition” and Tía Eva’s “envy” threatened to destabilise the fragile consensus among the group on the draw as a mechanism for distributing shared property. In this case, drawing lots was a means to ensure fairness of opportunity, when it was not physically possible to divide the sheep equally among the association members.\footnote{In other settings, drawing lots and similar games of chance have the opposite intention – for example, Woodburn (1968: 54) describes a gambling game with bark disks among the Hazda, which resulted in the majority of men loosing “all their metal-headed arrows and be[ing] unable to hunt big game”.

Equivalence is an ambition perpetually frustrated by awkward materialities—and sheep are a particularly awkward materiality. This is what Carlos was objecting to when he said that he would not participate in the draw because he had received a small sheep in the last one. He was
attempting to extract what he considered to be fair for him personally, and resisting incorporation into a collective of uniform subjects (of the draw, of chance) which did not take his personal history of unfair and unequal outcomes into account. Thus in pursuit of fairness, the draw abstracted people from the situated specificities and temporalities of interpersonal inequality. This is a feature of other communal exchanges too. For example, when people are expected to provide equal monetary contributions to communal endeavours in *cuotas*, as in the anniversary celebrations above, this operates by fundamentally misrecognising that people do not start from a basis of equality of wealth. Tía Isabel, for her part, complained that in the quinoa cooperative, those that “have more” were keen to put down their *cuota* and take full advantage of what was being offered, such as backpacks, seeds, the use of tractors and threshers. Whereas those who could not afford the *cuota* were not able to participate in the same way and receive the same benefits, “they want to do everything, they don’t want us to be able to participate”. Thus, the actually existing material inequalities between people threaten to destabilise attempts to construct a homogenous collective subject. Attempts to ensure fair allocation can paradoxically serve to highlight and exacerbate existing nonequivalences. In this friction, which operates at the intersection of public ideologies and performances of equivalence or fairness, and private histories and temporalities of difference and inequality, envy and ambition have the potential to re-emerge, despite people’s best efforts.

*Photo 4. Association members advance on the flock of sheep before the draw (source: author).*
Perhaps even more so than Tío Carlos, however, Tía Eva’s objection to the sheep she had received threatened to undermine the draw in entirety. By claiming the *chusco* sheep should not have been included and walking off, she challenged the premise of the draw as a means for achieving a fair distribution and attempted to withdraw her participation by “having nothing”, further highlighting the draw’s unfairness. The older Tío’s exclamation that “that’s how the draw is” and Tía Luzmilla’s muttering about Eva’s envy can therefore be understood as an attempt to discipline Eva, discount her critique and bring her back into line and into participation alongside everyone. Yet where others sought to silence their critiques, Tío Hilario took another route to appeasing the nascent emergence of these “ugly emotions”. Carlos was allowed to keep his sheep, while Eva was offered a second lamb to purchase. This served to mitigate and allow for at least a partial resolution of their concerns outside the formal draw process, while maintaining the integrity of the draw for the rest of the association. In this way, Hilario deftly and sensitively accommodated Carlos, Eva, and the rest of the organisation’s competing concerns, recognising the former as legitimate enough critiques about the fairness of the draw across time and across sheep to warrant at least partial redress, which was begrudgingly accepted. He thus moved these out of the realm of emerging concerns about envy and ambition, which were already beginning to bubble away under the group’s surface.

Viewed as a levelling or redistribution mechanism (Foster 1972), Hilario’s actions do not measure up—the wealth in sheep could not be equally redistributed. However, I suggest that his actions were less about ensuring strict material equivalence, and more about managing and mitigating emerging tensions which could have serious consequences for the organisation—the sheep association would have been far from the first organisation in the Andes to fall apart over claims about unfairness, envy, and ambition. Hilario’s actions allowed the draw to continue and sheep to be divided among the association members for another year. In the end, people ultimately accepted a relatively unequal distribution while expressing their disgruntlement and disapproval. Robbins (2013: 457) has argued that anthropologists should focus on “how people living in different societies strive to create the good in their lives”. However, I suggest that attempts to ensure a just distribution and mitigate the fallout from emerging concerns about envy and ambition suggest that in practice, sometimes a workable good is that which is pragmatically ‘good enough’: ‘good enough’
distributions of communal property, and ‘good enough’ attempts at containing the spectre of envy and ambition in public life.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of envy and its shadow-concept of ambition in the material and moral life of Suma Marqueños. I have suggested that these partially revolve around the ethical issue of wealth accumulation, which is both desirable and subject to some contestation by others, requiring legitimation through narratives which positively emphasise hard work, suffering, and sacrifice to ‘get ahead’. I then explored how attributing envy to others, as routines of talk which attempt to position another person as envious of the wealth and opportunities one has, can be a strategic act. These allow the speaker to make compelling moral claims about another’s intentionality which sideline critique of their personal intent, practices, and ambitions, fixing social disputes which may be ‘about’ something else entirely within a register of moral-material lack. They also allow the speaker to index and imagine themselves as fulfilling the moral imperative of getting ahead or advancing relative to others. This sheds light on how notions of the good and one’s progress toward the good can be conceived of and articulated through a process of comparison with the negative ethics—specifically the negative intentionality—of others.

While the first half of the chapter highlighted the uses to which envy’s affordances can be put, the second half of the chapter considered how Suma Marqueños attempt to mitigate envy and ambition in public life. Moving on from Foster’s concept of levelling mechanisms but retaining his broader focus on the significance of envy in collective affairs, I explored Suma Marqueños’ concern with, and attempts to respond to, the emergence of envy in anniversary celebration dance competitions and sheep association draws. Arguing that Suma Marqueños were particularly sensitive to the emergence of envy and ambition as “ugly emotions” which threaten to destabilise collective projects, I suggested that responses to these were more partial and incomplete than Foster implies. In some cases, people attempted to mitigate envy by removing competition and reasserting a formal equivalence, while in others people took on and sought to address the claims of those considered to be acting enviously or ambitiously by offering redress outside the channels of formal distribution. Consequently envy avoidance might be more fruitfully understood as a series of ad-hoc measures, deployed with varying degrees of success, in response to its emergence in collective affairs. These are ‘good
enough’ solutions that keep collective projects afloat, ugly emotions in check, and positive moralities and ethics intact, if only temporarily.
Most of Suma Jirwa’s members, some 30 people, had sat at the base of the chullpas (Ay. funerary towers) for over an hour, waiting for the meeting to begin. In the meantime, the women pulled out their knitting. The soft, persistent clicking of the needles intermingled with half-whispered gossip and the bleat of a sheep. Tío Jorge, the cooperative’s long-suffering president, remained standing, hands behind his back, eyes fixed on the distant—and empty—road. He shook his head and motioned me over. We used my credit to ring Eber’s cellphone: straight to voicemail. Tío Jorge grumbled and spat something into the dry grass. Twenty more long minutes passed and finally, we saw Eber’s motorbike snaking along the dirt path toward the centre of the village. He got off, pumping Tío Jorge’s hand up and down and grasping at the proffered fists of some of the nearby women, who didn’t get up from the ground. As he turned to face us, we were momentarily blinded. His belt buckle, a gaudy American dollar sign etched out in green rhinestones, caught on the afternoon sun. Eber removed a stack of documents from his laptop bag. “Did you miss me, did you want to cry?”, he teased. “Of course, we rang you”. “Or are you lying that you rang me?”. “We're always ringing you and you never reply”, Tía Andrea retorted.

Tío Jorge took charge of the meeting, greeting everyone and explaining: “we are all worried about the sale of quinoa [to international exporter Organic Sierra y Selva], and now Ingeniero (Sp. engineer) Eber is going to tell us what is happening”. Eber stepped forward. “Sisters”, he said, “before anything else, I want you to prepare yourselves psychologically. Because I’m going to make you feel possibly a little bit bad (quizas un poco mal)”. He asked if they wanted to hear the bad news. The women were impatient, they had been waiting almost five months to find out whether their quinoa had sold: “Yes, we do”. He explained that Suma Jirwa’s two sister cooperatives, Ayara and K’ajaq, had already sold their quinoa, which had been collected by the company several days prior. “But why haven’t they picked up our quinoa?”. Two samples of quinoa were taken for testing from the umbrella cooperative of

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40 Ingeniero (or Ing. for short) is a professional title used for those who have completed qualifications in scientific and technical professions, in this case agricultural engineering. The usage is much more broad than the English equivalent.
Suma Jirwa—one from our village, and the other from a village about an hour’s bus ride away, in the *zona lago* (Sp. lake zone). One of our samples tested positive for two prohibited chemicals: metamidaphos, an organophosphate insecticide most commonly used to counteract *gorgojo de los Andes*, the plague that devastates potato harvests; and cypermethrin, a broad-spectrum insect neurotoxin. If it were only the cypermethrin that were the problem, Eber continued, the cooperative would be able to sell their quinoa in Europe, as the European Union have more relaxed thresholds for organic production than the United States, “but the metamidaphos is what’s screwing it up”. There was a sharp and collective intake of breath from the group. People began to mutter. This meant their quinoa could not be sold as organic and the sale, anticipated for some five months since receiving their organic certification, would now no longer go through. “I felt bad [when I heard the news]”, Eber continued, “I wanted to drink and cry and forget about all this… because, how is it possible? *We have to be honest* (his emphasis), if we’ve sprayed pesticides, we’ve sprayed pesticides”).

The sale’s failure was particularly significant for cooperative members, representing a watershed moment in their perception of the future. It was the first international sale Suma Jirwa had attempted as organic producers, after successfully achieving full organic status the year prior. They had, however, held off from going to market when prices tumbled in late 2015, the result of coastal overproduction and market saturation, confident that these would improve the following year. In time, sales falling through would become an unremarkable occurrence for the cooperative—shortly before I left the field, they failed to secure another sale. Nor are these kinds of commercial and regulatory failures unique to Suma Jirwa. The market is littered with examples of the frictions inherent as people are unable to successfully articulate with buyers, and as they attempt to side-step or subvert regulation for profitable gain (see Tsing 2005). However at the time, this particular failure constituted a break with the imagined future of a successful sale which sustained people, albeit increasingly tenuously, until the meeting described above on the 18th of November, 2016.

In this chapter, I extend the focus on negative ethics in collective economic affairs, showing how the perceived immorality of particular acts such as lying may be suspended in pursuit of

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41 In one well-publicised recent example of regulatory avoidance, the German car manufacturer Volkswagen admitted to having used illegal software to cheat US emissions testing protocols in its diesel engines (Burger and Martin 2019). The then-CEO Martin Winterkorn was later charged with fraud in the US and Germany for conspiracy to cover up the cheating, among other allegations.
greater goods. The chapter seeks to chart people’s contingent ethics located in the everyday “near future” (Guyer 2007: 409) of the cooperative’s first, and highly-anticipated quinoa sale, which did not eventuate. In particular, I explore the shifting status of lying and honesty as moral categories and practices for cooperative members, tracing how and when they became salient over a year-long process of organic certification and attempts at making a sale to international exporters. I argue that the kinds of future possibilities cooperative members perceived, including ‘productive’ kinds of uncertainties which were foreclosed following the revelation of pesticide contamination, significantly informed their ethical orientations and actions in shifting presents—namely, the two very different presents of before and after the collapse of the sale. The moral injunction not to lie was subject to quite different interpretations and positioning pre- and post-failure. Before the sale, a collusive and coordinated performance on the part of the cooperative at an institutional level was considered a pragmatically permissible, logical, and almost admirable response to organic certification, particularly when the prospect of a future financial windfall loomed large. After the sale’s collapse, lying became significantly more morally problematic for the cooperative, when future prospects of making a good sale were bleak and members were searching for someone to blame. I will suggest that this shift in moral orientation indicates a pragmatic or instrumental attunement to the future material ‘opportunities’ available to people in a given present, where ethical considerations (the ‘ought’) are inflected by the relationship between what is and what could be.

My arguments in this chapter are two-fold. Firstly, I suggest, following Nielsen and Pedersen (2016), that the cooperative members I worked with perceived the near future as a shifting range of potentials, which they apprehended through particular material presences and absences, taken as indexical of the contours of future possibility. If waiting and absence produces a particular set of affects (Crpanzano 2003), then conversely hope manifested in the physical materialisation of goods, people, and flurries of activity in the countryside. These were interpreted as a synecdoche for the possibility of bigger, more promising futures. Yet this was by no means a naïve or ignorant optimism. As the initial activity died down and time stretched on, certainty about the sale gave way to a more-wary engagement with the (relative) unknown, which was increasingly sensitive to the possibilities of failure as well as success and progressively “poised for disappointment” (Mattingly 2010: 3). Yet even when these imagined futures collapsed I contend that echoes of what could have been persist,
which I will suggest has significant moral import for how lying was morally positioned by cooperative members. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates the strategic and contingent suspension of concern about the negative ethics of lying in pursuit of a successful sale, which reappeared when this good failed to materialise and the ‘bad actions’ of some were revealed.

The chapter takes the following structure: I first give a brief overview of the treatment of lying, deception, and the limits of truth in the Peruvian Andes. Then I explore how agronomists and cooperative members alike performatively achieved organic certification, and the imagined horizon of economic possibilities for making a good sale which emerged in the wake of this. I explain how this horizon was renegotiated, and how new ethics were instantiated (albeit temporarily) following the sale’s collapse. The chapter ends with a consideration of what more sustained attention to futures, consequences, and pragmatics might mean for understanding ethical action in Suma Marka.

Lying, deception, and half-truths in the Andes

Literature on lying in the Andes is sparse, reflecting intermittent interest in lying in anthropology more broadly as a “culturally specific form of intentional deception” (McGranahan 2017: 245; see for example Gilsenan 2016 [1976]; Hurston 1990 [1935]). This is somewhat surprising, as lying appears in a series of well-known Quechua moral injunctions thought to go back to the Incas: “do not steal, do not lie, do not be lazy (ama sua, ama llulla, ama quella)”, which have been picked up and articulated as central indigenous values in recent Pan-Andean moral and political thought. These injunctions have formed the basis of indigenous community activism and organising in Ecuador (see Colloredo-Mansfeld 2002: 632), political critique of corruption in Peru (see Berti and Cryan 2006), and even became the linchpin of government policy under Evo Morales and the Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia. During his inauguration in 2006, Morales stated: “we will govern with the laws our ancestors left us, el ama sua, ama llulla, ama quella, do not steal, do not lie, do not be lazy, this is our law” (in Postero 2007: 3).

42 Peruvian historian Juan José Vega (2000) contests this claim, arguing that these moral precepts were instead a colonial imposition. Nevertheless, the ancient Incaic origins of ama sua, ama llulla, ama quella persists as a pervasive popular imaginary, which has been bolstered by recent political articulations in the region.
A similar ethos informed the treatment of lying in Suma Marka. On my very first visit to the community in June 2015, I was instructed by Eber not to make promises I couldn’t, or didn’t intend to keep when I went to live there, because “us Aymaras are very powerful (somos fuertes), and we kill corrupt liars (nos matamos a los corruptos mentirosos)”. He proceeded to tell me the story of Mayor Cirilo Robles from the city of Ilave, who was lynched by a local mob on April 26, 2004. Eber suggested this had happened because Robles was a liar who “hadn’t kept his promises” and who had stolen from the people (see also Zubieta 2014). Eber most likely had simply intended to shock or scare me, but his point was clear: people in the village did not like liars. Indeed, several adult Suma Marqueños recalled how, as children, they had been whipped by their parents for dishonesty. Moreover, calling someone a “liar” was a wounding insult in interpersonal conflicts which arose in the community, used especially when someone was thought to be deliberately misrepresenting the truth for personal gain. Recall from Chapter Four how Tía Isabel had called her brother Rodolfo an “ambitious liar” following a dispute with his cousins over a shared parcel of land in the andenes above the village, which he—untruthfully, according to his siblings—claimed his wife had purchased. Tío Rodolfo considered this particular slur to be an outrageous provocation, and responded by threatening Tía Isabel with violence. Consequently, in Andean Peru as elsewhere, people stated that one “should not lie”, and often lamented the inescapably pervasive and corrosive influence of lying in public and private life, alongside other ills such as corruption (see for example Valenzuela 2018). Nevertheless, they also conformed to the central paradox that underpins much scholarship on lying—that lying can be both morally problematic and socially necessary, and therefore, is invariably ubiquitous (Bailey 1991).

Yet in spite of the ancestors’ normative disapproval, lying was not always straightforwardly problematic in Suma Marka. This was particularly evident in humorous stories of people telling “stupid” lies. In one popular tale, two boys are sitting outside their school room, waiting for their teacher to arrive to go inside and begin their lessons. One asks the other, “what did you have for breakfast?”. The second boy responds, “I had a delicious seco de pollo”. “Then what’s that on your jumper?”. The second boy looks down to find he has dropped canihuanco, a porridge made of ground canihua, all over his front. When told this story prompted uproarious laughter, and can be interpreted as a humorous cautionary tale suggesting that people either should not lie lest they be made to look a fool, or conversely,
should learn how to lie better. There were, therefore, situations in which lying or misrepresenting the truth was considered contextually appropriate, alongside other forms of truth-stretching such as strategic omissions and evasions, silence, and literal interpretations.

In early June 2015, I accompanied Tía Isabel to a series of appointments with local government officials in the nearby town of Qhatu Marka. Unusually for a woman who was most comfortable in trousers, she had chosen to dress in a full pollera skirt with petticoats and bowler hat, the distinctive dress of rural women, for the meetings. When I remarked on this, she smiled impishly, explaining that in order to keep her vale FISE, the voucher which entitled her to a discount on bottles of gas, she had to present herself as if she was permanently domiciled in Suma Marka, rather than splitting her time between the countryside and her arguably more permanent residence in the city. “The important thing is that we secure the voucher”, she explained, “and so this is how I have to dress, like I am a woman of the pollera. If I wear trousers, they will suspect me”.

A stance of strategic engagement was considered especially important when dealing with outsiders and state authorities, where there was an assumption of mutual distrust, and the ever-present possibility that someone else could be profiting at your expense. Consequently, Suma Marqueños often maintained an attitude of suspicion toward all outsiders, especially when being asked to divulge personal information (see also Ødegaard 2018). Starn (1999), writing about an agricultural community in the Northern Peruvian Andes, noted that he was unable to ever get people to confirm whether they held debts with the bank—they would simply smile, shake their heads in refusal, and change the subject. Likewise, in Suma Marka, people were also very skilled at responding to the literal interpretation of questions posed, pretending not to hear things they did not want to respond to, or evading particular lines of questioning by answering another question altogether. Many of my early attempts at asking questions in Suma Marka were met with this kind of strategic evasion until I had earned sufficient trust to warrant more frank and detailed explanations, though gaps and silences invariably persisted (see also Starn 1999). It was also a skill I struggled unsuccessfully to master personally, only really ever achieving this on a single occasion. Taking a pair of boots across the pampa to Tía Isabel, who was digging ditches for the construction of the village’s new water and sanitation system, I crossed paths with one of the water engineers who had

43 Indeed, her own slightly dubious possession of the vale FISE, intended primarily for families who would otherwise use dung-fuel fogón stoves, may have contributed to Tía Isabel’s concern about others’ knowledge of her cooking practices in the opening vignette in the Introduction.
recently descended on the village for the purposes of the project. Clearly surprised to see a gringa emerging over the hill, he asked me where I had come from. “From over there”, I replied, gesturing at the houses and ignoring the implication about where (in the world) I could be from. “What are you doing here?”. This was clearly a question about my presence in the community more generally, to which I responded, “delivering these wellington boots to Tía Isabel”. Pleased with my skill, I rushed back home to report this to Tía Teresa, who smiled and said, “ah yes, now you understand”. A lie well-told, or an evasion deftly made, especially but not exclusively to an outsider, was often met with this kind of quiet, knowing approval on the part of others.

It was also useful to occasionally obscure the truth to one’s social intimates, confirming Dell Hymes’ (1983: xv) observation that “in a good many peasant societies, the foundation of prudent speech is to say no more than, and only as much as, is good for the speaker”. My comadre Carmen, who I became very close to over the course of my fieldwork, made me privy to several intimate and potentially embarrassing disclosures about her personal life during fieldwork (see the discussion of borrowing her daughters’ communion money in Chapter Three, for example). Nevertheless, she remained selective in the information she chose to impart about herself and her family. During a phone call in October 2019, Carmen passed me over to speak to my god-daughter Ofelia, who mentioned excitedly that her grandmother Eva was living with a new man. Eva had been a madre soltera (Sp. single mother) since her husband had walked out on the family when her two children were small, and had suffered greatly raising them alone. Consequently, a man on the scene was novel and intriguing gossip and I pressed her for details, only to find out that it was old news—the couple had gotten together over a year ago and had been living together for the past six months. When Ofelia passed the phone back to her mother, I lightly admonished Carmen for not telling me about her mother’s living situation in the numerous previous phone calls we had had. She apologised profusely and said she had wanted to tell me, but was afraid about how I might react, or whether I would consider it to be improper, given that her mother was still technically married to her long-absent father. Lying in the Andes then, is contextually mediated—and as I will demonstrate below in a discussion of the cooperative’s approach to organic certification, significantly conditioned by the possible futures which people perceive.
“Sometimes it’s better to lie straight up (de frente)”: performing organic certification

While organic certification regimes gained traction internationally from the 1980s onward (Guthman 1998), the emphasis on organic production is only a relatively recent shift in the Peruvian quinoa sector. Following the 2011 United Nations International Year of Quinoa, the Peruvian government sought to capitalise on a perceived gap between supply and demand in the international market by bankrolling a series of projects to encourage coastal rice farmers to switch to the production of conventional quinoa (Andina 2014). Highland farmers would produce organic quinoa, thus ensuring a neat division of labour between the different ecological zones of coast and highlands. This caused controversy in Puno however, as many producers felt that the government was favouring coastal producers, who received state investment in technical assistance and the provision of resources to convert from rice to quinoa. By contrast, highland farmers were left to face the significant demands of organic agriculture on their own or conversely, to try and compete in the conventional sector but with significantly lower volumes than coastal producers. This led to protests that the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI) was “undressing one saint to dress another”.

However, as the boom wore off (Kerssen 2013; El Universo 2014), state agronomists and NGOs working in the area began to tout organic quinoa production as a “healthy [sano]” alternative to conventional farming. For local and national authorities involved in Peruvian agricultural markets, organic certification appears a neat and timely response to an increasingly competitive global market, where quinoa is now grown in more than 80 countries across the world. At the 2017 International Quinoa Congress José Luis Rabines Alarcón, a representative from MINAGRI, said that cornering the organics niche internationally was the “only way” for Peruvian quinoa to be competitive at an international level. He admitted that the previous government had made a mistake in promoting the coastal production of conventional quinoa over highland organic production (see also MINAGRI 2017). Puneñan farmers are now routinely encouraged to take part in certification programmes, with the express aim of securing higher prices for their quinoa in a declining market. Quinoa prices, once reaching up to S/. 200 (£41.72) an arroba44 or almost S/. 17.40 (£3.63) per kilo for conventional quinoa at the height of the boom in 2012, have dropped

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44 An arroba is a local unit of measurement weighing 11.5 kgs, and is used primarily for agricultural products and foodstuffs.
substantially over the past four years. Conventional quinoa now fluctuates between S/. 3.00 (63p) and S/. 3.40 (71p) per kilo in the local market, and up to S/. 4.00 (83p) internationally. Organic quinoa, by contrast, carries a premium price of between S/. 4.50 (94p) and S/. 5.50 (£1.15) per kilo.45

To sell organic quinoa to an overseas market, which offers the most attractive prices, most buyers will require producers to have undertaken a formal process of certifying their quinoa as organic. This process, which spans the whole year and is reviewed annually, includes an internal system of control undertaken by the cooperative, followed by an inspection made by an external auditing body. The external inspection, often completed by a single inspector, involves a thorough review of internal control documentation, and visits to selected producers’ farms to assess their compliance with organic regulations in person. Once producers successfully achieve certification, product vendors can legally include organic labelling on their product and charge consumers a premium for its value-added qualities. As such, many cooperatives in the region have now secured, or are in the process of securing, organic certification. Several NGOs who work with Puneñan cooperatives specifically offer technical and monetary assistance with organic certification for beneficiaries of their development programmes (see for example Swisscontact 2016; Programa Conjuntos Granos Andinos 2016). This is a necessary intervention, because the process is costly and time-consuming, requiring a level of technical expertise and a familiarity with multiple sets of regulations, bound in dense, legalistic documents which stretch into the hundreds of pages. Organic certification, then, can be considered an archetypal example of what Strathern (2000) calls an audit culture: it emerges out of a situation of perceived or actual mistrust; is a performance standard which encourages its participants to take it upon themselves to “check themselves” (p. 4) and their own practice; and is designed to facilitate the ethical ideals of openness and transparency in the organic production chain through adherence to certain standards of conduct, in turn producing consumer trust in the final, certified product (Guthman 1998; Galvin 2018).

Suma Jirwa first achieved organic status in 2015 following a two-year transition period. Between April and June 2016, they undertook the second iteration of their annual review. The process was largely stage-managed by the small technical team of volunteers who

45 True as of April-May 2016.
“accompanied” the cooperative, including local agronomists and agronomy students on work placement who were drafted in to help with the bureaucratic demands of certification. With the experience of various certification campaigns across multiple cooperatives behind them, they claimed to “know what the inspector wants to see (saber lo que quiere ver el inspector)” and sought to cultivate the correct appearance of compliance in order to pass the certification. As such, they took on the bulk of what Graeber (2006: 117) calls the burden of “interpretive labour” in managing the bureaucratic aspects of the certification process. They performed a delicate translation and balancing act between the ‘reality’ of life in the Peruvian countryside as they knew it, and the arcane technical demands of the certification regime. This included permitting minor infractions which they perceived as ultimately harmless parts of everyday rural life, such as not throwing anything away, even old containers which previously held pesticides or other contaminants, while simultaneously encouraging cooperative members to uphold what they saw as more fundamental tenets of organic agriculture, such as not using chemical pesticides or fertilisers. Jillian Cavanaugh (2016), writing about food safety and heritage certification in Italy, sees a disjuncture between the rigidity of audit documents, and the relative flexibility and creativity afforded by accompanying talk which smooths the passage of this performative documentation. Here, however, I want to focus on the form-filling itself as a creative act, one which stretched the boundaries of the relationship between the document and the reality it purported to represent.

The work included filling in a series of forms on the producers’ behalf and coaching participants on how to respond to the less intuitive demands of certification. “Do you have a backpack sprayer? Is it new or old? OK, it’s old, we’ll put down that you don’t have one and you’re going to hide it when the inspectors come”, Hector, one of the agricultural engineers, explained to Tía Flor as we sat around a makeshift table in the shade of Tío Gerardo’s front patio, half-hidden behind a stack of producer information forms. As he worked, members of the cooperative sat around the patio, talking quietly and waiting their turn at the table. Some expressed a keen interest in what was being written on their behalf, while others sat with arms folded and were reluctant to part with even the most basic of information. The registration of total land area was a particularly sensitive topic, as were questions about the animals and tools people owned. Many were concerned that others would overhear them, and spoke in whispers while offering this information, worried that this could give rise to unfavourable comparisons and provoke envy (see Chapter Four). Others were pointedly
vague, suspicious that this information could be used for purposes other than the organic certification. Part of Hector’s role, drawing on his background as a university-educated agronomist, kin-member, and fellow campesino from the neighbouring village of J’iska Marka, was to reassure his tíos and tías that they could provide the information necessary for the organic certification without concern.

Hector motioned for me to listen in as he went through each section of the form, noting down the producers’ total land area, area planted with quinoa, type and number of animals owned, and tools possessed (both mechanical and non-mechanical). He explained as he was writing that we had to ask specifically about the backpacks because “people here never throw anything away”. This was just “how life is in the countryside (así es la vida del campo)”. However, he suggested, even if the backpack was no longer in use, the inspector would usually “smell it” as part of his inspection, which would invariably “smell like” prohibited chemicals, the residue of former pre-organic use. This could mean risking the organic certification if discovered. It was therefore important that the cooperative members understood and could manoeuvre around what was and was not permissible to give the appearance of full organic compliance, at least for the duration of the certification. Here, Hector acted as a mediator between campo and certification in order to reach a compromise which appeared above board on paper, while simultaneously accommodating the habits of countryside living (see also Cavanaugh 2016).

Hector completed some of the forms in pencil to enable later modification, and other information written in pen was corrected with tipex and written over again if he did not consider it appropriate for the certification’s requirements on reflection. After we had collected them, I spent several days cloistered in a cold room in his house in the neighbouring village, readjusting figures under his direction. Hector paid particular attention to augmenting the area under quinoa so that the cooperative’s total projected yield would ostensibly be higher. He removed any references to quinoa which the producers had sold at the local market, so that the cooperative would be able to certify the largest volume of quinoa possible and therefore improve their chances of making the largest possible sale. Once completed, these forms were returned to the office of the NGO that Eber worked for in Puno, where a team of agronomists and student interns from the local university, hunched together in a
cramped room, exercised further creative license by ensuring these “matched” with the internal control documents and producers’ diaries.

When I arrived at his office with the forms Eber was on the phone, so I drifted over to greet Ing. Mario, a jovial agronomist who had set himself up in the corner of the cramped office. Peering over his shoulder, I saw he was laboriously copying the signature of the Vice President of the Evaluation Committee, Julio, at the bottom of the internal control documents for each of the cooperative’s producers. According to the regulations, all members of the evaluation committee should be present during the internal control and sign the forms, but Julio was working and could not attend. I asked Mario earnestly if it was alright for him to be copying Julio’s signature. He laughed: “don’t worry, they’ve already put me in jail” (ya me han metido en la carcel), gesturing with both hands toward the stack of over 500 documents as if they were handcuffed together. Then, tickled with the joke, he elaborated more loudly for the benefit of the whole office, “if they do put me in jail for forgery, hopefully you will all come visit me sometime”. Everyone laughed. Eber grinned: “I don’t know what you’re talking about, it’s on you if we get found out, I have nothing to do with this (nada que ver conmigo)”. Here, actions which could potentially be considered ethically and legally transgressive were met with self-conscious amusement and levity, leveraged for comic effect.

Eber then motioned me over to his desk and pointed to a stack of new neon-coloured notebooks which had been purchased by one of his interns that morning. Explaining that “under the regulations” producers were supposed to keep notes on their production activities throughout the year, he thrust four in my direction. When I didn’t immediately respond, he borrowed one that his assistant, Janeth, was working on. She had drawn an elaborate title page decorated with tiny stalks of quinoa, imitating those that Peruvian school-aged children are asked to draw in their exercise books for each subject on the first day of class. She had haphazardly stuck a list titled “National and International Norms for the Production of Organic Quinoa” onto the inner cardboard cover. Wonky columns framed a list of random dates on the inside page, beside which Janeth had noted the following activities: sowing, weeding, ridging, and fertilizing. Eber closed the book and bent it back and forth until a crease appeared in the centre, explaining that I was supposed to make it look like it had been well-used and to complete it “with my other hand, in the handwriting of someone who doesn’t write much”. I took to this task with (perhaps too much) gusto, scraping the corners
of some under the heel of my boot, and spilling tea on the pages of others before drying them over the heater, interventions which the team of agronomists found highly amusing.

In her work on organic certification among Indian rice farmers, Shaila Galvin (2018) has noted that it was relatively common practice for Organic Board officials to fill out diaries and associated forms on behalf of producers considered unable or unwilling to engage in this form of documentation themselves. She argues that these documents were therefore not an accurate or direct representation of the production that occurred but rather a place where “Organic Board officials could narrate organic status” (p. 500). Clearly, a similar process was at work here. It has become commonplace for literature on audit culture in general, and certifying regimes in particular, to identify how documentary practices which purport to offer transparency, legibility, and accurate representation in fact engender their opposites, or something else entirely: producing uncertainty (Galvin 2018), incompleteness, gaps, slippages, and partial representations (Cavanaugh 2016), and generating “a physical and conceptual space beyond the control of audit” (Dunn 2007: 37). This is largely positioned as an effect of documentation and documentary processes. However, the truth-claims of certifying regimes also raise the more straightforward question of whether and to what extent information is actively reinterpreted, strategically omitted, or even directly falsified by the various agents who engage with such regimes, in order to ‘fit’ the correct narrative for external authorities. In Jason Konefal and Mari Hatanaka’s (2011) study of organic shrimp fisheries in Indonesia, for example, fishermen openly admitted to lying on documents and to officials to secure organic status. Thus, such documents—while clearly constructed and performative—are nevertheless also socially consequential because the auditors treat them as if they were truthful and accurate representations of reality.

In the case of Suma Jirwa, agronomists and cooperative members alike espoused a pragmatic approach to getting through the certification successfully, because of the limited time and resources the cooperative currently had available to “face (enfrentar)” the certification and fulfil all of its requirements to the letter. During the previous year of certification, which had been their first, the cooperative received some start-up funding to pay for certification costs from a private benefactor, Señor Andreas Velasquez. Andreas is a contact of Eber’s, and runs a large, family-owned commercial farm outside Arequipa, producing milk and a revolving selection of vegetables such as onions, peppers, broccoli, and avocados, depending on what
he thought would be profitable in a given year. He had a soft spot for small highland farmers and was personally interested in supporting Puno’s fledgling quinoa industry, which he believed had market potential. The funding was only limited to the first year, however, as Andreas’ aim was that the cooperative would become self-supporting—generating enough income from the sale of their quinoa to finance next year’s certification and further expansion. As I noted in the introduction to the chapter, Suma Jirwa’s quinoa had not sold, however, as between 2014 and 2015 the price dropped dramatically. Eber had advised the cooperative members to hold on to their stocks until the situation improved, or until they had achieved full organic status and could command a higher price for their product. As a consequence, the cooperative was without either external or self-generated financial support for the second round of certification. They had to generate the money to pay for the certification themselves, and once the small stipend they had received from Andreas for agronomist support ran out, could not afford to continue to pay Eber, Hector or the other agronomists for their time. After continuing to work voluntarily for a period, Hector ran into financial difficulties and subsequently withdrew from cooperative duties to pursue other work. Following his departure, Suma Jirwa relied on the work Eber, his friends, and his interns could do in a voluntary capacity, shoehorning meetings and attempting to fulfil basic certification requirements in and around Eber’s paid work for an NGO.

Two weeks prior to the inspector’s arrival, Eber’s agronomist friend Mario held a meeting in the countryside which he claimed would help “familiarise” producers with the process of inspection. He was concerned, he told me on the bus ride out to the village, that producers might say the wrong thing or be caught out by a tricky question from the inspector. This was because they were “honest” people who were not overly familiar with the specific technical demands of certification. During the meeting, Mario adopted the persona of the inspector, leading producers through a simulation of possible questions and the kinds of responses they should give: “we should reply, we don’t use…. [pesticides] that’s right, pesticides, chemicals, urea, super calcium phosphate, these poisons we haven’t known for years (no conocemos años), since our ancestors, it doesn’t matter if you have to lie, although some people use

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46 Andreas paid the full cost of the first year’s certification, plus a small stipend which paid for Hector’s assistance until the money ran out in early 2016. He also hosted 32 cooperative members on a two-day field trip to his farm, paying for transport and accommodation, showing them around his milking shed and vegetable fields. In return, the cooperative participated in a seed exchange programme with Andreas’ farm.

47 Producers are not able to sell their quinoa as certified organic until the third year of certification, when there are no longer any traces of fertilizer or pesticide residue in the soil.
them, yes or no?” He continued, “when the inspector asks, this is how we should respond, we have to lie a little, we produce with pure manure (guano de corral), naturally”. Mario instructed the socios how to prepare right up to the smallest detail, including the colour of the plastic sacks they should use.48 He explained: “we have to cover up (tapar) our errors, because if they discover us, it will be an observation for us. Sometimes it’s better to lie straight up (de frente)”. Tía Isabel responded to Mario’s suggestion with glee, eyes shining as she recounted how in the previous year’s inspection she had, on her own initiative, asked her cousin Flor to loan her several sacks of quinoa. They ferried the sacks over to her house in a wheelbarrow, hauling the final one into position “just before” the inspector arrived. Isabel explained that this was so that her harvest would appear more bountiful in the inspection. She appeared especially pleased with her intervention, and said the inspector had commented on ‘her’ quinoa admiringly. Mario also approved: “That’s good, that’s how we have to be (así tenemos que ser)”.

Lying “straight up”, as I continue to demonstrate below, was part of a range of tactics employed by agronomists and socios—including strategic omissions, misdirection, distraction, and window-dressing—to secure the organic certification for future sales. Together, these constituted a collusive frontstage performance of compliance on the part of the cooperative members and accompanying agronomists (Goffman 1971; see also Hatanaka and Busch 2008). Within this performance, lying in its myriad forms alternately emerged as pragmatic deceit, creative art, and cunning ruse, but was nevertheless positioned—at least, at this point in time—as a legitimate and morally justifiable response to the exigencies of certification. With only very limited resources at their disposal, lying was a pragmatic and strategic way to keep the project of organic certification, and the possible futures it engendered for the cooperative’s socios, afloat.

The inspection

The day of the inspection was a rush of activity. In the morning we met with Ignacio, a gentle, rotund man in his early 40s, at Eber’s NGO offices in town. He was from a certifying organisation based in Bolivia and had been an organic inspector for a little over three years.

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48 The sacks should be white or coloured, not black, because the chemicals in black plastic could potentially contaminate the quinoa.
Like Eber, he came from a rural community and had trained as an agronomist before moving to Cochabamba. Unusually for certifying agents, he was also an Aymara speaker. “You’re going to take him out to the village and show him where to go”, Eber told me as I followed him up the stairs and out of Ignacio’s earshot, “maybe he will like having a gringa to show him around… to distract him a little”. By this, I understood that Eber hoped I would behave flirtatiously, which would contribute to the cooperative’s successful performance.

Accordingly, Ignacio and I set off for the local minivan depot, while Mario and Eber went on ahead on motorbikes as planned, to check that the selected producers were ready to receive the inspector in the “best possible manner”. This meant storage sheds needed to be clean and orderly, both sheds and the surrounding property free of any items that could jeopardise the certification such as old pesticide or fertiliser packets, and for producers to have a final chance to practice their responses before the inspector arrived in the village.

Cramped knee-to-knee in the back of the minivan, Ignacio explained to me that his job was to look for five major risk factors: a good level of general knowledge of the rules of organic production; use of correct products; the presence of pests (which would encourage the use of pesticides); adequate storage; and possible sources of cross-contamination, such as spray drift from non-organic neighbours. He had already gone over the internal control documents of each producer and from these had selected a cross-section to visit. This was standard practice for an inspection due to the short time period in which the inspection was supposed to take place. The internal control covered visits to all producers, and the external inspection was based on interviews with a small sample, visits to their recently-harvested quinoa fields, plus a sample of quinoa taken for laboratory testing from an individual producer. In Suma Marka, four were chosen: two from each side of the village, including Tía Flor, who was the largest landowner, and sister-in-law to the cooperative’s president, Tío Jorge.

As we rounded the corner into Tía Gaby’s courtyard for the first visit of the day, we were greeted by a saying “storage room”, painstakingly handwritten on A4 paper and stuck to the lintel of the storage room door. Ignacio pointed at the sign and smiled as he stepped inside to begin the inspection. He was unassuming, methodically working through a series of questions with the producers about what they had planted previously, whether there had been a lot of pests over the year, what fertilisers and pesticides they had used, where they got their seeds from. He asked to see their see their storage shed, agricultural equipment, and the parcels
where they had grown and recently harvested their quinoa. At certain points Ignacio appeared to give producers the benefit of the doubt when they wavered in their responses, joking with them to help ease some of the tension of inviting a stranger into their homes. Although good-natured, he was nevertheless assiduous in cross-checking their answers against their internal control forms. En-route to one of the quinoa fields, he stopped to pick up and examine some small crystals scattered along the pathway, which he told me were most probably a type of nitrogen-phosphorous-potassium-based inorganic fertiliser. I asked him how he would interpret a sign like that: “someone’s been using chemicals around here”, he replied. When we were in Tía Lorena’s storeroom, Ignacio beckoned to me to come outside, whispering to me to step back inside and see what I could smell. I did as he asked, noticing a faintly acidic tang in the air, which he said he thought was a non-permitted chemical used for long-term seed preservation. I asked if it would leave traces in the quinoa, and he nodded, whispering: “and I’d wanted to test another producer, but Ingeniero Mario wants me to test her quinoa. Well, with pleasure”.

Ing. Mario had, however, good reason to be so particular about which producer was tested. When I pulled him aside to tell him what the inspector had told me, he said: “well he has to test Señora Lorena’s quinoa because Señora Flor confessed to me this morning that they had sprayed their potatoes [with pesticides], so her test will definitely come out positive”. With potentially more to hide, Tía Flor’s ‘staging’ was more elaborate than most. We arrived at their house to find that we were being led, not to their actual storage shed in one of the rooms off the patio, but to one of their formerly empty outbuildings where I had stayed when visiting the family several weeks’ prior. Like the others, Flor’s ‘storage shed’ also bore a small sign on it in anticipation of the inspector’s visit, and she explained to the inspector that she kept her quinoa separate from the rest of her stored goods. During the interview, Flor also claimed to have only a certain amount of quinoa stored, when the actual amount she had stored was much larger and, contrary to what she had told the inspector about keeping the quinoa separate, in the other storage shed with her potatoes, habas, wheat, and oats. Towards the end of the interview, the inspector checked Flor’s form, where she had listed that she owned a backpack used for spraying plants. Ignacio asked where it was and whether he could see it, but Flor was adamant she didn’t have one: “we borrow ours from Jorge”. When Hector and I were helping producers to fill out their forms, we had instructed them not to list a backpack unless it had not ever been used with pesticides. This was difficult unless it was
relatively new, as most people tended to keep things even when they were no longer in use, and a number of producers had been using pesticides before the cooperative decided to go organic. At that point, Flor had claimed to have a new backpack, so that was what had been written down on her form. Ignacio paused for a minute to see if she would elaborate, but she stood firm, and the interview concluded without much additional fuss.

As the inspecting party were leaving, Tía Flor motioned me into her courtyard to give me a small bag of *quisipiña* (Ay. quinoa biscuits made from a malleable, boiled dough), while the others set off ahead on motorbikes to the final house visit. She then took me by the arm and we walked together through the fields toward the house. I seized the opportunity to ask her, carefully, about what Mario had disclosed about her quinoa being potentially contaminated. Perhaps it was the relief or pleasure of getting through the inspection unscathed, or perhaps I was looking particularly trustworthy in that moment, but she was uncharacteristically unreserved. “Yes, we confessed to Jorge this morning that we had sprayed our potatoes. It’s the *gorgojo* (Sp. potato weevil) you know, what can you do?” I murmured sympathetically.
Gorgojo de los Andes (Premnotrypes spp) is a particularly feared pest in the countryside. In its larval stage, the insect presents as a fat, white grub, about the size of a forefinger, which can decimate potato crops if left unchecked. Formerly controlled by communal rotational farming methods known in Aymara as aynok’a,49 a shift toward an individuated, patchwork style of land use has meant that gorgojo beetles can move easily from one parcel of potatoes to another, maintaining a consistent food supply and ensuring steady reproduction. As potatoes are the staple food crop in the Peruvian Andes, “what fills the pot (lo que llena la olla)”, there is significant concern about the success or failure of the potato harvest. The first question that people ask is whether the harvest is “wormy (gusanado)” or not, and during growth will check their potatoes frequently to see if the gorgojo has begun to attack their crop. This is very necessary, as gorgojo damage can be severe. A National Institute of Agricultural Innovation (INIA) study in 2015 estimated that up to 35% of the potato harvest per hectare could be lost to the gorgojo, and in some cases the reduction of between 80-100% of quality and productivity, leading producers to abandon their parcels (La Republica 2015). As such, people resort to the use of chemical pesticides. These principally include carbofuran and metamidophos, which are classified as some of the most toxic commercially available pesticides, and expressly prohibited under major organics regulations, including USDA, EU, and NOP schemes (ibid). Tía Flor’s appeal of “what can you do?” alludes to this predicament, a form of instrumental reasoning whereby the threat of crop destruction appears to demand a particular kind of (chemical) response.

Yet this belies a still-more complex set of circumstances, where Tía Flor was tied into the cooperative project through kinship obligations to her brother-in-law Jorge, the cooperative’s president. As the community’s largest landowner, producing a significant amount of quinoa, the cooperative needed Flor’s contribution to be able to meet the minimum threshold of 5 tonnes of quinoa to make the sale viable. Tío Jorge had also appealed to Flor to loan the cooperative money to meet the costs of certification, which they planned to recoup through the sale and through membership subscriptions. As noted in Chapter Three, Tía Flor’s main concern was her daughter Yeli, a young woman in her mid-20s who lived with her in the village, and who had an intellectual disability. Flor was amassing money through sales of

49 Aynok’a denotes a method of collectively farming a cluster of communally-held parcels following the same seven-year rotational pattern of potatoes in year one, quinoa in year two, a legume such as tarwi or habas in year three, and grains such as oats or barley in year four, before a minimum fallow period of three years. Aynok’a farming acts as a significant control for crop-specific pests due to the distance between parcels and the yearly crop rotation, preserves soil fertility, and maintains biodiversity.
crops, animals, and some assets such as land and tractors, and extending significant credit to her kin, to ensure that Yeli was financially and socially looked after in the future. Here multiple, competing obligations, maternal concern, and the particularities of circumstance coalesce in ad-hoc responses to the demands that a particular course of action—such as the certification—makes. Seen in this context, Flor’s lie and subsequent ‘confession’, delivered at the last moment under the threat of possible discovery, was a strategic if hastily-reasoned response, the morality of which could be contingently suspended in service of the more pragmatic goal of keeping her own and the cooperative’s projects afloat.

 Imagined futures: from possibility to collapse

By June, Suma Jirwa’s struggle to achieve the organic certification seemed likely to pay off. The certification was awarded and by the end of July, Eber had arranged for them to sell their quinoa harvest of around 5 tonnes to one of Peru’s largest international organic exporters. But first, each member would need to transport their quinoa to a single storage shed. This was so that the company’s contractors could make a quality inspection and take a sample of the cooperative’s quinoa for laboratory testing. The general mood was upbeat on the day of the transfer. People arrived pushing wheelbarrows and lugging sacks on their shoulders, quickly filling Tía Angelica’s small front patio with noisy activity. Eber and his interns set up a makeshift production line along one side of the house, where each member’s sack was weighed, rebagged into standard white sacks, and sown up with a small tag noting the individual name of the producer, the sack’s weight, and the variety of quinoa it held. Eber handed me a clipboard to record the exact amount of quinoa each person had contributed, and I used these weights and Eber’s assessment of the quality of their quinoa to calculate precisely how much money they were to receive from the sale. This was based on the tentative price of S/. 4.50 (94p) per kilo for quinoa of “very good quality” and S/. 4.30 (90p) for quinoa of “good quality”, agreed to under the terms of the contract, plus an additional levy of 50 centimos (10p) per kilo, which would go into Suma Jirwa’s accounts to offset some of the costs of certification. As I calculated each amount owing, people scribbled their figures down on their hands, into dog-earned notebooks, and on scraps of paper which were hastily tucked into wallets like promissory notes.
As Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012: 29) observed of statistics in post-war Cyprus, numbers “have a phantasmic quality: they give a semblance of solidity. They make the tentative appear symbolically more tangible or true”. In this instance, the concreteness and specificity of their individual figures gave added weight to people’s expectations surrounding the sale, such that people were already mentally allocating the weight to people’s expectations surrounding the sale, such that people were already mentally allocating the money they anticipated receiving to address their contemporary concerns. My comadre Carmen, who had been waiting eagerly for me to finish in a nearby field, rushed over as I was leaving Tía Angelica’s patio to ask how much money her mother was going to make. She was not a member of the cooperative herself, but had decided to pool her quinoa with her mother’s so that both could benefit from the sale and the higher prices on offer. When I told her she could expect S/. 648.00 (£135) from her half of the quinoa, she grasped my hands together in hers and said enthusiastically, “now, with those S/. 600 that I’ve got coming, I can pay back Lorena the money that I owe [from borrowing to pay for her son’s school fees and other household expenses], and I can pay for Jhon’s [her son’s] university fees for another month”. Other cooperative members espoused similar goals: “this is for my little fruits and vegetables”, meaning the weekly shop at the nearby market; to pay back debts they had accrued, including aynis for an upcoming fiesta; and in one instance, to buy a new ‘eco’ stove for the kitchen which Tía Teresa was in the process of rebuilding as a legacy for her grandchildren. Another tía joked as she heard her figure: “that’s going to be for my new pollera”, prompting uproarious laughter from her fellow cooperative members, who were tickled by her tongue-in-cheek display of personal extravagance.

As such, the money—ranging from S/. 68.80 (£14.35) for Tía Teodora’s 16 kilos to S/. 1602 (£334.15) for Tía Lorena’s 356 kilos—if not necessarily a massive windfall, was nevertheless welcomed as a useful addition to the family economy, directed at oikos and the reproduction of social relations. Frances Pine (2014: S95) writing on the relationship between migration and hope among economic migrants in the Polish highlands, defines hope as follows: “a desire to believe in a better future or in the possibility that something can change…”. But I suggest these more quotidian ‘micro’-hopes, located in an everyday “near future” (Guyer 2007: 409) and directed at the possibility of realising the continuation of a particular standard of living, are equally significant in a context of relative material uncertainty and in particular, poor cash flow: “it’s not everything but it’s something that’s going to help us”, Carmen said as we discussed the sale again that evening. Pine further suggests that “hope is also always mirrored or shadowed by its opposite, despair” (ibid). At this particular point in time,
however, cooperative members did not appear despairing or express concern that the sale might not go ahead. Rather, the future seemed eminently tangible, buoyed by the concrete activity that had taken place up to that point in passing the certification, readying the quinoa for sale, and in particular, the specificity of the monetary values that had been produced. These steps had a synecdochic quality, whereby the successful completion of each part of the process stood in for the future realisation of the sale.

Several weeks after the socios transferred their sacks to the communal storage shed, a dour consultant arrived from the international exporter to assess the quinoa. He took photographs of the room, stamping the sacks two-across so that he would be able to tell if any were introduced or removed in his absence. He then took a pointed plastic tube and inserted it methodically into each sack, releasing a stream of quinoa into a plastic bag which he would take away for laboratory testing. As he left the room, he placed a numbered red zip-tie across the outside latch, effectively locking the door and sealing the quinoa inside, “so that no-one can make any changes”. Tío Jorge, the cooperative’s president, followed the consultant around and out of the dusty room with a mixture of interest and concern, mentioning to me after he had set off in his truck that the exporters were “very strict”. Although inspections of this kind are commonplace in agricultural sales, the introduction of independent laboratory testing for pesticides was a relatively recent addition to the quinoa sector in Peru. Until 2016, holding an up-to-date certificate of organic production was considered sufficient for producers to be able to secure a sale of quinoa internationally. However, after 27 shipments of Peruvian quinoa were rejected at the US border for high levels of pesticide contamination over the period of February 2014 to March 2016 (Solano Oré 2016; see also El Comercio 2014), including a shipment from the organic exporter Exportadora Agrícola Orgánica, exporters became increasingly concerned about the possibility of chemical contamination. As a result, they began to introduce mandatory laboratory testing, making their purchase of quinoa conditional on a negative result, due to be processed in a ten-working day timeframe. This introduced a new, unexpected, and particular kind of truth-claim to the ones the cooperative had previously been operating with—a scientific truth-claim predicated on the presence or absence of trace materials of chemical additives.

The ten-day timeframe for processing the sample came and went, stretching into weeks, and then two months. Suma Jirwa’s members had difficulty getting hold of Eber on the phone to
ask for news, he stopped turning up in the countryside, and the buoyant optimism which had marked the *socios* early engagement with the process of certification and the sale started to dissipate, replaced by growing frustration and uncertainty. As I had acted as a go-between between Eber’s office in the city and the cooperative in the countryside, members began to ask with increasing frequency if I had heard anything about the sale. They were growing agitated by the wait, concerned about mounting debts, bills, and other expenses, and as their quinoa could not be moved from the storage shed until a decision was made on the sale, they did not have the option of siphoning off a sack or more to sell at the local market, which they would normally do to make ends meet if it were still in their own sheds. Tía Isabel told me that she didn’t know what to do as she was counting on the money from the sale to service some of her *ayni*—four crates of beer in total—for the *fiesta* of *Carnavales*, due to take place later that month. Her sister-in-law, Tía Teresa, on hearing that there was—still—no news, lost confidence in the sale, “they aren’t going to buy it, are they?”.

In a comparative discussion of failed infrastructure projects in Mozambique and Mongolia, Nielsen and Pedersen (2016: 239) have argued, following Bergson and Deleuze, that “imagination does not always operate and move from the subject outwards but also from the world inwards”. This is an objectivist position which asserts that imagination is “not merely […] an individual’s subjective capacity for making sense of the world, but a creative force that is internal to matter itself” (p. 239). Similarly, Suma Jirwa’s producers perceived the near future as a shifting range of possibilities, which were apprehended through particular material presences and absences in the countryside (of things, people, and activity), taken as indexical of the contours of future possibility. Following the Bergsonian approach, these sensorial ‘images’ conjure up past memories and recollections through which people imagine possible futures. As such, the future, or what Bergson describes as the ‘cut’, is posited as radically open and uncertain, essentially unknowable—hence the exercise of significant creative license in imagining possible futures that Nielsen and Pedersen’s case studies suggest, and their conclusion that the subject is paradoxically unknowing. While sympathetic to this theoretical approach, I suggest that an emphasis on the unknowing subject and radical openness does not wholly capture the lived experience of this kind of engagement with future uncertainty in Suma Marka. In the context of the cooperative’s quinoa sale, the imaginaries of a successful, materially enriching sale may well have been “a function of the degree to which the gates of the world remain as widely open as possible” (p. 258), but people did not
perceive it as such. Instead, they envisaged a specific, tantalising and almost-concrete possibility of an imagined future sale, which slowly disintegrated the longer they waited.

At least for quinoa growers at this point in time, the future had not conclusively “collapsed”. It remained a future which had yet to materialise, but which was becoming steadily more uncertain and harder to envisage the longer they had to wait for it. Yet it is also important to note that this future imaginary has an enduring quality even as certainty fades. Echoes of what could have been persist as a lingering possibility into and beyond collapse. It is this disjuncture between what is and what could (or should) have been that had ongoing moral import for Suma Jirwa’s members.

“For the fault of one person, we all pay”: establishing blame for a (now)-collapsed future

By the time Eber arrived at the meeting in November to deliver the bad news about the collapse of the sale, cooperative members had waited almost five months since the certification was granted. After explaining what had gone wrong with the chemical testing, Eber remonstrated the cooperative members at length for lying:

Because how is it possible, we have to be honest. If we’ve sprayed pesticides, we’ve sprayed pesticides [here, Eber’s voice strained to breaking as he hit the peak of an agitated crescendo]. I very clearly told you, for one person we are all going to pay, and we’re going to pay now. And the organic certification, how does it serve me now? How does it serve me? How does it serve us, I ask you? We’ve paid [for the certification], we’ve negotiated projects, and how does it serve us? It makes me ashamed to say to the people who have financed us that the result has come out positive. I’m not going to tell them, hopefully they don’t ever find out.

In the absence of specific knowledge about how the quinoa had been contaminated—only that it had—suspicion of dishonesty found fertile ground. The revelations of chemical contamination led to an intense discussion about what might have happened, where the possibility that someone had lied about spraying their quinoa featured heavily alongside other, more benign (and for the socios, seemingly less compelling) attributions of causality such as spray drift from neighbouring non-organic parcels, and the decline of “traditional”
methods of farming which controlled pests and maintained soil fertility without the use of chemical additives. Tia Lorena swiftly evaded blame by reminding the group that it could not have been her, because her quinoa had been individually tested as part of the certification process, which Eber affirmed, “at least we know that it wasn’t you”. Others chimed in too, claiming that as their quinoa had been accepted the previous year and “it’s the only quinoa I have”, it could not have been contaminated. Then Tío Jorge piped up, saying “I don’t know, what’s done is done, we can’t say that yours is contaminated and mine no…. But you all should have a conscience (tener conciencia) about what you are doing. One of us has definitely been spraying”.

Later in the meeting, discussion shifted to the question of how to pay for the storage of the quinoa which could now not be sold, and an argument broke out among some of the women. Tía Flor suggested that everyone should pay an equal share of the storage costs, but others were unconvinced, arguing that she should pay the larger share because she had the most quinoa. As the argument got more heated, Tía Hilda burst out: “she should pay, she has the most quinoa and because of her lies she has ruined everything for us (nos ha fracasado todo)”. Indeed, gossip about Flor circulated well beyond the initial meeting as cooperative members dissected the fallout of the sale’s collapse. “She’s a liar that Auntie, she has put chemicals [on her quinoa], how would she not with the amount of potatoes that she has”, Tía Dominga opined as we huddled together with a small group against the rain several days later, waiting for a bus to head south. In the weeks that followed I heard a rumour, repeated by multiple people, that Flor had contacted Eber directly to demand the removal of her quinoa from the communal storage shed, which was considered by many to be further evidence of her guilt and dishonesty. Even those close to her such as her brother-in-law, Jorge, claimed he found her behaviour during the inspection suspicious: “Some time ago Flor told me “I have a backpack, I bought one”, and I told her “lend it to other people who are going to pass the inspection”, but when we arrived at her house and the inspector asked her “do you have a backpack?”, she said “no”. So, I ask you, what does that say? It says that she’s hiding something, doesn’t it? What could it be?”.

Tía Flor was not the only one under fire, however. Others were certain that it was members of a neighbouring community, Qullu Marka, who had jeopardised the sale. They were recent recruits to the cooperative, whose quinoa had been included in the sale as the cooperative was
struggling meet the 5-tonne threshold the contract stipulated. Similarly, Tía Isabel suggested that her neighbour, Tía Eva, with whom she maintained fractious relations (see Chapter Two), could be the guilty party. Isabel claimed she had seen Eva spraying her potatoes and had also included her daughter Carmen’s quinoa in the sale, who was not formally part of the cooperative but was “taking advantage” of her mother’s membership to benefit. Accusations of blame fractured along existing fault lines between unhappy neighbours, cooperative members and non-members, coinciding with differences in wealth and status, and inter-community rivalries.

The spectre of mendacity also inflected blame directed outwards and away from the cooperative. In later conversations I had with Eber, his interns, and other agronomists who had worked on the certification, Eber expressed his suspicion that the international exporter might have fabricated the results as a way to secure a lower price. He claimed it was suspicious that it had taken significantly longer to process the results than the ten working days the company had promised. Likewise, Eber found it very unusual that, despite repeated and increasingly frantic attempts to contact the company’s consultant agronomist, he had failed to return Eber’s calls or emails until nearly a month later. Eber also suggested that it would not have been difficult for the company to doctor the results, as he knew from visiting their plant in Lima that they conduct the chemical testing in-house. Crucially, this was because the organic exporters also “buy conventional, non-organic quinoa, too”.

The group’s repeated recourse to lying and lack of honesty in their recriminations marks a very clear distinction in the treatment of lying before and after the sale’s collapse. Lying, formerly a permissible and necessary response to the demands of certification, was at this juncture mobilised as a key ethical register through which to apportion blame to others for the failure of the sale. Specifically, the cooperative members lamented what appeared to be an initial lie of omission by the guilty party in including their own quinoa in the sale despite pesticide contamination, and in the subsequent (assumed) refusal of the guilty party to “have a conscience”, “be frank” and own up to having lied once the contamination had been uncovered. Lies, then, were morally problematic to the extent that they had become unexpectedly negatively consequential for the cooperative members, by preventing the ‘public good’ of a successful sale that would benefit the socios and their families. I suspect
something approximating the reverse would have been true had the Suma Jirwa’s performance of organic compliance been successful in securing the sale.

As it was, the sale’s failure contributed to a heightened sense of distrust and suspicion among cooperative members, already somewhat wary of one another. During a conversation I had with Tío Jorge several months after the sale’s collapse, he fantasised about conducting individual tests of each cooperative member’s quinoa. Jorge envisioned a cost-effective machine that would produce instantaneous readings of pesticide and fertiliser contamination and thus circumvent the possibility of failure altogether: “you only have to put it in and the reading comes out and yes, we’ll take your quinoa and no thank you, we don’t want yours. That would be good, wouldn’t it?”.

*Pragmatics as ethics: embracing contingency*

In the preceding sections, I made a case for the role of temporality and consequence in mediating cooperative members’ ethics of lying and truth. In this section, I further explore the importance of temporality and temporally-inflected practices—specifically the opportune moment and a pragmatic form of opportunity-seeking. I also follow Fassin (2014) in making a further case for the relevance of consequentialist evaluation in the cooperative’s ethical deliberations regarding the sale, and for an anthropology of ethics more broadly.

In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle introduces the notion of *kairos*, an expansive concept which Smith (1986: 4) defines as “a season when something appropriately happens that cannot happen just anytime… a time which marks an opportunity which may not recur”. *Kairic* time thus incorporates qualitative dimensions of aptness (as in the ‘correct’ moment), situational contingency (the moment only arises in response to a particular confluence of factors), and urgency (as the moment is fleeting). It is the opposite of *chronos*, which is linear, quantitative time (Kinneavy and Eskin 2000). While there is disagreement over the relationship between rhetoric and ethics in Aristotle’s writing, Kinneavy and Eskin (2000: 434) suggest that *kairos* “adds a value dimension to temporality”. For members of the cooperative, the organic certification can be considered a period of *kairic* time, an “opportune moment” where they were compelled to act in order to take advantage of the material possibilities which the certification engendered, regardless of how stringently they had followed the dictates of
organic production over the year. As the sale’s failure attests, seeking opportunities in this manner was a risky endeavour. Writing against classic interpretations of peasants and artisans as risk-adverse, Jason Antrosio and Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld (2015) have noted how Andean artisans have been willing to risk, if not “it all”, then at least a significant proportion of their assets and lines of credit in market ventures such as pigs, potatoes, and Ponzi schemes. I suggest a similarly entrepreneurial ethic is at play here. Cooperative members sought to pursue a personal interest by gambling on lying and on the sale’s outcome. This should not, however, be equated with the pursuit of self-interest in purely utilitarian economic terms. Rather, people understood their pursuit of opportunity within the broader context of families saliendo adelante (see Chapter Four), oriented toward a telos of material security and domestic provisioning for the household, and especially for the women of the cooperative, maternal provisioning for one’s children (Goddard 2000).

Pursuing such opportunities required both an imaginative sense of the world as it could be (detailed below), and also a pragmatic engagement with the world as it was—requiring cooperative members to do what was necessary to keep the project of organic certification afloat and moving forward, including the aforementioned lying, performing, and truth-stretching. This also meant needing to be appropriately responsive to situational contingencies and urgencies, such as having to change the producer selected for testing on the morning of certification. In this respect, doing what was deemed necessary in the moment was considered to be the ‘right’ thing, a kind of Andean realpolitik of committing to the logic of a particular course of action and all that that course of action entails. In a 2016 article, Anastacia Piliavksy and Tommaso Sbriccoli explored the ethics of powerful gangsters known as goonda in India. Writing against a tendency in the anthropology of ethics to focus narrowly on the cultivation of virtuous subjectivities, they suggest that the goonda are not admired for their virtue but for their efficacy, defined in this context as a capacity for effective action, such as being able to swiftly deploy violence and flout social etiquette in a manner that does not invite reprisal, or navigate the complexities of Indian bureaucracy to secure a well for the village. Crucially, the focus of goonda ethics centered on the acts themselves rather than the kinds of persons they produced. Likewise, in this context, it was not so much the cooperative members’ character at stake initially as being able to act effectively ‘on the hoof’, that was valuable for and valued by cooperative members in the
moment—an action considered to be ‘good’ inasmuch as it served the ultimate goal of *saliendo adelante*.

This pragmatic orientation—and here I am using the term pragmatic in the prosaic rather than philosophical sense⁵⁰—rests firmly on the “is” side of the is/ought dialectic. Cheryl Mattingly (2014: 479) has written convincingly about the importance of practical reason and action “in the face of uncertain circumstances, competing demands [and] the particularities of context”. She makes a compelling case for what Piliavsky and Sbriccoli (2016: 376) term world-oriented teleologies, where “the social world is […] itself the purpose of moral judgement and action”. Building on this work, I suggest that exercises of practical reason and action might also incorporate considerations of consequences. Moreover, I suggest that a consideration of consequences, and particularly negative consequence, is also a significant component of world-oriented teleologies, reconfiguring the relationship between *askesis* and *telos* if the *telos* is unfulfilled. Following the sale’s collapse, what was understood as proactive opportunity-seeking on the part of Suma Jirwa’s members who had sprayed their quinoa, was re-evaluated as a form of inappropriate, dishonest opportunism and subsequently condemned.

Didier Fassin (2014: 432) has noted that consequentialism is an “orphan in the foundational triptych” of the moral philosophy that anthropology has engaged to date, with significantly greater attention devoted historically to deontological moral precepts, and more recently, to virtue ethics. Perhaps the apparent exclusionism of consequentialist approaches in philosophy has put anthropologists off, with an insistence that “whether an act is morally right depends *only* on the actual consequences” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2019: n.p, my emphasis), though varieties of consequentialist reasoning abound in the discipline. Attending to consequences and their ethical import in an anthropological context need not adhere stringently to this framing, but rather as I have demonstrated above can be very firmly situated within “messy everyday scenes” and the “essential perplexity” of social life that Mattingly (2014: 479)

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⁵⁰ Though lay notions of pragmatism clearly have resonances with the philosophical usage of pragmatism that “knows the world as inseparable from agency within it” (Legg and Hookaway 2020: n.p). This was perhaps most concisely summarised in Charles Sanders Peirce’s pragmaticist maxim: “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (Peirce, cited in Olshewsky 1983: 1999).
describes. It is a responsive, worldly ethics that is both anticipatory and retrospective, contingent on outcomes and open to conditions of possibility. Consequentialism and virtue ethics are not wholly separate and antithetical philosophical traditions but enjoy considerable overlap, particularly where virtuous ends are part of the deliberations regarding the consequences of a course of action (see for example, Driver 2001; Bradley 2005). In the cooperative’s case, the consequences of truth-telling and lying are what is fundamentally at stake. The acts of lying did not initially matter as ends in themselves, nor did they significantly impugn or uphold the liar’s character in the moment, following an Aristotelian framework of virtue ethics (Laidlaw 2014: 53). Rather, they were made meaningful and morally consequential in anticipation and retrospect—by the extent to which they could, and did, produce a favourable or unfavourable material outcome for their individual livelihoods, and for the group. In Suma Marka then, material and immaterial goods, and past, present, and future, combine in ways which resist easy opposition.

Conclusion

As Els van Dongen and Sylvie Faizang (2002: 85) observe, lying is both “attractive and dangerous”. This chapter has explored how and when certain moral categories become ethically salient in economic life in the Andes. Specifically, I have demonstrated how attitudes to and the practice of lying and honesty shifted over Suma Jirwa’s attempts to secure organic certification and sell their quinoa at a higher price to international markets. Before the sale, lying was a permissible and encouraged response to the demands placed on cooperative members by the certification process, given the tantalising possibility of making a modest financial windfall. Afterwards, it became a source of significant ethical concern and was a key register through which cooperative members apportioned blame for the sale’s failure. As such, I have argued that responses to lying and honesty were, in part, conditioned by the kinds of futures that can be imagined and brought to bear. The ethical inflections of possibility, partly indexed by material presences and absences in the countryside, coloured the moral import attached to truth in this context, as did the particular truth-claims which the certification and chemical testing assert. Nevertheless, moral action in economic life remained at least partly about pragmatically seizing hold of and pursuing opportunities whenever they arise. In these circumstances, actions that might otherwise be considered to be
'bad’ can become justifiable, legitimate, and even laudable relative to the greater good of a material windfall, but crucially only if this greater good is able to be realised.

My intention in this chapter was not to reproduce what Ivan Rajković (2017: 49) has termed the “virtue of precarity”, to illustrate how the so-called disenfranchised and downtrodden pursue their vision of a good life. Nor did I wish to indulge in a crude reductionism which collapses the ethical into the instrumental, similar to the objectivist fallacy which Faubion (2001) and Laidlaw (2014) suggest conflates the desirable with the normative. Rather, I hoped to consider how what constitutes ethical action for the cooperative is inflected, and in turn significantly complicated, by considerations of opportunity, future possibility, and the pragmatic pursuit of these in service of getting oneself and one’s family ahead. The case of Suma Jirwa’s organic certification and failed sale suggests that we need to pay careful attention to instances of ethical flexibility and contingency in ways which extend beyond the is/ought dialectic, to explore how temporality and material outcome are implicated in ethical considerations through a relationship between what is, what could be, and what becomes possible. Sustained attention to temporality, to future possibilities, shifting presents, and material consequences, can help to illuminate the contours of contingent ethics in conditions of economic uncertainty.

Coda: new futures

Some five months after the sale had collapsed, I went to visit Tía Isabel at her house in Puno, who was buzzing with enthusiasm. She told me about a funding competition that the community’s artesania (Sp. handicraft) group had participated in the previous day. Many of the group’s members were over the 40-year old age limit for funding consideration, so Isabel had enlisted her son Freddy, a mining engineering student in the final year of his studies, as a ‘member’ of the group. With the encouragement of Inga. Melisa, a tutor from Puno who worked for the UN-backed development fund that supported their project, they had presented Freddy as a tourism student who was keen to establish a local handicraft market at the bottom of the chullpas in his mother’s natal village. The artesania group had won the presentation, and secured the funding for additional training, materials, and a pasantia (Sp. excursion) to
visit some textile-based tourism operators in Arequipa. Recalling the organic certification, I asked whether Isabel would consider the group’s actions in the competition, or the cooperative’s actions during the inspection, to be lying. She said she thought it was: “we can do it once, but it shouldn’t be a habit. Every time [we do it], we’re lying”. There was, however, an important caveat. “But…” she continued, “if there’s a big order, for example, if they ask Eber for 40 tonnes [of quinoa] by tomorrow and we don’t have it, he has to get it from somewhere else and we are going to have to say that it’s ours. We can’t lose that opportunity. Can you imagine it (Imagínate)?! That would be so good for us, that way we could get ahead (así podríamos salir adelante)

51 Their vision of a tourism-based market came to fruition in 2019, when the regional government organised a tour of the chullpas, selling tickets at S/. 10 (£2.50) per person and bussing more than 400 (primarily domestic) tourists out to Suma Marka for the day.
CONCLUSION

You’ve got to ac-cen-tuate the positive, e-lim-inate the negative, latch on to the affirmative, don’t mess with Mister In-Between.

—Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters

In a chapter on values in Didier Fassin’s weighty *Companion to Moral Anthropology*, Joel Robbins observed that “most people in most places […] think of themselves as tolerably morally successful most of the time” (2012: 118). Suma Marqueños were no exception. In their everyday lives, ethics was not so much an inward-looking deliberative exercise centered around moral self-improvement and the reflective freedom involved in making ethical choices. More often than not, the trouble lay outward, with other people, or in complex relationships which bound self and other in problematic or uncomfortable ways. Thus even as Suma Marqueños usually considered themselves to be good people who were doing good things—working hard, getting ahead, upholding kinship obligations, making a contribution to the community—they nevertheless had to contend with and attend to kin, friends, neighbours, and fellow community members who were, in their estimation, behaving badly. Alternately, they found themselves accused of unethical or immoral actions by these same people. This was especially marked in their economic lives, as these required communal and interpersonal engagements that bound people and their fortunes tightly together. In the course of these everyday activities of making a living and living together, much of ethics took place in the form of articulated concerns and moralising judgments about others’ bad actions and characters. Moralism, in common parlance, carries pejorative connotations, of making unnecessarily harsh, self-righteous, venal, or petty judgements. It is an activity which is itself judged, in certain contexts, as unethical (see Coady 2006). Yet throughout the dissertation I have argued that moralising with, about, and through others is a central part of Suma Marqueños’ everyday ethics.

In each of the dissertation’ four ethnographic chapters I considered different aspects or settings of this everyday moralism in the economic lives of Suma Marqueños, highlighting complex, shifting relationships between ideas and practice of the bad and the good, thereby
demonstrating the wide-ranging import of the negative in people’s ethical lives. In the first half of the dissertation, I drew attention to situations in which the pursuit of the good, such as constructive kin relations and the empathetic recognition of suffering through the extension of loans, was complicated by negative ethics. Chapter Two explored how kinship obligations and support endure through a series of moral breakdowns and a persistently negative sociality and affect, a state of relations which I have termed kinship-in-breakdown. Here I charted the Charka Ramos’ siblings difficult history through childhood abuses of power in age hierarchy and the tragic death of their father by poisoning, through to contemporary disputes over inherited land, demonstrating how they both attempted to detach themselves from their sibling relations and maintained key kinship obligations to one another. I used the concept of categorical fidelity to describe how ideas and ideals of kinship relations in the abstract became divorced from their fulfilment in practice. This demonstrated the persistence of both abstract goods and concrete bads, enacted through enduring obligations which were at once pragmatic and moral, and which could not be easily divested.

Taken together, Chapters Three and Four comprise an extended discussion of wealth, poverty, and social personhood in Suma Marka, within the overarching discourse of “getting ahead” and “falling behind”. Chapter Three took up a consideration of lending obligations, contrasting two key forms of credit extension in Suma Marka: interpersonal loans of money, and apxata exchange of crates of beers at fiesta celebrations. Here, I sought to explain the persistence of shame as a moral sentiment, which only emerges when soliciting interpersonal loans, despite both acting as forms of needed credit for community members. This, I suggested, was indicative of differing moral valuations of loans and gifts. While people were predominantly concerned with the erosion of the value of the gift in apxata exchanges and the maintenance of equal transactions between the interchangeable roles of host and guest, interpersonal loans tapped into a much deeper, more ambiguous register of moral concern. Specifically, I highlighted the positioned nature of borrowers and lenders in interpersonal loans and the performance of suffering which was often required to successfully solicit these. These hinged on empathetic recognition and the extension of care and mutual solidarity on the part of the lender, but also left the borrower in the conflicted position of being both grateful for the much-needed financial intervention and simultaneously devalued by it, subordinated through the extension of favours which may not be able to be repaid and occupying the shameful, potentially immoral positionality of “living off” others. Of particular
interest here was the unanticipated and unintended production of lazy borrowers as ‘bad’ subjects, as an outcome of attempts to do good by extending loans.

In the second half of the dissertation, I moved to consider how concerns about negative ethics, such as envy and lying, are alternately invoked, attended to, and suspended in service of other material and social ends. Chapter Four examined discourses surrounding the wealth that enables people to extend loans to others, through an examination of envy attribution and envy avoidance. The focus on envy attributions highlighted the work of interpersonal comparison—specifically, how the attribution of bad intentionality to others might be mobilised to imagine oneself as a good person getting ahead, while others are left behind. I also demonstrated how the negative morality ascribed to envious behaviour could be strategically invoked as an explanation for interpersonal disputes, to fix their interpretations of others’ behaviour as unethical and ward off others’ critique.

In the final section of Chapter Four and throughout Chapter Five, I shifted focus to negative ethics in the community’s collective economic projects, including the sheep and llama association and Suma Jirwa, the quinoa cooperative. The second half of Chapter Four considered several examples of concern with envy in community affairs, demonstrating instances in which people sought, through a variety of ad-hoc measures, to mitigate the emergence of envy in public life. I showed how in Suma Marka, people maintain an ideological and presumptive equality as community members who should (ideally) have the same rights and obligations. Given that this was frequently very difficult to achieve—particularly when material goods such as sheep are equitably indivisible—envy mitigation centered more around ‘good enough’ fixes which sought to temporarily resolve issues as they emerged, rather than institutionalised levelling mechanisms that previous researchers on envy have described. By attending to concerns about envy and ambition, community organisers could maintain enough of a consensus among the group to keep their projects afloat and the membership together.

Chapter Five comprised an extended case study of lying in Suma Jirwa’s process of organic certification and the attempted sale of the cooperative members’ quinoa. Contrasting how lying was evaluated by cooperative members and agricultural technicians before and after the failure of the sale, as initially pragmatically necessary to secure the certification and thus legitimate, and later as immoral, I demonstrated the importance of aspirations for material
success, temporality, possibility, and consequences in people’s moral evaluations. I joined Fassin (2014) in making a case for further attention to consequentialist reasoning, illustrating how ethical evaluations of lying were not static but subject to dynamic and contingent processes of re-evaluation over time based on the consequences of people’s actions. Here, potential bads were suspended in service of greater goods, and then re-invoked in order to apportion blame when the anticipated good of a successful sale did not materialise.

Materiality and morality

A key aim of this dissertation has been to examine the role of materiality—the economic and the physical material world—in people’s everyday ethical evaluations. To this end, I have treated materiality as both figure and ground. In the first instance, I demonstrated how economic life in Suma Marka was suffused with negative evaluations, highlighting practices of inheritance, borrowing and gift exchange, envy ascription and avoidance, and cash cropping as key sites of moral concern. I sought to re-centre economic activity as a sphere of social life which is subject to significant ongoing and unfolding moralisation. This taps into a long tradition of engagement with morality in economic anthropology (Browne and Milgram 2009), but moves away from normative assumptions about particular forms of exchange as alternatively moral or immoral to instead illustrate how economic activities and their products emerge as a contested terrain of moral evaluation and action. Additionally, I have sought to illustrate the incursions such materialities make on moral evaluations and conflicts. In particular, I drew attention to the affordances (Keane 2016) of material objects—such as money, beer, and sheep. I noted how the (in)capacity to consume or equitably divide these objects frustrated attempts to pursue goods and amplified moral conflicts. Where others have viewed economic interests as largely instrumental and “context-free” (Keane 2010: 68), I have demonstrated how they are deeply implicated in moral and ethical matters. This is perhaps most strikingly evident in Suma Marcqueñoś’ commitment to “getting ahead” as a moral-material value, and also in Chapter Five, when material loss, specifically, the loss of anticipated revenue from the sale of quinoa, prompts a re-evaluation of prior lying as unethical.
**Perverse vitality: accentuate the negative?**

Throughout the dissertation I have advocated for a focus on negative ethics, asking what might ethical life look like if we take as our starting point the negative, the bad, the unethical, the immoral? It would, however, be remiss to claim that the existence and persistence of negative ethics has escaped the attention of anthropologists. Webb Keane (2016: 6), for example, notes that “saying ethics is a ubiquitous feature of human life does not mean that all people are inclined toward the good, an assertion so absurd that it’s hardly worth denying”. Yet while evaluation in general has been a central premise of the recent turn to ethics, approaches to the good in particular have rendered negative ethics epiphenomenal, an everyday truism and mere shadow presence that is indicative of, and ultimately oriented toward, the good. As I have demonstrated throughout the dissertation, the observation that others aren’t always good was a fact much remarked on in Suma Marka—elaborating on the moral failings of similar others was an important sense-making activity. Consequently, my aim in identifying negative ethics has been primarily ethnographic, with the intention to document how people in Suma Marka, like people elsewhere, struggle with one another over the course of their everyday lives.

Functionalist-inclined accounts have noted that naming and shaming the bad has a disciplinary role, seeking to bring people back into line with, and in doing so reassert, shared values and visions of the good (Durkheim 1960 [1983]; see also Yan 2014). While this is certainly part of the work that negative evaluations do in Suma Marka, I have argued for a more expansive understanding of the role of concern about the negative, and the negative more generally, in people’s ethical lives. I have shown how negative evaluations are also mobilised in service of other ends—particularly the pursuit of material betterment and the maintenance of personal and familial reputation and status—and how people’s articulations of the negative point to more complicated relationships between the bad and the good than a functionalist account implies. In this final section, I consider how what I have called the perverse vitalism of negative ethics allows us to illuminate some important contours of everyday ethics, and in the process, begin to imagine ethics and ‘the good’ differently.

Attending to the negative has demonstrated the importance of comparison, and particularly negative comparison, in people’s ethical lives. Imagining oneself as a good person or as doing good in Suma Marka involved implicit and explicit comparisons with others’
intentions, actions, and characters, tacking back and forth between self and other to see who measures up and who falls short. This draws attention to the fact that evaluation takes place in different modes or registers, and that a comparative mode is marked by directed, interested qualities. Furthermore, in identifying how Tío Rodolfo was mobilised as an everyday negative exemplar in Chapters Two and Four, I have suggested that ethical comparison also has pedagogical attributes, as his actions and character as a bad brother and “ambitious” person offered salutary lessons for his kin and fellow community members on how not to conduct oneself. Closely linked to comparison is an acknowledgement that while moral judgements may often appeal to values considered to be shared or universal, they are made from situated positions and circumstances—this might be broadly glossed as a claim that ethical life is perspectival. This is not a novel observation, for the existence of moral conflict and contestation has been amply documented by a number of different authors (e.g. Robbins 2004, 2007; Laidlaw 2014). Nevertheless, I suggest that an acknowledgement of the situated character of ethical life has methodological implications, requiring close attention to interpersonal ethics in particular, and resisting the tendency to aggregate up or abstract away from the specificity of interaction to systemic analysis. Attending to positionality in ethics also allows for a consideration of how particular ethical valences might be objectified and invoked in moments of social discord, to win an argument, to imagine oneself favourably, or to apportion blame. Similarly, people might attempt to address negative ethics in order to keep the peace or move on with social life, or to suspend concerns about negative ethics in pursuit of other social or economic goals. My intention here is not to render ethics as wholly instrumental, but rather to direct attention to moments in which specific ethics can be instrumentalised. This is of particular interest because such moves are socially risky—they can themselves be subject to negative evaluation.

Highlighting negative ethical evaluation also illuminates its absences. Across the chapters I have drawn attention to instances where ethical transgressions, particularly one’s own, were considered to be enjoyable or amusing. That people sometimes prefer to do bad things is unsurprising, that people find doing bad things appealing because they transgress ideals and ideas of the good suggests an ambivalent relation to the good that is worth unpacking. When Isabel knocked her brother Rodolfo to the ground in Chapter Two, or when people received more than their ‘fair share’ from the allocation of funds in Chapter Four, they demonstrated both an awareness that these acts were morally problematic but considered them pride-inducing and pleasurable—they were not only mobilising other values. Likewise, lying and
forging signatures in the final chapter was the subject of tongue-in-cheek joking among cooperative members, agronomists, and interns because it was transgressive. People were revelling in the ‘naughtiness’ of doing something understood as potentially morally dubious (but also practically necessary in order to achieve organic certification and thus realise a successful sale). This invites a consideration that ethical life is not always or only conducted seriously or in earnest, and to examine the role that irreverence might play. While anthropologists often profess to take their subjects seriously, we might instead canvas *when* people do and don’t take themselves seriously, and *why* fervent principle might, on occasion, be treated lightly (see also Mayblin 2017). In part, this emerges from the ever-present possibility of being called to account by others—joking is a means of warding off critique by pre-emptively making light of one’s transgressions. It might also encompass a recognition of the difficulty of living up to one’s ethical ideals, and potentially even an embrace of the likelihood of moral failure. Crucially, however, most of these seductive ethical transgressions were comparatively minor. When they became more economically and socially consequential, or were subject to significant moral opprobrium, as lying was in Chapter Five, levity ceased.

In calling attention to the role of comparison, situated perspectives, instrumentality, and the occasionally-seductive quality of ethical transgression, I have gestured towards a vision of complex and ambiguous ethical lives. Inasmuch as this constitutes an orientation toward the good, hope, and care, it also significantly incorporates contending with what is problematic, difficult, troubling, and undesirable in oneself and in others. In producing an account of Suma Marqueños’ negative ethics, it has not been my intention to undermine accounts of the good or its desirable qualities as a motivating force in people’s lives. Instead, I have endeavoured to undertake a complementary account in order to draw attention to the unethical as a significant dimension of Suma Marqueños’ everyday ethics. Overall, I have shown that a concern with the negative is galvanizing for Suma Marqueños. Whether people are learning to live with and accommodate morally problematic others, contexts, and materialities, bear weighty obligations, or attempting to root out the bad in their communities, negative ethics occupies a paradoxical place in economic and social life—it is at once destructive and generative, perverse and vital.


