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THE SYMBOLIC AND ETHNIC ASPECTS OF ENVY AMONG A TEENEK COMMUNITY (MEXICO)

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Fear of envy plays a central role in the social interactions of a Teenek community in northeastern Mexico, as it influences the daily behavior of its members and inhibits the accumulation of material excess. In this paper, in addition to the socioeconomic explanation of this phenomenon, the symbolic approach to envy provides insights into certain aspects of the group's sociality because the ramification of envy serves to demarcate the Teenek community. Thus, envy could also prove to be a cognitive means of defining an ethnic group.

"ENVY IS THE SORROW OF THE TEENEK," asserted a woman from the Teenek hamlet of Guayabal near Tantoyuca, in the Mexican Northeast. An elder from the village of Xilozuchil told me that two of his sons had moved to the large port city of Tampico because "over there . . . there is no envy; life is easier." His hut had been burned down, he said, because of envy: he had lost everything—maize, gourds, beans, lard, sugarcane.

The marginalized but demographically stable Teenek (or Huastec) Indians in the northern portion of the state of Veracruz with whom I have worked see envy as one of the chief causes of their misfortune.¹ The frequency of explicit comments about envy voiced by many Teenek people and about the rules of behavior that it implies, namely its formal meaning in the social realm, had struck me since the beginning of my fieldwork in Teenek villages. This attitude toward envy was quite different from that prevailing in my own society, where envy is an inner, reprehensible feeling and is therefore hidden and not openly discussed.

Envy is understood among my Teenek interlocutors as a malevolent feeling caused by someone else's good fortune, and it is directed against that person. The Teeneks believe the effects of this resentment could be disastrous for the target of envy, so to forestall any behavior or excess that could fuel the fires of envy, all personal initiative likely to improve an individual's lot is blocked, causing the impression of apparent sluggishness in the villages. The feeling of envy is indeed followed, according to the emic point of view, by an act of witchcraft or at least by some malevolent deed against the envied person. The immediate purpose of witchcraft is to destroy the possession that aroused the envy, thereby restoring the original situation. As such, envy is considered a great evil, as in Pitt-

Rivers's words (1970:185): "And where does Evil come from if not from envy, the universal inspiration of the witch?"

Contrary to the feeling of jealousy, which focuses on possessions, envy is directed at the persons who possess the coveted good and is aimed at depriving them of it rather than obtaining it. The etymological distinction between envy and jealousy should be underscored, as it is central to the discussion that follows. "Jealousy" derives from the Greek *zêlos* = "ardor," "fervor," that which aims at preserving a being or a good in danger of being taken away. "Envy" derives from the Latin *invidia*, from *invidere*, to look attentively, which corresponds to its etymological meaning, composed of *in* = "in" and *videre* = "to see." Specifically, it means "to look at askance," "to regard with ill will" (cf. Foster 1972:167-68). Or in La Rochefoucauld's terms: "Jealousy is in some measure just and reasonable, since it merely aims at keeping something that belongs to us or we think belongs to us, whereas envy is a frenzy that cannot bear anything that belongs to others" (1959: *Maxim* 28).

The question of envy in peasant, traditional, and poor societies, embedded in a context of inequality relative to other social groups, has been analyzed in the anthropological and sociological literature of the 1970s and 1980s generally from an economic and psychological perspective (Bloom 1984; Kearney 1976; Nozick 1974; Rawls 1972; Salovey and Rothman 1991; Silver and Sabini 1978; Stein 1974). Schoeck (1969) and Foster (1972), probably the first to analyze this issue in depth, argued that envy activates a leveling mechanism with regard to wealth. According to "the image of limited good" (Foster 1965a, 1965b, 1967), all worldly goods in such societies are considered limited, and if one person possesses more than others, it is perceived to have been obtained at everyone else's expense. Any relative enrichment or improvement creates a tension among the group and is thus perceived as operating against the group's stability (Foster 1972:169). This situation gives rise to envy followed by the fear of an act of witchcraft, forcing the fortunate person to distribute part of his or her goods to others or to avoid the accumulation of goods altogether. Foster suggests that such repression stifles the entrepreneurial spirit and blocks the Western notion of "progress." The importance of belonging to the minority group and the group's stability outweigh the value of the personal accumulation of goods. Thus, those who value their membership in the group follow its norms and capitulate to this leveling mechanism (Wolf 1955). Peasant conservatism confers a sense of security, so this negative attitude toward "progress" may actually be considered a rational position (Foster 1972:200).

This is the common interpretation given in the anthropological literature about envy and the evil eye (Appel 1977; Chiñas 1973; Dionisopoulos-Mass 1976; Lykiardopoulos 1981; Maloney 1976; Rebhun 1994; Roberts 1976; Spooner 1976; Stephenson 1979). However, the problem with the approaches promoting the "limited good" concept is that they are rooted in the principle of the imperious, profit-oriented, and acquisitive activity of individuals without taking into account other ideological dimensions in which they are embedded. Moreover, this notion has been used too often to explain the persistence and perpetuation of poverty, ascribing—in the vein of Oscar Lewis's concept of *The Culture of Poverty* (1959)—the origins of a group's misery to their traditions and values

(see, for example, Choi 1993). According to that position, membership in a group that has been poor for generations constitutes belonging to a separate culture characterized by resignation and fatalism, which tend to be self-perpetuating. However, poverty, as correctly suggested by Sahlins (1972:235-36), is first of all a relationship between human beings. The Teeneks, like probably most of the Indians in Mexico, are poor because the dominant society has systematically and structurally marginalized them. Nevertheless, the question here is not "Why poverty?" but rather, "Why envy?"

Regarding witchcraft, Nadel (1952) has suggested that such a phenomenon has several ontological levels of interpretation and that social inequality is always lived subjectively. Thus, the political dimension of envy's discourses and expressions must also be taken in account (cf. Crapanzano 1994). Instead of a fatal cultural and personality trait associated with poverty, envy can rather be viewed as an alternative value, which has an adjustive function and which is activated by the situatedness of the poor society in question.

Furthermore, although mostly Catholics, Teeneks do not relate to envy as a deadly sin. Rather, envy is a part of a complex of behaviors, like anger, gossip, drunkenness, and disrespect, that are negatively sanctioned in Mesoamerican ideology (cf. Gossen 1986). Thus, beyond the economic and psychological aspects of envy as a leveling mechanism, the strength and depth of this emotion, its association with witchcraft beliefs, and its universal presence as a cultural issue in peasant and Indian societies also raise questions about its deep, ethical meaning. As Lutz and White (1986:420) correctly assert, emotions are in fact "about social relations; emotional meaning systems will reflect those relations and will, through emotion's constitution of social behavior, structure them." Thus, based on a renewed interest in the topic of envy and the relationship between that emotion and culture (Ashforth 1996; Bougerol 1992; Eves 2000; Gable 1997), I am concerned in this paper more with the social and cultural construction of Teenek envy than with its psychological aspects. Indeed, Teenek envy is approached in this paper as a shared sentiment, defined as socially articulated symbols and behavioral expectations rather than as a private feeling that is not culturally or socially motivated. In following the avatars of envy among a Teenek group, I am analyzing it from the explicit cultural components as they were shared with me in the villages and not from a presumed universal affect (cf. Rosaldo 1984). I thus propose that a symbolic analysis of this phenomenon among the Teeneks, situated in its social and historical context, could reveal the sociocultural pattern in which it is embedded.

THE SOCIAL SCENE AND THE TEENEK COMMUNITY

Fieldwork among Teenek villages around Tantoyuca and especially in Loma Larga-San Lorenzo (253 inhabitants in 1995) was carried out between March 1991 and September 1993 with several additional stays until November 1995. The Teenek localities established on the hills around Tantoyuca (Figure 1) are mostly isolated hamlets devoid of services such as drinking water, electricity, medical assistance, roads, and means of communication. The dwellings consist

Contrary to the Teenek Indians of the neighboring state of San Luis Potosí, who have won more academic attention, the Veracruzans Teeneks of Tantoyuca seem at first glance to be a heavily acculturated indigenous group. This assumption may be made in light of the absence among them of many of the emblematic traits that usually distinguish ethnic groups, such as a traditional garment, agricultural rituals, particular ceremonies, and the system of religious *cargos*. However, Teeneks are far from collective anomie. This group has preserved its language, which belongs to the Mayan linguistic family (most men and some of the women are also fluent in Spanish), and a certain cosmology anchored in the Mesoamerican tradition, which together constitute the foundation of Teenek collective identity (Ariel de Vidas 2004). As we shall see, adherence to the Teenek origin myth, which asserts and justifies Teenek presence in their territory, enables them to protect the integrity of communal lands against the mestizo appetite, not only to ensure basic subsistence—although it alone is not enough to sustain the group—but also to provide some cultural autonomy. Teenek communities are encapsulated in the mestizo world, and their sense of collective identity is strongly influenced by this “situatedness.” They fit Wolf’s “open peasant community” pattern (1955, 1957, 1986), meaning that far from being a “closed corporate community,” they are integrated through a structural and work relationship into the national political and economic system. These communities are more open to external cultural influences, and according to Wolf, they more commonly exhibit differences in levels of wealth, along with ensuing envy and witchcraft. However, in spite of their “openness” and their members’ need to seek jobs outside, the community still preserves some values for its members as an ethnic site where customary laws and autochthonous beliefs and practices related to Teenek cosmology can still be exercised (Ariel de Vidas 2004). Envy, as will be seen, is embedded in this cultural autonomy, and it plays a major role in conserving the communal world vis-à-vis the exterior.

THE EXPRESSIONS OF ENVY AMONG THE TEENEKS

To avoid arousing envy among their neighbors when they engage in crafts, the Teeneks of Loma Larga customarily weave the agave fibers in the darkness of their houses. Everyone in the village does this type of craftwork, but the sight of others in the act of weaving only exacerbates the competition, and hence the envy, among the villagers. The people state quite openly that they weave in darkness to conceal the hoped-for “enrichment” of the weavers and their families from passersby. However, in fact, the profits from a week’s work (a dozen *morrales*—woven bags—made by at least three or four family members) equal just one day’s wages in the region and at most are enough for some essential items, such as salt or a bottle of cooking oil. Fruit carried from one house to another, whether obtained through trade or in exchange between relatives, is always covered by a cloth or concealed deep inside a *morral*. Nor do people expose their purchases or the products from their fields to the gaze of indiscreet eyes. A neighbor who sees peppers hanging from a kitchen beam, for instance, may feel entitled to demand some. Similarly, one takes only the minimum number of corncobs needed from

the fields so as not to be forced to give some away to a neighbor to dispel his or her envy. Therefore, the cobs are left hanging on their stalks in the fields, where they are likely to be eaten by animals. Traded objects that because of their size cannot be concealed in a bag, such as a table, a turkey, or a box of oranges, are carried at dawn, when supposedly nobody can see them. People pour soft drinks into unmarked bowls to conceal from neighbors the fact that they are enjoying a tasty treat. Each purchase sparks questions about its price; for this reason, apparently, it is acceptable to wear new clothes only on specific days, such as the New Year or a person’s birthday, when the purchase will not give rise to a malevolent comment. Desirable objects that are exposed to everyone’s view may generate envy, which the owner can offset only by offering them around. Such a solution, however, requires a desirable possession to be given away. Everyone in the village knows each plot’s productivity, each domestic unit’s agave bag manufacturing capacity, and each villager’s choice of various economic options to improve his or her lot; still, it is essential to keep up the appearance of a shared condition. To avert envy and the potential act of witchcraft that could follow, it is advisable to downplay one’s possessions and to enjoy them with restraint and discretion.

The walls of Teenek houses, built of vertically aligned bamboo bundles inserted into the ground, fulfill a very important role in the social logic of envy. From the secure, shadowy interior, through the gaps between the bundles one can watch passersby coming down the path, observe what someone has brought back from the field, look at a neighbor’s new dress, count the number of bags someone is taking to sell in town. These observations will generate the comments bandied throughout the community. It is a logic that imposes a kind of social control over the acceptable demarcation of the members of the group.

This phenomenon intensifies when an individual goes to work outside the village, which is usually justified by the need for money to finance a baptism or a wedding, not by the need to improve one’s lot. Afterwards, when someone acquires a small amount of money and does not spend it immediately or in a way that is acceptable to all (i.e., on something everyone has to pay for at some time or other, such as a baptism, communion, or marriage), the delay in spending generates rumors and malicious gossip that can soon translate into envy and, according to the local beliefs, an act of witchcraft. As in the egalitarian societies explored by Peterson (1993:867), accumulation is acceptable only in three principal spheres: social purposes, social relationships, and sacred objects/knowledge. Valeria, who in a brief span had twice encountered a coral snake, one of the deadliest reptiles in the region, first at home and then near the well, attributed these unfortunate events to a spell put on her by malevolent neighbors. The encounters happened after her husband had returned to the village after several months of working in the sugarcane fields in Pánuco. With the money he earned he bought a fence for their yard, which had not been installed yet and could therefore be considered a resalable good. Surpluses must be spent overtly, otherwise the suspicion could arise that someone was accumulating capital, thus differentiating himself or herself from the rest. A fence, a corrugated roof, and the like are also affronts to this leveling logic, but at least they have the advantage of showing how the money was spent. On the other hand, a roll of barbed wire kept in reserve, having

been bought as an investment of a surplus, can arouse envy when it is not used immediately. The owner of such capital will find himself owing the communal authorities a fine demanded on some pretext or other.

In Loma Larga and the surrounding Teenek villages, with few exceptions, all of the inhabitants are very poor, and there are scant distinctions among the members of the communities. This does not mean that inequality is absent from Teenek communities. When the opportunity arises to improve one's lot, people do try to take advantage of it despite the inherent threat of envy. Young Florencio, who had found a job at the market in Ébano, successively brought back to the village a large cassette player, a television set (powered by a car battery), and above all a cow, the symbol of assimilation to the Other, the mestizo cattleman. However, the cow did not survive in the village for long. According to Florencio's family, one of their neighbors claimed that it was unseemly to "behave like the rich," (i.e., like the mestizos) and cast a spell on the cow. The animal fell and broke its neck and had to be slaughtered. As for Timoteo, who worked as a street vendor in Tampico, everyone in the village envied him, and his family suffered the silent treatment; he lost his friends, was not called to attend assemblies, and although he had some extra money, he was not even asked to help defray the legal costs of an ongoing land dispute between the community and its neighbors. He had practically been excommunicated from his village, but, in his own words, it was the fear of witchcraft motivated by envy that made him decide to quit his outside job. Another example of the fear inspired by the envy aroused by a relatively lucrative job is that of Claudia, whose parents had predicted that she would become a midwife. While waiting to reach menopause to be able to fulfill that function, she was actually dismayed by the prospect of her future job because, in her own words, making money risked arousing envy, which could in turn lead to acts of witchcraft against her. Jacinto's case, too, helps explain how the logic of envy goes hand in hand with the logic that excludes accumulation in the capitalist sense. Jacinto had an orange grove in his yard, and from time to time he went to town or to neighboring villages to sell the fruit. However, a sizable number of oranges was left on the trees to rot, as they were not eaten or harvested for sale. He explained to me that if he sold all the oranges, he would have to spend the profits, which would inevitably arouse others' envy, so he does not exploit his orange grove to the fullest.

At this point, it should be mentioned that this analysis focuses on the discourse that deals with envy as an emotion, along with its social effects, and not on discourse that directly expresses envy, which among Teeneks doesn't exist. Indeed, being envious in this society is reprehensible, and no one will admit resenting it, whereas being envied is a situation from which anyone could eventually suffer, so a lot of effort is made to prevent it (in the facts as in the discourses). Thus, at the level of expressive discourse, people avoid arousing envy by making little of every positive judgment about themselves and their families, whether it be their health, crop, house, clothing, food, and so on. When one asks news of someone, the answer is invariably *juntam anik'i*—"as always," namely, without any change that could arouse envy. Hence, fear of becoming a source of envy holds such power that it can induce people to forgo any strategy to "make it," independent of

whether or not it is followed by an act of witchcraft. Such a phenomenon speaks volumes about the limits of accepted behavior. It is also worth mentioning that the Teenek word for envy is *pa'ixnomtalaab* (*pa'* = "to pull down," "downwards"; *ixnom* = "to come apart," "to crumble"), clearly expressing the destructive character of this sentiment. Finally, all these ethnographic examples demonstrate a particular attitude toward excess and, by extension, toward social interactions. What are the Teenek limits of the tolerable behavior, and how are they managed?

THE PERIL OF EXCESS

Any change of situation, any chance to earn some extra money, is always accompanied by a commentary on it, referring to the threat of envy. Envy and subsequent acts of witchcraft among Teeneks of the neighboring state of San Luis Potosí were analyzed by Alcorn (1984) as the penalty for any deviation, as a means of leveling wealth, and as a psychological structure designed to counter antisocial behaviors. This implies a strategy summarized as the constant attempt to solve the problem of "how to get and not get got" (Alcorn 1984:161). Thus, this conduct does not arise from a radical egalitarianism, but rather from a social arrangement issued from a moral economy that is characteristic, according to Scott (1976:5), of many peasant societies. The system of envy could therefore be interpreted as an integrative way to manage excess in a context of limited resources. However, this explanation is partial, as it only considers the economic aspect of such leveling. Dow (1981) introduces a new argument to this discussion. He correctly indicates that the problem of envy does not derive from the peasants' acceptance of the idea of limited resources and their more or less egalitarian distribution, but from the effect of envy, which is to limit precisely the production considered expandable. It is not just an economic strategy, but a value system as well (cf. Wolf 1955). Based on his experience among Otomis in Mexico, Dow accordingly proposes a distinction between the capitalist mode of production ("image of limited good") and the domestic mode ("image of limited production"). He concludes that envy comes to the fore only when production is intended for profit and not for the survival of the household. In Taussig's words, "it is not the good that is limited. What they object to is *how* it is expanding and not the expansion per se. . . . 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 the cause for concern" (Taussig 1980:16–17). Thus witchcraft and envy would be, according to these views, an indigenous reflection on modernity and inequalities resulting from incorporation into a market economy (see also Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997). We are dealing then with a specific social ethic that opposes the alternative proposed by modernity, understood here as the social and technological evolution induced by the distinction—unlike the archaic perception—between the external rules of nature and society's conventions (Latour 1991). By its characteristics, this evolution exceeds the local rhythm and eludes indigenous communal control, considered, according to this perception, as traditional.

Using these insights, we can understand the interpretation Teeneks give to some of their dreams. Dreams of good roads, cars, horses, money, or a good

situation all bode ill, indicating that the spirits will attempt to attack the dreamer in the near future; one's own behavior and social relations must then be examined, particularly if one owes someone money. Teenek interpretation of this kind of dream derives from a logic analogous to that underlying envy. Any personal ambition that introduces a social difference, particularly one related to the mestizo world, is indeed improper and provokes gossip in the village. These aspirations generate envy, leading to the casting of a curse. We might even go further and state that in order to reduce the frustration of being unable to acquire those specific goods, they evoke envy and are regarded negatively by the community. However, in repressing all material desire for things or ways of life originating in the mestizo and modern world, envy reflects something more. What seems to emanate from the ethnographic data concerning the limit of the acceptable accumulation is that it is not ordinary possessions and basic subsistence activity that threaten communal equality and stimulate envy, but activities that substantially change someone's lot, leaving his or her peers behind. Teeneks envy each other in the midst of their own society from the moment an attempt is made at differentiation through the acquisition of goods, extra money, or attainment of a better situation, all of which are linked to the mestizo world. Among Teeneks, the exogenous aspect of money, introduced by the Spaniards, is indicated by the word *tumin*, derived from the name of a colonial coin. Accordingly, the behaviors that arouse envy concern the attempt made by a Teenek individual to be distinct from the established surrounding social order, wherein Teeneks are on the lowest step. This social position is bearable only if it is lived collectively by the Teenek as a whole. Any change in this status threatens the communal cohesiveness needed for the group's preservation. Hence, if a Teenek ever manages to improve his or her lot, he or she must then leave the community because this individual has now become distinct from the rest of the community's members and has loosened his or her ties to the collective (cf. Middleton 1955). It is then necessary either to yield to social pressures or to leave the village because such differentiation is offensive, as demonstrated in the quote from an elder at the beginning of this paper.

This idea of the exogenous practice of accumulation that activates envy accords with the fact, reported by Kearney (1976), that among Zapotecs of Mexico the evil eye is attributed to the image of a stranger who intrudes on the group. Moreover, according to Spooner (1970:314), the incidence of envy is greater among relatively isolated Middle Eastern peasants recently exposed to Western civilization than among nomadic groups for whom encounters with strangers have always been customary. Envy, in such societies straddling tradition and modernity, treats tensions, and at the same time, by its expulsion, social peace is obtained (see also Codaccioni-Meistersheim 1987).⁴ Envy thus seems to be an element of an inhibiting process, which serves tradition by frustrating innovation (Schoeck 1969:349). A comparable attitude is also found in other societies confronted with exogenous ideas about progress (Ashforth 1996; Gable 1997; Ghosh 1983). The Western notion of success, as noted by Schoeck (1969:57), is equivalent in traditional societies to treason, the crossing by a member of the group to the opponents' side.

At this point, I should note that this social position toward material accumulation is only one of many possible ones, depending probably on the degree of material integration. In a Nahua village nearby, whose inhabitants are more integrated into the regional economic, political, and modern life, the system of envy and its witchcraft issues are still managed, but in another way.⁵ Although to different degrees, the people in that indigenous village are all engaged in economic accumulation related to the regional market. However, the cohesiveness of the community is still a shared value, so in order to forestall any malicious deed against envied persons, the inhabitants are involved in constant reciprocal distribution of food, whether on an individual level or through a continuous series of fiestas. As Lutz and White (1986:417-20) correctly assert, emotion—envy in this case—is the primary idiom for defining and negotiating social relations of the self in a moral order. Emotional meanings are thus located within the moral fabric of social relations. In this rural setting, within which are situated these two traditional Indian societies (although Nahua and Teenek integration into extra-community sociopolitical dynamics are different), envy can thus be seen as a strategy of resistance for defending the group's preferred type of social organization and not—*pace* Oscar Lewis—merely as a fatal cultural trait inhibiting “progress.”

Envy and the alleged acts of witchcraft that follow are, above all, metaphorical sanctions against an individual whose conduct is deemed excessive, leading to his or her withdrawal from the local value system. As such, envy activates a social leveling mechanism. But by the same token, as we shall see, envy functions as a complex integrative mechanism because the negative regard with which it is held maintains the group's cohesiveness. An analysis of Teenek attitudes toward monetary credit reveals similar patterns which underscore the complex mechanisms inherent in envy.

LENDING AND BORROWING MONEY

No sooner has someone had a plentiful harvest, or returned home after a lengthy spell of work outside the village, or sold a large number of *morrales*, than people line up to ask for a monetary loan. Everyone knows that the chances of being repaid are scant, but according to local beliefs, to refuse the request under those circumstances would inevitably lead to a malevolent act. The amounts are usually small, and we see here another means, as symbolic as those described above, but more direct, by which differences are leveled. Paradoxically, however, misfortune, according to Teeneks, often results from owing someone money. Indeed, the situation of the envied party, from whom a loan has been requested, becomes inverted in this system. If previously someone feared an act of witchcraft by refusing to be a lender, now, as a creditor, he or she is in a position to cast a spell on his or her debtor if that individual does not return the loan in a reasonable amount of time. This reversal of roles is a permanent situation among the group's members because one never ceases to need money. Teenek employers do not always pay their workers, and fines owed the community authorities are often not paid either, not to mention debts, which are very rarely settled. However,

being accused of casting a spell is just as reprehensible as being envied because it implies a clear admission of a state of weakness and inferiority with respect to the other party, who is now in the superior position. In other words, it implies the acknowledgment of a hierarchy among the group's members. Thus, a subtle ethic exists according to which you must not work too hard because then you become the object of envy or of a loan solicitation, and consequently you may be suspected of casting a spell on your debtors; but you cannot abstain from working, because then you would be suspected of envying and casting spells on others, and you would also be forced to ask for loans and be exposed to a spell cast by the creditor.

This situation creates a vicious cycle that ultimately neutralizes the value of both superior and inferior positions. Each individual in the system can indeed expect to find himself or herself, at one time or another, in one situation or the other. As a zero sum game, however, envy creates a certain internal cohesiveness. Thus, instead of looking at this system only from its economic leveling aspect, we can see also that this mechanism ensures a permanent circulation of the capable and the feeble among the group's members. The group thus becomes a circling network of good fortune and misfortune, which serves a social integrative function for its participants. This is a social system in which each person must avoid a situation of excess or extreme deficiency in order not to create differentiation among the group's members. Controlled in this way, the demarcation created by someone's excess does not lead to the atomization of society; on the contrary, it produces a constant interrelationship based on the idea of a shared sociality. Envy thus appears as the expression of a subtle ethic of avoidance of debts and excess of any kind, so as not to create a hierarchy. Hierarchies, should they occur, can be leveled by an act of witchcraft. For this reason relatives and neighbors are paid in cash for jobs requiring an enlarged work force, a practice that would seem to reflect anomie, the weakness of collective links, and individualism. Cash payment for services rendered is quite rare among indigenous communities in Hispanic America, for whom scheduled work exchanges and mutual aid constitute a foundation of the local group's solidarity (*mano vuelta*). However, as among the Laymis in Bolivia, where credit and debt relationships are viewed as a circulating and fertilizing force (Harris 1989), the Teenek practice of paid work is less a sign of individualism or of the commoditizing of social relations than it is part of a social ethic that seeks to avoid the inequities resulting from debt. The result is a vicious (or virtuous?) cycle in which any tie of obligation must be avoided in order to maintain social equality. The system of envy among Teeneks is a way of managing excess and social disparities that might threaten communal cohesiveness in the context of a mode of sociality in transition (see also Ardener 1970; Eves 2000).

We have seen that the obligation to distribute a part of one's possessions or money to thwart others' envy does not derive from a feeling of solidarity among individuals sharing the same fate in a subsistence economy. This is not the "institutionalized envy" suggested by Wolf (1955) and others to explain why some societies lack a "rational" logic emanating from an imperative that humans inevitably pursue a maximum of production and property acquisition. Rather, it

is about a particular logic of social interaction. To be envied means to be part of the society (see also Bougerol 1992; Gable 1997; Galt 1982; Lisón-Tolosana 1973). One must have neither too little nor too much of anything, and the criteria for this delicate balance are constantly updated and evaluated by public rumor. In Taussig's terms, "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" (Taussig 1987:394). As among the neighboring Nahuas studied by Sandstrom (1991:226), "the point seems to be to avoid behavior that places one person above another." The sense of equality and the cohesion of the community are the cherished common values underscored and supported by the mechanism of envy. This sense of equality, emanating from the communal ethos (in Bateson's [1936] sense, as a culturally organized system of emotions), is constantly threatened by the external ethos, which creates a social hierarchy based on accumulation. However, it is insufficient to attribute the causes of misfortune and envy to an external presence and its artifacts without analyzing the internal meaning of the phenomenon for the society in question and "the metaphors and motifs that the cultures have elaborated in response to their new social condition" (Taussig 1980:15). Analyzing the Teenek cosmological system will help us understand why envy is activated with exogenous artifacts and how it is thereby symbolically related to identity and otherness. Envy emerges thus as socially shaped but also as socially shaping (cf. Lutz and White 1986:417).

FUSING COSMOLOGY WITH DAILY LIFE

One of the formal requirements for full-fledged membership in the Teenek community is direct patrilineal descent. As Weber (1968:385-98) points out, unlike other forms of collective identity, ethnic identity is based essentially on the subjective belief in a shared blood relationship. The common descent assumed by an ethnic group implies the development of a collective history, invented or experienced, which, by invoking some seminal event, molds the group and validates the sense of belonging to it. Thus, the main origin myth of Veracruz Teeneks goes back to a bygone time, when the earth was flat and the sun did not exist yet.⁶ When the sun arrived, the ancestors rejected its presence and buried themselves head first in the earth, creating the mountains and the ravines to try to hide the sun. However, they failed to eclipse it and, in the end, remained in the underground darkness, angry with their human descendants who succeeded them in their ancient lands. These telluric beings are called *Baatsik'* in Teenek (*baats* = "whirled"; *ik'* = "wind"), literally denoting whirlwinds. Whenever present-day Teeneks behave in a way deemed excessive toward the *Baatsik'* or other members of their community—that is, whenever they engender envy—these underworld beings appear in their lives in the guise of whirlwinds and cause "diseases of the soul." Such illnesses are characterized by the loss of part of the soul and cause a state of distress in the affected individual that can lead to complex pathologies. When a person is attacked by a disease sent by the pre-solar ancestors, a series of redemptive steps are taken to pacify the *Baatsik'* and to induce them to release his or her soul, which they have captured. These procedures essentially consist of rituals

of retrospection in which the individual's behavior is questioned; invocations to the supernatural beings to redeem the captive soul (these invocations are made only in the Teenek language, thus reinforcing the ethnic identity); and offerings to the chthonic spirits consisting of special foods placed under certain trees. An example of these special dishes is a broth prepared with a black chicken that must come from a local barnyard rather than from the town's market, reinforcing the ritual's autochthonous aspect. In short, the Teenek origin myth generates a whole system of complex relations encompassing the notion of the person, the surrounding space, curative and religious practices, cosmology, social relations, and so on, which ultimately suffuse Teenek praxis within their communal space (Ariel de Vidas 2004).

Contemporary Teeneks associate the arrival of "light" in their origin myth with their conversion to Christianity and Spanish colonization.⁷ Indeed, the sun in the myth separated the prehuman ancestors from present-day Teeneks, thus creating the first pair of terms opposing the "us" of the present to the "others" of the past. The reality of the Baatsik' in fact functions in Teenek thought as a principle of otherness and subordination. One must show these "others" respect if one does not want to be subjected to their fury and cause social imbalance. Moreover, the otherness of the Baatsik' lies at the foundation of Teenek identity, because the Baatsik' are the ancestors and have therefore forged Teenek history. Furthermore, although they are part of an "elsewhere," the Baatsik' are also the guardians of the moral values of the Teeneks here and now, and they wield their power through the mechanism of diseases, caused by envy, that afflict those who commit economic or social excesses. Otherness is therefore not in opposition to oneself, but is actually in oneself, and it is so closely joined to Teenek identity that it inscribes itself in the body, the primary identity of each individual.

Thus, Teeneks are still concerned with the close relationship between the social and cosmic orders, and the balance between these two worlds that is maintained via social norms. The traditional social relations, based on sharing and leveling, would be transformed by individual accumulation of wealth. Bloch and Parry (1989), although mainly concerned with the question of the introduction of money in traditional societies, aptly describe this as "the relationship between a cycle of short-term exchange which is the legitimate domain of individual . . . activity, and a cycle of long-term exchanges concerned with the reproduction of the social and cosmic order" (Bloch and Parry 1989:2). The beliefs and the mechanisms linked to envy thus ultimately fuse Teenek cosmology with daily life through the individual affected by a "disease of the soul" (Ariel de Vidas 2004). The differentiation that causes envy is made by adherence to elements external to the Teenek world, such as the light or Christianity accepted by those of the antediluvian ancestors who, according to the origin myth, did not bury themselves in the ground head first when the sun appeared. Since that time, humans have been the victims of the envy of the Baatsik' who remained faithful to the old ways.

If myths of origin attest to a certain historical reality adapted to a certain social logic (Malinowski 1954:125–26), the story of the Baatsik' can explain the symbolic logic of envy, about which Teeneks often complain. We have seen that the diseases caused by attacks of the Baatsik' result from a desire for objects

or a way of life that is not indigenous and is considered socially offensive. In other words, certain goods that the Teeneks associate with the mestizo world are considered inappropriate possessions for the group's members (cf. Sandstrom 1991:341). Through the origin myth, the mechanism of envy puts Teenek individuals in contact with their collective past (the origin of the group), the present (the contemporary world), and the future (death, or the survival of the individual, symbolically brought back to the destiny of the group as an ethnic unit). The origin myth in some ways explains the existing situation of social differentiation between the Teenek and the mestizo. Excesses or deviations, which arouse envy, are linked to that interethnic tension. Excess penalized by misfortune thus implies a certain call to order, which is also a call back to the group's origins and collective memory and, finally, a reinforcement of the boundaries between the ethnic group and the society around it. The origin myth, through the mechanism of envy, its social system, and its political dimension, thus provides a cognitive means (cf. Cohen 1994; Levine 1999) whereby communal and ethnic boundaries, in Barth's (1969) terms, are preserved. How does envy accomplish this task?

FROM THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSIONS OF ENVY TO ITS ETHNIC ONES

In his seminal article on envy as a universal social fact, Foster distinguishes three types of envy which derive from attitudes that can be defensive, offensive, or both: envy between conceptual peers (in social status), envy between conceptual non-peers, and envy of humans felt by the gods and the dead (Foster 1972:170). In the case of the Teeneks of Tantoyuca, these three types of envy are best considered as a whole, together with their social repercussions. This holistic approach can help us grasp the social and cultural metaphors that ultimately arise out of the social processes inherent to envy.

Let us come back to the diseases of the soul that are provoked, according to the indigenous interpretation, by the rage felt by the Baatsik' against the humans who remained on the earth's surface after the arrival of "light." "It's not right," complained those beings in the Teenek foundational myth. "We are not happy being down here while the others stayed up there; we will go look for them." The chthonic beings appear to feel toward the Teeneks what the latter claim to suffer from most—namely, envy. Indeed, the maladies of the soul, as testified by my Teenek interlocutors, come either from the fury of the prehuman ancestors or from envious individuals who have acquaintances in the world of the Baatsik'. Envy, chthonic or terrestrial, is always at the root of misfortune. However, an essential point for the understanding of envy is the fact that the Baatsik' do not attack those who are not Teenek—in other words, those who, according to the myth, usurped their land. The Baatsik' attack only those who, according to the origin myth, "did not try to fight against the sun anymore" and thereby established the primordial difference between the beings of the underworld and those of this world, namely the present-day Teeneks. This means that the Baatsik' attack those who did not fight strongly enough against the fundamental differentiation that established itself among a group of conceptual peers, thereby creating a conceptual

inequality. The envy of the Baatsik' is the ancestors' envy confronted by mortals' hubris. It reflects a tension between allegiance to the group and attraction to the world beyond the ethnic community, or modernity. Individuals in the village who have acquired goods deemed excessive (tape recorder, new clothes, corrugated roof, meat, a cow, etc.) arouse envy among their neighbors. The latter might cast a spell to remind those with excess of their social condition, reintegrating them into the group or expelling them from it. Emigration outside the family and the community circle eliminates the risk of envy for individuals because envy and its corollaries do not apply outside the community, according to the local beliefs. However, those who cross over to the other side may find themselves suffering from a variety of traumas (insecurity and fear of rejection, loss of reference, etc.). Remaining in the midst of one's society means taking part in the local system of envy and choosing to live one's life with other individuals who share the same ambivalent condition—in other words, conceptual peers (for other societies see Ashforth 1996; Codaccioni-Meistersheim 1987; Gable 1997; Pierce 1973; Stephenson 1979).

When we further analyze this system of social relations revealed by the mechanisms of envy we see that envy plays a major role in defining "us" and "them." Indeed, envy exists between conceptual peers (the Teeneks, and between them and the Baatsik', who were, before the arrival of light, conceptual peers). But envy is not at all relevant to the relations between Teeneks and the mestizo cattlemen, the social group that represents the Others par excellence. Teeneks often ask mestizos for money loans (which are rarely given and even less often paid back) because as mestizos they apparently cannot cast spells against the Teeneks.⁸ Furthermore, material ostentation (the flaunting of one's house, cattle, clothes, etc.) that among Teeneks would immediately arouse envy does not seem, according to my Teenek interlocutors, to incur social penalties among mestizos. The latter are part of a different genre, that of otherness, toward which the Teeneks cannot feel envy, and vice versa.

As envy emanates from a conceptual similarity, we can conclude that the conceptual limits of envy are applied along the lines dividing the group with which one identifies from the exogenous. I believe that this essential point extends beyond the specific case of the Teeneks. This point has been mentioned only incidentally or in an insufficiently explicit manner in most of the case studies in the literature on envy. For example, the inhabitants of Pindilig in Ecuador cannot conceive of envying a white person (Bernand 1992:261–63). In the Egyptian village studied by Ghosh (1983:222), strangers find themselves outside the category of the community and are therefore not objects of envy. The supernatural diseases originating in envy that affect the Mexican-Americans studied by Rubel (1960) cannot afflict Anglo-Americans. Among the Bassaris of South Persia studied by Barth (1961:145), only a member of one's own group can cast the evil eye. In the Galician villages studied by Lisón-Tolosana (1973), strangers cannot be suspected of envy and witchcraft. Strangers are beyond comparison because they are not in a structural position to participate in the internal system of envy based on a conceptual similarity. They have no stake in the matter in question, although they may be involved in it unknowingly, metaphorically.

Foster (1972) suggested that the emulation by an individual in an inferior social position of someone of higher status could eventually arouse envy in the former if that person does not succeed in equaling or outdoing the latter. However, this attitude seems to suit a society that extols equal opportunity and social mobility, both characteristics of modern society. By contrast, the rather hierarchical social organization in the region of Tantoyuca does not seem to allow for individuals emulating their social superiors. Teeneks do not envy the mestizos or the neighboring Nahua Indians, who are more integrated politically and economically into the outside culture. They simply cannot see any possibility of obtaining what those two groups possess (land, cows, cars, trucks, higher education, market stalls, etc.). The economic and political inequalities between the groups of the region are such that rivalry, which can exist only in terms of comparison and virtual substitution with the envied party, is not possible with non-Teeneks. "[O]verwhelming and astounding inequality, especially when it has an element of the unattainable, arouses far less envy than minimal inequality, which inevitably causes the envious man to think: I might almost be in his place. . . . [E]nvy concerns itself with small differences rather than with big ones" (Schoeck 1969:62).⁹

Indeed, envy marks the circles of social identification. In the Teenek case, it marks the circles of the sociocultural group because it is activated in relation to material characteristics associated with ethnic otherness. One envies one's equals and covets what close associates can obtain, but one does not envy at all those who are conceptually different. Teeneks can envy each other, and the Baatsik' can envy them (as the owners of lands that could still be in the hands of the Baatsik' had the sun not arrived). But the envy that Teeneks could feel theoretically toward mestizos because of the deep economic differentiation that exists between these two groups would have placed the former in an unbearable position of inferiority. Note too that the Teeneks of Loma Larga, victims for decades of land usurpation by several of their neighbors, focus all of their animosity and acts of retaliation on the people of the neighboring community of San Gabriel, who are Teenek but assimilated into mestizo culture and occupy only about 12% of the lands in dispute. However, enmity is neither expressed nor enacted toward mestizos, who have usurped much more land (88%) (Ariel de Vidas 1994b).

The Teenek envy mechanism, through which the diseases of the soul tie the individual body to the social body, both internally and communally, finally circumscribes the cognitive limits of the group. Through this mechanism, linked to the origin myth, which evokes the relations between the ancestors and the intruders, the members of the group become aware of their society's symbolic boundaries and of the resulting ethical principles that guide interethnic contacts. Of course, envy is not the basis of ethnicity, but because envy emanates from a conceptual similarity, it operates solely among the in-group and by implication defines the emic limits of the sociocultural group. These are not boundaries determined putatively, but by a symbolic meaning conveyed by the very group in question. Envy thus becomes an operative, cognitive means by which to circumscribe the fluid and constantly redefined limits of ethnicity. In their peripheral region, Teeneks do not manifest their ethnicity in the public realm, but rather by discrete

daily expressions in various domains. Elsewhere (Ariel de Vidas 2000, 2002a) I have analyzed various expressions of the Teenek social classificatory system in order to understand how they elaborate their theory about cultural differences that exist among the social groups that are present in their region, or, in other words, how their ethnicity is constructed. I believe that the Teenek ethnotheoretical model of ethnicity is also evident in the envy phenomenon that exists among them.

CONCLUSIONS: THE SOCIAL MANAGEMENT OF INTERETHNIC RELATIONS

Envy among Teeneks lies at the core of several other phenomena arising from certain individual, inter-individual, or collective tensions and conflicts. It synthesizes several elements: an indigenous theory about the origin of personal misfortune associated with the foundation myth of the group; ideas about witchcraft and its countermeasures; the concept of the individual and the body; the relation of individuals with nature and the supernatural; the relation of the individual with his or her society; and the relation of society with its exogenous surroundings. The relevance of envy lies in its context, not just in the individual or the object that is envied. At issue is not only the management of someone's excess, deemed to be acquired at someone else's expense, but above all a social management of interethnic relations. As viewed by Teeneks, envy underscores the social risk of contact with another society, which by its mere existence threatens to annihilate the group as such. This risk is at the core of the tension between what is considered traditional, linked to community life and to a notion of balance leading to cohesiveness, and what is modern, linked to the outside and mestizo society, and leading to atomization. The logic of the system of envy is coherent within Teenek society itself because the social control it implies is plausible between conceptual peers. However, the Teenek rationalization of envy meets its limits at the fringes of modernity, where social relations with conceptual unequals are already more complex and therefore less controllable. Moreover, whereas most analyses that stress its economic function conclude that envy produces (a sort of) material equality, I argue that it is conceptual equality that stimulates envy as a language of resistance. Thus, by recognizing envy as a mechanism that works only within a given group, we can define that group's cognitive limits and gain insight into its social principles. Envy is a system of social relations, culturally symbolized, that circumscribes the ethnic group and ultimately reveals the emic concepts of the Self and the Other.

NOTES

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1. According to the national censuses, between 1980 and 2000 the Teenek population of Tantoyuca grew by 29% in absolute terms (compared with 46% for the entire national population and 17% for the entire indigenous population); in relative terms, the Teenek population of Tantoyuca has remained stable in relation to the local non-Teenek population since the 1960 census (around 40%). Thus, with a population of about 165,000 Teeneks (defined as such by their language), of whom 37% live in the state of Veracruz and 63% in the state of San Luis Potosí, the Teenek culture seems, for the moment, in no danger of extinction.

2. This situation is quite different than that of the neighboring Teeneks of San Luis Potosí whose products (essentially sugarcane and coffee) are marketed through commercial networks. Some of the reasons for the differentiation between the two sub-ethnic groups were analyzed in Ariel de Vidas and Barthas (1996).

3. *Indicadores socioeconómicos e índice de Marginación Municipal 1990*. Mexico DF: Consejo Nacional de Población, 1993.

4. A somewhat different case is that of a Japanese community studied by Yamaguchi (1997), in which families with inherited wealth may be separated from the rest of the group. Their separation is justified by a myth alleging that the families are possessed, but in the author's view the rationality behind the boundary established between this group and the rest of the community is envy. That which suffers the effect of envy, in this case, is social status and not coveted possessions. The marginalization is thus symbolic and not economic or spatial. Although different from the other cases mentioned, it is also, for that community, a process of exclusion and a way to manage envy.

5. Based on my ongoing comparative research between Nahua and Teenek people of the Huasteca region (2004–2007).

6. This origin myth was recorded in various versions during my fieldwork in Loma Larga (1991–1995). The first version was told to me by Delfino Cruz Hilaria, the village's healer.

7. To understand change processes in the sense of myths and the relation between the appearance of the sun and Christianity in the Mesoamerican tradition, see Graulich (1997) and López Austin (1990).

8. At the beginning of my fieldwork in Loma Larga, I was classified by local Teeneks as an *ejek* (mestizo) and as such (and as a person considered rich), I was constantly solicited for monetary loans that in most cases were never paid back. Over time and with increased familiarity, I was no longer considered completely *ejek*. Furthermore, I spent most of my time with the healers, learning, among other things, how to counter spells. Thus, when loans were not paid back in due time, I was often asked if I was angry with the debtor—in other words, if I would cast a spell on that person.

9. All this takes us back to Aristotle's reflections on envy: "for those men will be envious who have, or seem to have, others 'like' them. I mean like in birth, relationship, age, moral habit, reputation, and possessions" (Aristotle 1959:239), or the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas (1947:1349): "Wherefore a man envies not those who are far removed from him, whether in place, time, or station," or of Spinoza (1955:169): "No one envies the virtue of a person who is not his equal." The relationship between envy and conceptual equality is summed up by Bacon (1985:28): "Where there is no comparison, no envy."

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