



## The Role of Pastoralism in Processes of cultural Reconstruction and Change among the Wayuu Indians of Northwestern Venezuela

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### Introduction

In this chapter I suggest that features associated with Wayuu pastoralism underlie a culturally institutionalized style that predisposes the Wayuu to successfully negotiate, and profit from, national and global changes that impact their culture. Opposed to being victims of acculturative pressures, the Wayuu effectively utilize outside influences to their benefit in processes of cultural reconstruction and renewal.<sup>1</sup>

The Wayuu (Goajiro or Guajiro), are the largest and most successful Amerindian society in Colombia and Venezuela. According to the most recent census information, their population size is close to 300,000 individuals (O.C.E.I, 1992, p.22). The Wayuu are located in the Guajira Peninsula politically divided between Colombia and Venezuela in the northern most region of South America. In recent decades they have spread demographically to occupy major areas outside of their traditional homeland. Their language, Wayuunaiki, is widely spoken and taught at major universities and colleges in

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<sup>1</sup> In designing this project I found that traditional models of acculturation were limiting. In designing my initial research questions I utilized Ortner's model of cultural reconstruction first proposed in her 1984 article entitled: "Theory in Anthropology since the 1960's" (Ortner 1984: 126-66).

both Venezuela and Colombia. A striking indicator of their ethnic vitality has been the sovereignty they maintain over their traditional territory as well as the active promotion of their cultural needs and interests through global innovations such as the Internet.<sup>2</sup>

The Guajira Peninsula is a hot, arid desert with little water and sparse vegetation. In pre-conquest times, the Wayuu subsisted on hunting and gathering, and fishing. With the arrival of Europeans in the early part of the 1500s their culture was dramatically transformed by their adoption of cattle pastoralism: "In comparison with cattle raising, all other subsistence activities played minor roles. So successful was this change, so vigorously did the new Goajiro culture flourish, that today, with a population of some 50,000 individuals, it is the largest tribal society of Colombia and Venezuela and one of the largest in South America." (Wilbert 1972: 163). Opposed to hunting and gathering, cattle raising allowed the Wayuu to acquire large amounts of wealth.

Over the centuries the nature of Wayuu pastoralism has evolved from the nomadic herding of cattle to the sedentary raising of livestock that includes primarily cattle, goats, and sheep. Additionally, at present, most Wayuu people make an income from jobs in the urban setting with pastoralism playing an auxiliary role (Saler 1988: 42-48). Nonetheless, pastoralism continues to be important and is redundantly expressed throughout Wayuu culture.

## **Background**

This research is based on a three-month pilot study I conducted on the topic of culture change in traditional Wayuu communities of the Guajira Peninsula in 1997, followed by four months of ethnographic fieldwork in 1998. While the majority of my fieldwork was carried out in rural, traditional Wayuu communities, I spent some additional time examining culture change among the Wayuu in urban settings as well. My exposure to Wayuu culture in the urban context was largely determined by the mobility of my informants who maintained residences in both the Guajira Peninsula as well as the city of Maracaibo.<sup>3</sup>

While the Wayuu people move with great fluidity between rural and urban settings, their traditional homeland in the Guajira Peninsula is by and large restricted to outsiders. In order to conduct research in this area, I had to obtain numerous permits and documentation that I was required to present to Venezuelan authorities when I entered and left my rural field sites. Non-Wayuu Venezuelan and Colombian nationals will pass through the Wayuu

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that Wayuu society is self-governed by a body of customary law that has been formally recognized by the Venezuelan government.

<sup>3</sup> I have altered or changed any information concerning activities, events, or locations in order to insure the privacy of my informants.

territory on their way to major cities. Their presence in the area is restricted to major highways and discouraged based on the following: First, the Wayuu are known for their dislike of outsiders as well as their sense of sovereignty over their territory. Second, the Guajira peninsula is made up of widely scattered settlements, a few Indian market places, and National Guard outposts. There is simply no place for outsiders to reside, and one must have an introduction to even approach a Wayuu dwelling. Third, in addition to the searing heat, unrelenting humidity, and lack of potable drinking water, equine encephalitis, and cholera are also endemic in parts of the territory. Fourth, this region of the country is particularly dangerous due to activities such as smuggling of contraband, assault, homicide, and robbery.

The Wayuu are noted for their social structure based on matrilineal descent and overarching clan or matri-sib structure. Raiding, feuding, and blood-revenge are cultural features associated with pastoral activities and the Wayuu system of descent. Additionally, the Wayuu are known for their shrewd dealings with outsiders as well as their gracious hospitality in dealing with accepted non-Wayuu.

In order to conduct fieldwork in this area I obtained a formal introduction to Wayuu people in several traditional communities. During the course of my fieldwork, I was accepted as an adopted member of a Wayuu family. I was given traditional Wayuu women's *mantas* (floor-length dresses), customary hats, jewelry, and carrying bags to wear. I was included in social events such as visits and rituals while accompanying my Wayuu friends and informants throughout the territory.

At the outset I had no intention of studying pastoralism. My initial research focused on the roles and activities of Wayuu women who are internationally known for their expertise as weavers, conflict mediators, and religious specialists referred to as "Piaches". It was during my day-to-day interaction with Wayuu women that I became aware of the on-going importance of pastoralism as a core feature of Wayuu culture.

Scholars have acknowledged the participation of Wayuu women in pastoral activities as necessary when males are absent (Watson-Franke 1976: 207; Saler 1988: 95-96). With the exception of taking animals to market, I found that on a daily basis, women performed many of the same pastoral subsistence activities as men. Some of these activities included: untangling large animals such as goats and hogs from cacti and barbed-wire fences; scouting for lost or stolen livestock; attending to the wounds of injured livestock; and participating in the resolution of conflicts regarding stolen or injured animals. While conducting fieldwork I realized that for the Wayuu, pastoralism was more than a subsistence practice. Characteristics and themes associated with pastoralism are interrelated and permeate Wayuu culture at many levels.

## **Chacteristics of Wayuu Pastoralism and Cultural Reconstruction**

Since the contact period the Wayuu have been exposed to extreme acculturative pressures. These pressures have included national policies of the Venezuelan government to assimilate and "civilize" indigenous peoples (Kuppe, René 1987). Other pressures include the effects of television and the press that often promote Venezuelan mainstream cultural values. In past decades the Wayuu have increasingly dealt with global influences such as mandatory formal schooling, international tourism, and have been the focus of religious conversion movements. While some Wayuu political activists and western scholars have viewed these outside influences as culprits of acculturation, in many cases the Wayuu have profitably used them in on-going processes of cultural reconstruction.

I suggest that characteristics associated with Wayuu pastoralism predispose the Wayuu to deal effectively with these outside influences. These characteristics include the following: (1) A predisposition for change; (2) Economic opportunism; (3) The ability to buffer outside influences; and (4) The capacity to maintain cultural solidarity and traditions.

### *A Predisposition for Change*

At the subsistence level, Wayuu pastoralism is characterized by uncertainty and the need for constant vigilance. These characteristics of pastoralism are affected by the following: (1) The behavior of animals being herded; (2) Theft and raiding; (3) Injury to animals; and (4) disease.

In recent times, goats and sheep are the most commonly herded animals (Saler 1988: 45). The behavior of goats makes them particularly difficult to herd. Goats and sheep must be let out of the corral for extended periods of time in order to graze. Young goats or new goats added to a herd often wander off from the rest of the flock and get lost or hurt. In order to keep track of these animals, the Wayuu tie two planks of wood across the goat's neck that extend to the ground on the outside of each leg. The bottom ends of each plank are specially marked so that each goat leaves an identifiable trail. Nonetheless, lost goats are a common problem in the Guajira Peninsula, and the center of numerous conflicts.

Theft and raiding are also a problem. Wandering or lost goats are sometimes picked up by passing trucks on their way to and from Colombia. In order to reduce theft, the Wayuu have a rule that no butchered livestock can be sold in the market place. Animals are brought to the market place bound and alive. In this way the original tattoo indicating ownership can be identified with the proper owner. Nonetheless while conducting fieldwork I found that raiding and theft of livestock were on-going occurrences.

The grazing patterns of livestock (goats in particular), as well as the practices of raiding and theft, create an extremely uncertain existence for the

Wayuu. In a moment, an individual or family's herd can be lost or stolen. Herding requires constant vigilance by both men and women.

Adding to the uncertainty is the problem of injury. Animals will often get caught in barbed-wire fences that are scattered throughout the Guajira desert. It is the job of both men and women to untangle large animals and tend to their wounds. Often sheep and goats return to their corrals with large pieces of cacti stuck to their fur or hides. I constantly observed women single-handedly subduing large animals such as goats or sheep in order to remove sharp clumps of cacti that posed a threat not only to the animals, but also to little children who might come near them.

During the rainy season from late September through November, some low lying areas of Guajira Peninsula fill with huge lakes of water. These flooded areas become rapidly infested with stinging mosquitoes that become unbearable for livestock as well as people. At night, large cattle will often wander to asphalt highways where they lie down and attempt to scrape off stinging insects. They are often hit and killed by speeding cars and trucks.

Not only do livestock suffer injuries, but they can also become sick. While in the field some of my informants vaccinated their livestock and checked them for fevers. In parts of the Guajira Peninsula where deadly diseases such as equine encephalitis are endemic, sick animals not only pose a financial loss for owners, but also a deadly health risk for people.

In every way, the nature of pastoral subsistence activities among the Wayuu involves uncertainty and the need for constant vigilance. Change is inherent in the system. The ability to cope with, and react to uncertainty and change, are adaptive behaviors in Wayuu pastoral society. The necessity to create and take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves is evidenced in the structure of the economic system.

### *Economic Opportunism*

Like other pastoral societies, the Wayuu must rely on the exploitation of outside resources to supplement their subsistence activities, and to provide security in face of on-going uncertainty. Features of the Wayuu economic system include: negative reciprocity; balanced reciprocity; a trade/barter complex; general reciprocity; and participation in the global market economy.

Among the Wayuu, activities associated with negative reciprocity such as raiding, theft, or taking economic advantage of others are common, and reflect the uncertain nature of the system. They also function to generate individual profit and internal change.

Balanced reciprocity refers to the economic practice of exchange in which one gives to another party with the expectation that a gift of equal worth will be reciprocated within a given time frame. This practice provides the Wayuu (as it does many societies) with an informal system of security. The Wayuu readily initiate balanced reciprocal relationships among themselves and with

outsiders. During the course of my fieldwork I was frequently given water, food, or assistance with difficult subsistence tasks. For example, knowing that I was unaccustomed to performing heavy physical labor in the searing desert sun, many of my informants insisted that I rest in the shade while they chopped wood for cooking, or carried water from distant locations. While living in traditional communities of the Guajira Peninsula my survival depended on the good will of my informants who provided me with traditional herbal medicines and foods during times of illness. In exchange for the gifts and services that I received from my informants, I was asked to purchase items for them while I was shopping in the urban center of Maracaibo. Some of the gifts I was asked to bring back to informants living in traditional communities included vitamins, dry goods such as rice or powdered milk, or school supplies such as pens and paper. These items were difficult or inconvenient for many of my informants to obtain. On some occasions my informants asked for money to help pay for doctor's visits, or medicine. In almost all cases they were careful to ask for gifts that were of equal value. In a few instances I was told that my gifts were too valuable, and that I should offer something of less value, or save the valuable gift as a going away present.

Reciprocal gift giving often leads to trade and barter exchanges. In Colombia and Venezuela, the Wayuu have a reputation for their shrewd business dealings among each other and with outsiders. While conducting fieldwork, I was constantly warned by my Wayuu informants to be careful when engaging trade/barter relationships. I was advised not to tell other Wayuu how much money I had, or how much I wanted to spend for a purchase. Among the Wayuu trade and barter are an art that involves skill, patience, investigative work, and calculation. While conducting fieldwork, I was constantly tested and tutored in the art of trade and barter.

General reciprocity is the act of giving a gift or service with no expectations that it will be reciprocated within a particular time frame. The practice of general reciprocity among the Wayuu underlies an elegant, gracious, and sophisticated style of negotiating with outsiders, often to the advantage of both. While in the field, Wayuu people often gave me beautiful gifts, such as traditional weavings, knowing that they would never see me again.

Among the Wayuu general reciprocity is often expressed through hospitality. Hospitality is a core tradition of Wayuu culture (Armstrong and Métraux 1948: 376). It is essential in an environment where heat stroke, thirst, and danger are ever-present. It is critical to the Wayuu pastoral way of life in the Guajira desert where activities such as herding or searching for livestock take individuals far from home.

General reciprocity is important in Wayuu culture in two ways. First it is essential in establishing profitable trade/barter relations. Second, it allows the Wayuu to be open to, and to maximize innovations from national and global cultures. As an example the Wayuu have voraciously adopted Western

innovations such as the Internet to set up web sites in which they sell their traditional weavings, art, and music internationally. Also posted on the Internet is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that has been translated into the Wayuu language, Wayuunaiki. While in the field I listened to regular radio programs in Wayuunaiki that were aimed at promoting Wayuu cultural values and ethnic solidarity.

In some cases Western ideals are used in processes of cultural reconstruction. As noted above, Wayuu women make numerous and valuable contributions to their culture. Watson-Franke (1985) has suggested that the social structural importance of women, as well as the many contributions they make, affords them high status. While in the field, I found that gender stratification was not inherent in the Wayuu belief system. Gender roles were considered to be of equal value. Neither sex had higher status than the other. As one female informant stated: "Women are not more important than men. They both are important". To some extent the male-dominated national culture has had a negative impact on Wayuu culture by diminishing the roles of women and thus creating gender inequality in which women are victims of male privilege (Watson, Lawrence C. et al. 1977). In response to this situation some university educated Wayuu women have adopted Western notions of feminism in describing the traditional roles and status of Wayuu women. While traditional Wayuu culture is not feminist, the use of the concept helps to illuminate the important contributions of Wayuu women. In addition, it is a useful tool for translating and reconstructing the image of Wayuu women in the face of Western ideals of male domination.

### *The Ability to Buffer Unwanted Outside Influences*

Secrecy is an important characteristic associated with pastoral activities that predisposes the Wayuu to effectively deal with outside influences. Secrecy is essential in activities involving negative reciprocity such as the raiding of livestock, theft, and in barter/trade exchanges. While not all Wayuu people equally participate in pastoral activities, the tradition of secrecy associated with their pastoral way of life is maintained as a central feature of culture and an effective tool in processes of cultural reconstruction and change. Secrecy serves to buffer unwanted influences from the national and global scene. It is effectively used by the Wayuu to protect cultural resources while negotiating with outsiders.

During the course of my two field seasons, my informants kept reminding me that secrecy is a central feature of utmost importance in their culture. The dissemination of information, no matter how insignificant it may seem, is considered by the Wayuu to be potentially provocative of conflict. This became clear to me when in traditional communities I greeted people by asking them what was new. According to the grammar *Aprendamos Guajiro* (Mansen, Karis et al. 1984), the word "Kasachiki" means ¿Qué hay de nuevo?, or in English,

What is new? But when I asked my informants in traditional communities, they always responded with the word: “Nójotsü”, meaning “nothing”. After a while I became suspicious that there was never any news. I realized that “news” in addition to meaning “What is new?”, has another connotation in traditional Wayuu culture. It means trouble. I asked my informants and confirmed that the question was not only asking if there was trouble, but was creating trouble by eliciting information about local events.

Culture is a commodity in Wayuu society. Secrecy is used to keep information about Wayuu culture from outsiders who might make a profit from it. While the Wayuu are voracious in their use of outside innovations, many of my informants felt that information about Wayuu culture was a salable commodity that should only be exploited by Wayuu people. For example, on one occasion I asked a senior woman if she would help me with my study of Wayuu women’s traditional education. She responded by telling me that her daughter had written several books on this practice. I then asked if I could read them. At this point she stared at me, and without saying a word, stood up and walked away. Other practices used in avoiding giving out information are to make jokes surrounding a topic, or to give misleading information. When I asked a close informant why some Wayuu people would not help me with my study, she exclaimed: “It is because they think that you are going to write a book and make lots of money from the information they give you.”

Another Wayuu colleague suggested that it was a problem with “egoism”. She said: “The older generation feel that they have ownership rights to cultural knowledge. Even though I am Wayuu, they do not want to help me at times either. You must learn to be patient, and wait for the right time.” My colleague was right. Many Wayuu people, who at first were reluctant to give me information, eventually were extremely generous with their help.

Secrecy is also used in image maintenance. In speaking with a Wayuu professor I told her that sometimes Wayuu people were very secretive about giving information to outsiders. She pointed out that keeping cultural information secret is a way of protecting the culture. She said that sometimes people publish things about the Wayuu that are harmful. She added that even if it was unintended, someone else could use the information in a destructive way.

### *The Capacity to Maintain Cultural Solidarity and Traditions*

In Wayuu society, unilineal descent plays an important role in maintaining cultural solidarity and traditions. As mentioned above, Wayuu social structure is based in part on matrilineal descent with an overarching clan or matri-sib structure. As with other nomadic pastoral societies (Khazanov, 1994: 139), the flexible, segmentary nature of descent



accommodates core characteristics of Wayuu pastoralism. In the case of the Wayuu these characteristics include: uncertainty, the need to maximize outside resources, and mobility.

In spite of the shift from the nomadic herding of cattle to the sedentary raising of livestock, core characteristics of Wayuu pastoralism have remained consistent with the exception of mobility. While the Wayuu are no longer nomadic in their pastoral subsistence activities, they nonetheless remain highly mobile, with people moving between the Guajira Peninsula, and major cities for a number of reasons. Some of these include: visiting relatives, employment opportunities, and hiding from enemies (Saler 1988: 54-55).

During the course of my fieldwork in 1997 and 1998, I found that descent still played an important role in addressing cultural requirements associated with the pastoral way of life by providing a means of unification, mutual support, and solidarity. In addition to maintaining cultural traditions, descent also facilitated the incorporation of outside innovations and change. Some of the corporate functions of descent included: (1) the practice of maintaining Wayuu cemeteries; (2) the obligation to provide support and aid to lineage members in times of crisis; (3) the maintenance of cultural pride and ethnic solidarity; (4) descent functions to override national and urban boundaries keeping more acculturated Wayuu connected with rural traditions.

#### *The Practice of Maintaining Wayuu Cemeteries*

The Wayuu tradition of burying their deceased lineage members according to principles of matrilineal descent is well noted (Gutierrez de Pineda 1950: 177). According to tradition, each extended family has its own matrilineal graveyard. Members of the matrilineage are buried spatially in accordance with their position in the descent system (Wilbert 1972: 201). I found that all of my informants, whether they lived in urban settings or traditional communities of the Guajira Peninsula, stressed the importance of maintaining Wayuu burial practices. Many took me to their lineage cemeteries and traced their matrilineal heritage by showing me the arrangement of their ancestors' graves. While conducting fieldwork I attended four primary burials and one secondary burial. Each was heavily attended by matrilineal relatives.

There was a tremendous amount of diversity among the people who attended. While some were university educated, dressed in western clothes, and lived in urban centers, others were very traditional in their dress, demeanor, and place of residence. In spite of the diversity, both hosts and guests conversed in Wayuunaiki. It was clear that the Wayuu matrilineal descent structure still plays an important role in maintaining Wayuu traditions related to metaphysical beliefs for both rural and urban Wayuu people. In addition it serves to keep the more acculturated Wayuu tied to their traditional homeland and pastoral traditions in the Guajira Peninsula.

### *The Use of Descent in Amassing Support and Aid*

The second function of descent is to provide aid and support to lineage members in times of crisis. Support, whether it be in the form of financial aid, work-related assistance, or emotional support was still an important function of descent. Opposed to being diminished by outside acculturative pressures, the tradition of aiding lineage members is enhanced by opportunities and resources available at national and global levels. Urban-dwelling, acculturated lineage members who no longer make a living from pastoral subsistence activities were considered to be valued clansmen since they had diverse and valuable resources to offer.

Conversely, the obligation among lineage members had its negative side as well. Aid and support are often withdrawn when lineage members do not follow strict rules of proper social conduct. As Watson points out: "Such traits as aggression and defiance of authority (however unreasonable that authority may be) may lead to ostracism from the lineage and disinheritance with its attendant loss of security and status" (Watson 1981: 241).

### *The Use of the Clan in Maintaining Cultural Solidarity and Pride*

Affiliation with a matri-sib also has a third function of demonstrating ongoing ethnic pride. At present there are some 27 recognized matri-sibs out of the original 30. Each has a particular animal totem with origins in a specific area of the Guajira Peninsula. Each clan is identified by an insignia. Some of the larger clans include the Uriana, Jaguar clan with 58,970 members in Colombia and Venezuela, followed by the Epleyuu, Pig clan with a population of 47,988 members (O.C.E.I. 1999). Many Wayuu people wear their clan insignia on traditional Wayuu hats. Some women weave the name of their clan into their traditional carrying bag called a "susu". Clan names and motifs are painted on elementary school walls in the Guajira Peninsula with the intent of promoting solidarity and pride at the cultural level. While many Wayuu no longer make a living from pastoralism, their clan membership insures their full welcome and participation in the culture at large.

### *The Function of Descent in Overriding National and Urban Boundaries*

For the Wayuu their system of descent is a powerful mechanism in overriding national and urban boundaries. It was the general attitude of my informants that boundaries, rules, or restrictions imposed on the Wayuu were meant to be broken. All of my informants insisted that for them, the political boundary between Colombia and Venezuela was of no significance. Many of my informants crossed the national boundary claiming that it did not have meaning for them since the Guajira Peninsula in its entirety is the traditional

hometown of the Wayuu. Wayuu people maintain connections and important contacts in both countries in part based on clan identity and descent connections.

Likewise, my informants moved with great fluidity between urban centers and the Guajira Peninsula. As mentioned above, there are several reasons for maintaining rural/ and urban connections. During my fieldwork I found that there were not only a number of reasons for changing residence, but in addition, my informants did so on a frequent basis. Some informants would move to a relative's house in the city for a week just to visit, shop, or for a change of setting. Some informants went back and forth on a bi-weekly basis for business reasons.

While the movement of people is fluid, their ethnic ties and obligations are reinforced through matrilineal descent. The obligation of acculturated, urban informants to pay their respects to their rural matrilineal kin meant that urban Wayuu people are continuously included in cultural traditions associated with the pastoral way of life. Thus descent functions to maintain ethnic solidarity and cultural traditions by overriding national, urban/rural, and acculturated versus traditional boundaries.

## **Conclusion**

During my second field season a senior informant in his late fifties told me that he had gotten together with a group of other elder men who are known for their influence in traditional communities of the Guajira Peninsula. He explained that they had noticed that the younger generation of boys no longer wanted to learn skills associated with pastoral subsistence activities. He said: "We need to find a solution to this problem because when the pastoral way of life is over, the culture is over". And as mentioned above pastoralism has been augmented to a large degree by salaried jobs in the urban setting. Nonetheless, in spite of the diminishing role of pastoral subsistence activities, features of pastoralism continue to underlie Wayuu cultural vitality and shape processes of cultural reconstruction.

I suggest that pastoralism continues to affect processes of culture change in Wayuu society because pastoralism itself continues to evolve in such a way that it remains a salient and central feature of the culture. According to Saler, pastoralism continues to be an important activity, but instead of defining the Wayuu as pastoralists in the strict sense of the word, he prefers to say that they have a "pastoral propensity" (Saler 1988: 44).

Saler suggests that this pastoral propensity includes the following. "There is a liking of certain pastoral themes even among indigenous people that have no or little livestock. Among the Wayuu domestic livestock are an important theme in the epic song *jayeachi*. Livestock are consumed at certain rituals and are amply used in offerings of various types. The mark used on livestock also represents the mark of clans ("castas") or of flesh [matrilineal] names,

and are tattooed on people's skin and are carved or painted on rocks. They admire the horseman. The number of head of livestock that one possesses indicates one's wealth and serves as an indicator of their social status" (Saler 1988: 44-45) [Translation mine].

Not only does Wayuu pastoralism continue to evolve, but core characteristics associated with it contribute to the success and vitality of the Wayuu as an ethnic group. Opposed to being victims of outside assimilation, characteristics of Wayuu pastoralism such as uncertainty, and the need to maximize outside opportunities, predispose the Wayuu to take full advantage of resources and innovations at national and global levels. For the Wayuu, pastoralism has and continues to be essential in processes of cultural reconstruction and change.

### *Abstract*

*The Wayuu are the largest and most successful Amerindian society in Colombia and Venezuela. The author suggests that features associated with Wayuu pastoralism underlie a culturally institutionalized style that predisposes the Wayuu to effectively deal with, and profit from, national and global changes that impact their culture. These features of pastoralism include: 1) The precarious nature of subsistence activities that prepares that Wayuu to cope effectively with uncertainty and change; 2) An economic system characterized by opportunistic activities such as trade and barter that allow the Wayuu to effectively exploit outside resources; 3) A tradition of secrecy used to buffer unwanted outside influences; 4) A social structure based on unilineal descent that functions to maintain cultural solidarity and traditions. In past decades pastoral subsistence activities have increasingly being replaced by salaried jobs in urban settings. Nonetheless, features of pastoralism continue to positively influence processes of culture change because pastoralism itself evolves in such a way that it remains a salient and central feature of the culture.*

### *Resumen*

*Los Wayuu constituyen la sociedad amerindia más grande y más exitosa de Colombia y Venezuela. El autor sugiere lo siguiente: las características asociadas con el pastoralismo Wayuu, subyacen a un estilo culturalmente institucionalizado que los predispone a lidiar con los cambios globales y nacionales que impactan su cultura, y a beneficiarse de ellos. Dichas características incluyen: 1) la índole precaria de las actividades de subsistencia, la cual prepara a los Wayuu a enfrentarse de modo efectivo a la incertidumbre y el cambio. 2) Un sistema económico caracterizado por actividades oportunistas tales como el comercio y el trueque que les permiten explotar de modo efectivo*

recursos externos. 3) Una tradición de mantener sus cosas en secreto, usada para amortiguar las influencias exteriores no deseadas. 4) Una estructura social basada en la descendencia unilineal, la cual sirve para mantener la solidaridad cultural y las tradiciones. En las últimas décadas, trabajos asalariados en centros urbanos han ido sustituyendo las actividades de subsistencia pastoril. No obstante, algunas características de la vida pastoril siguen influyendo positivamente los procesos de cambio cultural, porque la vida pastoril misma evoluciona de tal modo que sigue siendo un rasgo destacado y central de su cultura.

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