



# What is history? Reflections from the edge of empires, nation-states, and disciplines

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## Abstract

Using a comparative, hemispheric perspective on Wayúu history and historicity in the Guajira peninsula, the essay outlines the political aims, projects, and laws of the Wayúu in relation to memory, ritual, ceremony, and territory, as well as empires, nation-states, and disciplines. It questions the primacy of written sources and their interpretation within the discipline of history and asks us to consider what oral traditions teach us about the relation between history, myth, and landscape. It specifies what Wayúu historical narratives tell us concerning aspirations for the future, explains the contexts in which they are mobilized and made public, and discusses the ways that Wayúu historians and intellectuals authorize their representations of the past in relation to kinship and lineage and jurisdiction, as well as how they make use of new technologies in pursuit of political legitimation and cultural preservation.

## Introduction: groundings

On a blisteringly clear day in early June, 2012, at the beginning of the long dry season when temperatures reach the mid-90s by late morning and rise thereafter, Germán Aguilar Epieyú, who died in mid-April, 2021, navigates the maze of sandy paths that function as roads on the outskirts of Uribia, in the Guajira department, officially dubbed “the indigenous capital of Colombia.” This is where the Colombian nation-state and its dominant mixed-race culture and society meet the world of the Wayúu, the most numerous indigenous group in Colombia and Venezuela, with a total population of close to 700,000, according to recent census figures from

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2005 and 2011, respectively.<sup>1</sup> These two worlds—or better three, if we include the Venezuelan nation-state, which formally administers a small slice of Wayúu territory—collide at the northernmost, semi-arid tip of South America, surrounded on three sides by the Caribbean Sea.

The Guajira department in Colombia, where four-fifths of Wayúu territory is located, and the municipality of Uribia, symbolize the failure of the multi-cultural promises of the 1991 Colombian Constitution concerning respect for indigenous autonomy, territory, and jurisdiction. Uribia has about 115,000 people, of whom about 6,000 live in or near the town itself; the rest live in dispersed, kin-based Wayúu settlements, called *rancherías* in Spanish and *püichipalas* in Wayuunaiki. Nearly five thousand Wayúu children died of hunger and dehydration in the Guajira between 2010 and 2015, and today, they remain six times more likely to die that way than children elsewhere in Colombia. Only a minority of people in the region can access health care, education, clean water, sewage, electricity, or basic infrastructure. In mid-2018, this state of affairs was acknowledged and condemned as unconstitutional by Colombia's Constitutional Court, but in 2019, Wayúu representatives, the Colombian Ombudsmen's Office and the Attorney General's Office agreed that the sentence remains a dead letter.<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has only made things worse.<sup>3</sup>

The municipality of Uribia, like the Guajira, is synonymous with poverty, illiteracy, disease, corruption, malfeasance, and organized crime in public works.<sup>4</sup> Yet the Guajira is not poor: because of royalties, it receives for mineral rights at the world's largest open-air coal mine (El Cerrejón), it is one of the richest departments in the country, with the highest per capita royalties—one analyst calculated the figure at roughly \$625,000 per person.<sup>5</sup> Until recently, corruption was carried out by criminal clientelist networks tied to local and regional actors such as mayors and governors; lately, people appointed by the central government appear to have taken over. Though primarily non-Wayúu, these networks rely on collaboration from wealthy Wayúu intermediaries, whose fortunes depend on their domination of the poor, uneducated majority of Wayúu, and access to Colombian state coffers.

Like Germán, Sergio is an elder of his *apüshi*, or extended matrilineal family. But unlike Germán, Sergio is also a poet, singer, and shaman, and hails from the Upper

<sup>1</sup> See Peter Wade, *Blackness and race mixture: the dynamics of racial identity in Colombia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1994), and idem, *Music, Race, and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2000), for the ways that race is regionalized in a country in which race mixture is part of dominant nationalist ideologies. For Venezuela, see Winthrop Wright, *Café con leche: race, class, and the national image in Venezuela* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press 1993).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.elheraldo.co/la-guajira/la-sentencia-t302-no-se-ha-cumplido-en-la-guajira-defensoria-y-procuraduria-685710>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2020/08/13/people-resilience-colombias-wayuu-indigenous-community>

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Morales, "El exterminio del pueblo wayúu," *El Espectador*, April 18 2015. <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/el-exterminio-del-pueblo-wayuu-articulo-555826>

<sup>5</sup> Carlos Caballero, "La Guajira: un departamento que colapsó," *El Tiempo*, March 4 2016. <http://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/columnistas/la-guajira-un-departamento-que-colapso-carlos-caballero-argaez-columna-el-tiempo/16528264>

Guajira near Chimare. Germán was native to Maicao and Riohacha in the Lower Guajira (*Wopu'müin*). Both belonged to the Epieyú clan (*eirruku*), one of the most numerous of the several dozen matrilineal Wayúu clans. Both are *pütchipü'ü* (“messengers of the word,” or *palabrero* in Spanish), and formed part of the *Junta Mayor de Palabrerros* that UNESCO declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. The *Junta* seeks to preserve traditional systems of authority and judicial norms that emphasize compensation and reparation, achieved through the diplomatic mediation and negotiation of the *pütchipü'ü*, who dialogues with the families of victims as well as the families of those accused of victimizing. Successful resolution of a case leads to the establishment or re-establishment of social ties between families of victims and families of victimizers and restores equilibrium in society.<sup>6</sup> This is how Wayúu law works, and since the law adjudicates conflicts, it is inseparable from historical memory.

Through rituals and ceremonies connected to clan and lineage, Wayúu authorities linked to each other through the *Junta Mayor de Palabrerros* sustain historical perspectives that have never been documented. We went to see Sergio Kohen, whom we met at the Wayúu cultural festival in Uribia in 2010, because we wanted to ask if he would share what he knows about the anti-colonial insurgency that drove the Spanish out of the peninsula in the 1760s and 1770s. We were told that he may be a descendant of Antonio Paredes, an “Indian magnate” whom the Spanish considered the leading Wayúu authority (*alaulayu*) of the late eighteenth century, and of whom Spanish officials said, “He thinks he is the only king on earth.”<sup>7</sup> Like other *alaulayus* of the era, Paredes actively sought alliances with Spanish officials in order to enlarge his own sphere of authority. He traded in Atlantic commodities like pearls, Brazil wood, African and indigenous slaves, cattle, horses, mules, burros, donkeys, guns, gun powder, ammunition, liquor, hatchets, machetes, and textiles.

Whereas Paredes was wealthy, powerful, and owned property in livestock and other commodities, since the decline of the Caribbean in the world economy in the nineteenth century, Wayúu authorities have been mostly peripheral rather than central to Atlantic capitalism, and to the Colombian and Venezuelan nation-states. Great wealth and power among Wayúu merchants-traders grew out of the colonial

<sup>6</sup> For the best anthropological treatment of Guajiro law, see Wilder Guerra, *La disputa y la palabra: la ley en la sociedad wayúu* (Bogotá: Ministerio de la Cultura 2002). See also, Gustaf Bolinder, *Indians on horseback* (London: Dennis Dobson 1957), 91-102. Julian A. Weston, *The cactus eaters* (London: H.F.&G. Witherby 1937), 159-169. Alvaro Camacho and Nora Segura, “La institución jurídica,” in *Indios y blancos en la Guajira* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1963), 89-114. Jean Goulet, “Guajiro social organization and religion,” Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University 1978, 332-410. For a Spanish understanding of Guajiro law in the eighteenth century, see José Nicolas de la Rosa, *Floresta de la Santa Iglesia de catedral de la ciudad y provincia de Santa Marta* (Barranquilla: Publicaciones de la biblioteca departamental del Atlántico 1945[1741]), 280-81.

<sup>7</sup> “Joseph Xavier de Pestaña y Chumacero to Marquez de Villar,” 17 February 1753, AGN, MM 124, fol. 218v; “Joseph Xavier de Pestaña y Chumacero to Marquez de Villar,” 26 April 1753, AGN, MM 124, fols. 203-4, in P. Josephina Moreno and Alberto Tarazona, eds., *Materiales para el estudio de las relaciones inter-étnicas en la Guajira, siglo XVIII* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia 1984), 42, 44. Antonio Arévalo, “Informe sobre la situación, condiciones materiales, población, e historia de la provincia de Riohacha,” in Adelaida Sourdis, ed., Antonio Arévalo, *La pacificación de la provincia del Río del Hacha [1770-1776]* (Bogotá, El Áncora 2004), 56.

Caribbean crucible, and did not outlast its decline. Sergio's home is a modest cement block house painted lime green, with two main rooms separated by a hallway, an outdoor kitchen fenced and roofed with branches, and an *enramada*, an open-air hut made of wooden poles, with a thatched roof and no walls. Prompted by Germán, I explained to Sergio the reason for our visit, and our hope of making a documentary film about Wayúu historical memory.<sup>8</sup>

No archival documents in Sevilla, Madrid, or Bogotá had prepared me for the lessons Sergio imparted about Wayúu historicity. After being introduced, Sergio told me he was expecting me because he dreamt I was coming. He told me that he had also communicated with his ancestors through dreams, and that in fact, they brought me to him from the archive in Bogotá.<sup>9</sup> They authorized him to share the history-topography of his clan's participation in the struggle against the Spanish in the Age of Revolution, but first we must perform the proper ritual sacrifices at Sergio's ancestral cemetery in the Upper Guajira.

The ancestors of the Kohen Epieyú brought me so that their descendants could unearth historical memories. Since it involves fidelity to the dead and cultural survival, the responsibility to get the story right is not to be trifled with, and can be met only through proper ritual procedure.<sup>10</sup> Neil Whitehead had a similar experience with Native prophecy and mythology with the Patamuna in Guyana.<sup>11</sup> It may be more common than we think, as Native peoples increasingly appropriate and demand control over academic knowledge produced about them, and join knowledge with ritual.<sup>12</sup>

Peter Nabakov raises a provocative question that is at the heart of this paper: when we study Native historicities, are we dealing with alternative histories or alternatives to history as currently practiced? Should we try to fit the knowledge and understanding gained through engagement with Native historicity into familiar frameworks—such as social or cultural history, or ethno-history—or might such fields receive a new lease on life through integration with the more expansive vistas opened by Native historicity?<sup>13</sup> Does moving from what Frank Salomon calls

<sup>8</sup> The voluminous ethnographic literature makes scant reference to Wayúu history or historicity. The exception is François René Picon, *Pasteurs du Nouveau Monde: adoption de l'élevage chez les Indiens guajiros* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de L'Homme 1983), 183–202. The major compilation of Wayúu myths, legends, and folk tales specifically omits Wayúu historical narratives. Michelle Perrin, "Introduction," in Johannes Wilbert and Karin Simoneau, eds., *Folk literature of the Guajiro Indians* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Publications, 1987a), vol. 1, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Dreams order the past and determine the future. Michel Perrin, *Los practicantes del sueño: El chamanismo wayuu* (Caracas: Monte Ávila 1995[1979]), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Nabakov, *A forest of time: American Indian ways of history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), 49.

<sup>11</sup> Neil L. Whitehead, "Three Patamuna Trees: landscape and history in the Guyana Highlands," in Neil L. Whitehead, ed. *Histories and historicities in Amazonia* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press 2003), 75.

<sup>12</sup> Larry Evers and Barre Tolkein, "Introduction," in Larry Evers and Barre Tolkein, eds., *Native American oral traditions: collaboration and interpretation* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press 2001), xviii–ix. Philip Deloria, "Historiography," in Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury, eds., *A companion to American Indian history* (Malden, MA: Blackwell 2002), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Nabakov, *op. cit.*

“histories of South American Indians” to “South American Indian histories” take us beyond what the discipline of history establishes as its epistemological limit? If we wish to follow Salomon, what kind of formal strategies and techniques might get us there?<sup>14</sup>

This paper addresses theoretical, methodological, and epistemological issues related to the study of indigenous histories and historicities in the Americas, and the relationship between written archival sources, ethnographic fieldwork, oral history, and documentary filmmaking. Using a framework that questions the conventional separation between North, Central, and South America, I place Wayúu history and historicity in the larger hemispheric context in which Wayúu actions and decisions take on their fullest meaning.<sup>15</sup>

Based on published and archival primary sources, the first section outlines the arguments of an essay I have published on the 1760s and 1770s in order to provide a capsule history of the Guajira peninsula, as well as Wayúu practices of kinship, law, trade, and property rights in the colonial Atlantic.<sup>16</sup> The second, longer section provides a close reading of the documentary film I co-produced, *Warrior Spirits: The Presence of Eighteenth-Century Struggles*, which is ostensibly about the events sketched in the first section, but in fact moves in wider orbits of Wayúu historicity and is available on Youtube.<sup>17</sup> It also specifies elements of the present crisis in relation to the past. The conclusion circles back to the questions raised above.

## Wayúu autonomy and Spanish pretensions to sovereignty

The Wayúu were never conquered by European colonial powers, yet their emergence was coeval with, and contributed to, the consolidation of the Atlantic capitalism in the greater Caribbean. Like the Spanish under the Bourbons, Venezuelan and Colombian nation-states have attempted without success to exercise sovereignty over the Guajira since the late nineteenth century. The Lower Guajira in Colombia qualifies as a borderlands or frontier region, as does the Venezuelan Guajira. In the Upper Guajira in Colombia, where most of Wayúu country is located, Wayúu clans are still the sole owners of the land, and strive to govern themselves according to their law. In this section, I excavate the historical roots of Wayúu autonomy in the Upper Guajira and specify

<sup>14</sup> Salomon, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> By history, I mean both what happened in the past and the discourses written about it, and by historicity, I mean culturally embedded ways of making the past comprehensible and meaningful for claim-making and political action in the present. See Neil L. Whitehead, *op. cit.*, xi, xiii; Frank Salomon, “Testimonies: the making and reading of Native South American historical sources,” in Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz, eds., *The Cambridge history of the native peoples of the Americas*, Vol. 3, Part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), 58, 89.

<sup>16</sup> Forrest Hylton, “‘The sole owners of the land’: empire, war, and authority in the Guajira Peninsula (New Granada), 1761-1779,” *Atlantic Studies* 13:3 (2016), 315-344.

<sup>17</sup> Directed by Lina Britto (2014) (Northwestern University), the documentary is available on YouTube in English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcCZjTqiUs8> and Spanish sub-titles: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnru9C\\_d3XY&t=63s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnru9C_d3XY&t=63s)

the limits of Spanish sovereignty.<sup>18</sup> I also explain how conflict and competition among Wayúu authorities, related by blood or marriage, set the parameters within which colonial Spanish counter-insurgency campaigns unfolded during the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>19</sup>

Although dominant declension narratives stress the early extinction of indigenous peoples and their replacement with African slaves in the Greater Antilles, the former shaped colonial markets and Atlantic commodity circuits in important ways. Through long-distance trade networks, they helped the rise of the Dutch, French, and especially the British empires.<sup>20</sup> After the British occupied Havana in 1762—provisioned with 600 head of Wayúu cattle—and nearly took Cartagena, Spanish policy dictated constant vigilance against possible British invasion, as well as systematic assault on stateless indigenous peoples of the periphery who traded with them.<sup>21</sup> War and trade were two intertwined aspects of the Atlantic world, and Spain devoted most of the increased revenues derived from tighter taxation policies to strengthening military defenses and attempting to conquer “barbarous” Native peoples on imperial frontiers.

The Age of Revolution ushered in a general crisis of sovereignty in the Atlantic world and the continental Caribbean was the weakest link in the Spanish imperial chain. Spanish claims to sovereignty led to efforts to implement mercantilist ideas about trade monopolies, which made Spain’s vulnerability two-sided: first, vis-à-vis unconquered indigenous peoples like the Wayúu, and second, vis-à-vis the captains of colonial French, British, and Dutch ships who traded with them. The condition for the possibility of these long-distance trade networks between Native peoples of the Caribbean and European colonial merchants was the Dutch occupation of Curaçao, Bonaire, and Aruba beginning in 1634; the British occupation of Jamaica beginning in 1655; and the French occupation of St. Domingue in 1697. From the Guajira, it took just days to get to the Dutch West Indies, and between one and two weeks to get to the British and French West Indies.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See Jens Bartelson, *A genealogy of sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995). Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Walker, eds., *State sovereignty as social construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996). Idem, *The critique of the state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001). For a range of critical perspectives from Native American scholars, see Joanne Barker (Lenape), ed., *Sovereignty matters: locations of contestation and possibility in indigenous struggles for self-determination* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press 2005). See also, David J. Carlson, *Imagining sovereignty: self-determination in American Indian law and literature* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Ranajit Guha, “The prose of counter-insurgency,” in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected subaltern studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988), 45–84.

<sup>20</sup> Neil Whitehead, “The crisis and transformation of the invaded societies: the Caribbean, 1492–1580,” in Salomon and Schwartz, eds., *op. cit.*, 864–903.

<sup>21</sup> Eduardo Barrera Monroy, *Mestizaje, comercio y resistencia: La Guajira durante la segunda mitad del Siglo XVIII* (Bogotá: ICANH 2001), 180. Jose Trinidad Polo Acuña, *Indigenas, poderes y mediaciones en la guajira en la transición de la colonia a la república* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes 2012), 128. The (uncited) source for this estimate appears to be Antonio Arévalo, “Plan de operaciones,” in María Teresa Oliveros de Castro, *La Goajira* (Mérida: Universidad de los Andes 1975), 187.

<sup>22</sup> For the Dutch, see Celestino Andres Arauz Mofante, *El contrabando holandés en la primera mitad del siglo XVIII* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de Historia: 1984). Wim Klooster, *Illicit Riches: Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795* (Leiden: KITLV Press 1998). Linda Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press 2012). For the British, see Adrian Pearce, *British Trade with Spanish America, 1763–1808* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2007). On trade relations with the French West Indies, see Eiver Miguel Durango Loaiza, “Contagiando la insurrección: Los indios guajiros y los revolucionarios franceses, 1769–1804,” MA Thesis, Universidad de los Andes 2012.

Following the impact of epidemics in the sixteenth century, survivors fused multiple ethnicities and runaway slaves—indigenous as well as Africans—into one people. As a result of disease, the Wayúu appear to have been born out of a shatter zone similar to the one that gave rise to the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek in the southeastern USA — groups which also absorbed runaway slaves at the moment of their emergence, and engaged in the Atlantic slave trade thereafter.<sup>23</sup>

After the Mapuche in Patagonia, the Wayúu were the largest of the unconquered stateless peoples that Spain aimed to rule, numbering between 30,000 and 40,000 in the 1760s and 1770s. Along with the Comanche in Texas and New Mexico, they were among the most politically, commercially, and militarily powerful indigenous groups in the hemisphere.<sup>24</sup> Like their Comanche and the Apache counterparts, Wayúu merchant-warriors became powerful equestrian pastoralists as a result of trade with European merchants and their colonial agents, and practiced transhumance.<sup>25</sup> Yet this kin-based mode of production and exchange, articulated with early Atlantic capitalism, also contributed to conflict among Wayúu authorities (*alaulayus*), whose power depended on the size of their herds, the extent of their kinship networks—including slaves—the number of guns and amount of ammunition they could marshal, and access to ports, pastures, fresh water, timber, and pearls.

Beginning in the 1760s, through military campaigns and garrison settlements from Alta California to Patagonia, Spain aimed to block trade between agents of competing European empires and unconquered peoples who occupied half the land, and made up one-fifth of the population, that Spain claimed to rule.<sup>26</sup> One of Spain's earliest moves to build and hold fortified settlements unfolded in the Guajira during the 1760s and 1770s, and it provoked an anti-colonial insurgency much larger than the better known Comunero Revolt of 1781.<sup>27</sup> Armed with rifles as well as bows and arrows, beginning on May 2, 1769, some 7,000–10,000 Wayúu warriors burned

<sup>23</sup> Weber, *op. cit.*, 249. Robbie Etheridge, ed., *Mapping the Mississippi shatter zone: the Colonial Indian slave trade and regional instability in the American South* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press 2009). Idem, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw: the European invasion and the transformation of the Mississippian World, 1540-1715* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press 2013). *For the importance of Indian slavery in the Americas, see James F. Brooks, Captives and cousins: slavery, kinship, and community in the southwest borderlands* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press 2002). Allan Galloway, *The Indian slave trade: the rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2002). Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian country: the changing face of captivity in Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2010). Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of alliance: indigenous & Atlantic slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Andrés Reséndez, *The other slavery: the uncovered story of Indian enslavement in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> For indigenous population figures in the late eighteenth century, see Weber, *op. cit.*, 61, 72-75. For Wayúu population figures, see Barrera Monroy, *Mestizaje*, 235-37, based on sources from Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Sección Colonia, *Milicias y Marina (MM)*, 119, fols. 375-378. *Ibid.*, 124, fols. 532-585; *ibid.*, 138, fol. 860. Antonio Narvaez de la Torre, *Escritos de dos economistas coloniales* (Bogotá: Banco de la República 1965), 35-36. Francisco Silvestre, *Descripción del reino de Santa Fe de Bogotá 1789* (Bogotá: Biblioteca popular de Cultura Colombiana 1950), 83.

<sup>25</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Weber, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> John Leddy Phelan, *The people and the king: the Comunero Revolution in Colombia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press 2011[1978]).



and looted seven Capuchin mission towns in the Lower Guajira, killing hundreds of colonial settlers, and taking dozens captive. The uprising surprised no one. Leading citizens of Riohacha, the port town of 4,000 east of Santa Marta and west of Maracaibo, warned Governor Gerónimo de Mendoza that a revolt was coming. They knew this because their Wayúu *compadres*—a Spanish term of fictive kinship—told them so. Authorized by Mendoza in late 1768, and led by Spaniards and creoles (offspring of Spanish merchants and/or officials born and raised in the Americas), colonial settlers carried out assaults on Wayúu persons, settlements, and cattle in the Upper Guajira. These constituted a grave violation of Wayúu law, according to which all settler colonists would be held responsible for the crimes committed by those who had acted on Mendoza's authority.<sup>28</sup> Wayúu authorities Antonio Paredes and his brother-in-law Juan Jacinto, whose livestock and relatives were captured, therefore sought payment for damages from Mendoza, but did not receive them. When damages are owed but not paid, warfare ensues. In 1771, with Riohacha still besieged and the rest of the peninsula entirely in Wayúu hands, one Spanish military official asserted, "They say they intend to continue their hostilities and to be the sole owners of the land."<sup>29</sup>

Spanish presence and sovereignty had always been limited in the Guajira, as Spanish ships could not provide for the subsistence of colonial settlers. Under Rodrigo de Bastidas, the Spanish made the first permanent settlement in Tierra Firme to the west, in nearby Santa Marta, in 1525. In 1545, the Spanish founded Rio del Hacha, on the site of the region's lone river, the Calancala, introducing cattle, disease, and miscegenation with Wayúu women.<sup>30</sup> This did not lead to Spanish conquest, however, for reasons that were partly ecological.

The Calancala River and the fertile plains that surrounded it were the center of the Lower Guajira, which was linked to the Upper Guajira through Wayúu kinship networks, as well as by the circulation of Atlantic commodities. Yet the Spanish were unable to establish a foothold in the Upper Guajira, which lacked fresh water for most of the year. Thus the Lower Guajira, where the 1769 uprising took place, felt the impact of Spanish colonial projects more directly than the Upper Guajira, which

<sup>28</sup> Alan Kuethe, "The Pacification Campaign on the Riohacha Frontier, 1772-1779," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 50:3 (1970), 467-481. Idem, *Military reform and society in New Granada, 1773-1808* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press 1978), 130-137. Antonio García, "Los levantamientos goajiros y el ordenamiento capitalista del Caribe," *Los comuneros en la pre-revolucion de independencia* (Bogotá: Plazas y Hanes 1986), 110-118. Barrera Monroy, *Mestizaje, comercio y resistencia*, 197-210; Polo Acuña, *Indígenas, poderes y mediaciones*, 183-230.

<sup>29</sup> Commander Francisco de Baraya y Campo to Governor Manuel Herrera Leyva, 1771, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) (n.d.), Bogotá, *Colonia, Milicias y Marina* 119, ff. 253-255.

<sup>30</sup> See Johannes Wilbert, *Survivors of El Dorado* (New York: Praeger 1972), 163-205. Francios René Picon, *Pasteurs du Nouveau Monde*; Gerardo Ardila, "La historia prehispánica de la Guajira," in Gerardo Ardila ed., *La Guajira: de la memoria al provenir. Una vision antropológica* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional 1990), 59-77. José R. Oliver, "Reflexiones sobre los posibles orígenes del Wayu (guajiro)," in *ibid.*, 81-127. Gerardo Ardila, *Los tiempos de las conchas: investigaciones Arqueológicas en la costa de la península de la Guajira* (Bogotá: Editorial Universidad Nacional de Colombia 1996). Idem, "Cambio y permanencia en el Caribe colombiano tras el contacto con Europa: una mirada desde la Guajira," in Heraldo Calvo Stevenson and Adolfo Meisel Roca, eds., *Cartagena de Indias en el siglo XVI* (Cartagena: Banco de la República 2009), 41-72.



featured innumerable natural ports where non-Spanish ships landed. Throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries, outside of Riohacha, there were no colonial settlements closer than Santa Marta or Maracaibo.<sup>31</sup>

During the second half of the eighteenth century, Spanish presence and colonization efforts, including mission settlements in the Lower Guajira, did not lead to widespread Spanish religious and cultural influence, much less political, military, or economic predominance. Those with Wayúu mothers, regardless of paternity, were incorporated into matrilineal clans, as were domestic and agricultural slaves of both genders. *Mestizaje*, or race mixture, between Guajira women and “Spanish” men—an elastic category that included creoles, *mulatos* (the offspring of Spanish or creole men and African women), and *zambos* (descendants of African men or *mulatos* and Wayúu women)—led to the spread of Wayúu language, law, customs, and culture.<sup>32</sup>

The Spanish incited antagonism between the Wayúu and colonial settlers with non-Wayúu mothers, most of whom were of partial African and/or Wayúu descent, rather than light-skinned creoles or Spanish people, who were a fraction of the population in Riohacha and the mission settlements. People with non-Wayúu mothers incubated a new settler colonial culture regulated by the Catholic Church, or rather the Cappuchin missionaries, and Spanish law, which held no validity for the Wayúu.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the rest of the Colombian Caribbean, where free people of color (*gente libre de color*) and mixed-race frontier settlers (*arrochelados*) formed the majority of the population, in the Guajira, they were a distinct minority, numbering perhaps 6,000, and in the second half of the century, were increasingly at loggerheads with the indigenous majority.<sup>34</sup>

The Wayúu lived in a matrilineal society composed of large, de-centralized clans (*eirrukus*) made up of extended maternal families (*apüshis*) that inhabited *püchipalas*, settlements that included an ancestral cemetery (*amóuyú*) and territory (*womáin*). Family membership, status and rank, and property in cattle and livestock, as well as political authority, passed through the mother’s line, and the mother’s brothers or uncles were the leading clan authorities of an *apüshi*. There

<sup>31</sup> Eduardo Barrera Monroy, *Historia de la Guajira durante los Siglos XVI-XVII* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura 1998), 37, 46-63. Idem, “Los esclavos de las perlas. Voces y rostros indígenas en la granjería de perlas del Cabo de la Vela (1540-1570),” *Revista Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* 39: 61 (2002), 3-33. Christian Cwik, “Curazao y Riohacha: dos puertos caribeños en el marco del contrabando Judío: 1650-1750,” in Jorge Enrique Elías Caro and Antonio Vidal Ortega, eds., *Ciudades portuarias en la gran Cuenca del Caribe: historia, cultura, economía, y sociedad* (Barranquilla: Universidad de Magdalena-Universidad del Norte 2009), 281-311.

<sup>32</sup> Gutiérrez de Pineda (1963), “Organización social,” in Guhl et al., *Indios y blancos en la Guajira*, 89-114 (1963); Triana Varón, “El Mestizaje,” in *ibid.*, 115-120; Picon, *Pasteurs*, 65-121; Polo Acuña, *Indígenas, poderes y mediaciones*, 231-274; Polo Acuña and Carmona Nobles, “El mestizaje,” 130-155.

<sup>33</sup> Lance Graham, “Guajiro culture and Capuchin Evangelization,” in Erick Langer and Robert H. Jackson, eds., *The New Latin American Mission History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1995), 152.

<sup>34</sup> For the preponderance of free people of color in the Colombian Caribbean, see Aline Helg, *Liberty and equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1770-1835* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press 2004). Marixa Lasso, *Myths of harmony: race and republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia 1795-1831* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press 2007). Alfonso Múnera, *El fracaso de la nación: región, clase, y raza en el Caribe colombiano, 1717-1821*, 2nd Ed. (Bogotá: Planeta 2008[1998]).

was no political representation above the level of the clan, and clan leadership was not hereditary, so there was competition among older men for wealth, authority, and prestige. Smaller clans were generally poorer, and larger clans richer, but within large clans, vast gulfs separated elites from commoners. Clans could number in the hundreds or well over one thousand.

Conflicts among the Wayúu were regulated by their laws concerning property rights and territorial boundaries, which stipulated that crimes against persons and property had to be paid for in damages in cattle and livestock, pearls, jewelry, and slaves; that responsibility for crimes belonged not to the individuals that committed them, but rather to the *apüshi* and clan to which the perpetrator belonged; and that territorial claims were legitimized with reference to the antiquity of ancestral cemeteries, where second burials took place after bones were disinterred from initial burial site and placed in an urn.

The most common crime recorded in Spanish sources was cattle rustling, and cattle exports were fundamental to Wayúu and Spanish colonial economy and society. Competition among young Wayúu men to acquire cattle was intense, and the need for a legal system to regulate disputes, as well as specialized jurists to mediate them, was correspondingly important. Trusted nephews of leading *alaulayus* acted as jurists (*püchipiü'ü*), or in Spanish parlance, “ambassadors” (*püchejeechi*). When mediation failed, brothers and brothers-in-law, as well as cousins, fought one another over property rights in herds and territory.

The de-centralized nature of Wayúu kinship structure led to a patchwork of micro-territories and micro-sovereignties, such that factionalism and conflict were endemic. Disunity helped the Wayúu consolidate their autonomy, because without a centralized authority, they were impossible to conquer. There were at least four sources of conflict among the Wayúu: first, power struggles within *apüshis* and clans over leadership; second, economic competition between *apüshis* and clans in the Atlantic capitalist economy, including control of key ports like Bahía Honda; third, struggles over property rights in livestock and territory; and fourth, the generalized crisis of sovereignty in the Atlantic world, which induced the Spanish to attempt to build and hold fortified garrisons in order to destroy Wayúu trade networks. The Spanish found willing Wayúu allies.

The mass uprising that began on May 2, 1769, resulted state-backed settler colonial raids in the Upper Guajira. In line with broader drift of imperial frontier policy, the Spanish overcompensated with militarized responses to the limited system of mediation they had established previously. We might have expected Spanish counter-insurgency to have united Wayúu *alaulayus* against colonial settlers and officials, especially given close kinship ties among Wayúu leaders. Indeed, when these events are remembered and discussed among clan authorities descended from colonial-era *alaulayus*, they are taken as a demonstration of the Wayúu capacity for unity when faced with outside threats. This may have been true at certain moments, and in specific micro-regions. However, following the success of the 1769 uprising against Spanish missions in the Lower Guajira, competition between Antonio Paredes and Juan Jacinto for control of the port of Bahía Honda, and the market in pearls, determined what the Spanish could and could not do in the Upper Guajira. Both of these two *alaulayus* sought alliances with the Spanish in the hope of vanquishing the

other; so did Paredes's sons and nephews after Paredes died. The extent of Wayúu trade with non-Spanish merchants and consequent military strength, and the limits of Spanish finances and military discipline, guaranteed Wayúu supremacy nonetheless.

This indicates a mercurial field of power among the Wayúu amidst a generalized crisis of sovereignty in the Atlantic world in the Age of Revolution. The crisis did not threaten the material basis of Wayúu wealth and authority, except insofar as it marked the beginning of the end of the British and French Caribbean as the center of profitable tropical commodity production based on slave labor, and favored Wayúu autonomy from Spanish efforts to extend colonial domination. It also exacerbated conflicts among *alaulayus*, as well as between these and colonial settlers, which the Spanish project of missions and settlements placed on a collision course with the Wayúu majority.

These findings have important methodological consequences. In this part of the revolutionary Atlantic, and perhaps elsewhere, we cannot explain conflict, competition, or cooperation using ethnic and national identities as a theoretical baseline. Instead, we need to examine changing relationships between specific Wayúu leaders, specific captains of non-Spanish ships, and specific colonial officials and settlers in a territory in which the Wayúu were far more powerful than any other group, and in which Wayúu law provided a normative framework for regulating Wayúu actions, expectations, and conflicts. Kinship, rather than ethnicity or nationality, defined identity as well as the fault lines of conflict, competition, and cooperation.

Despite Spanish colonial pretensions, the Upper Guajira was not a borderlands region, nor a frontier, but rather the Wayúu homeland—no one else had access to land, labor, or commodities there.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the Caribbean Sea itself, the peninsula was native ground, not middle ground.<sup>36</sup>

## Historicity, law, and territory

The plot of *Warrior Spirits* centers on the search for stories about the Spanish colonial presence in the eighteenth century and the Wayúu response. More specifically, it is about the search for the places where the Spanish sought to impose sovereignty by building fortified garrison settlements, as described in the previous section. Thus its focus is narrow. However, in terms of themes and chronology, the scope of *Warrior Spirits* is much broader. It raises key issues about the relation between discourses

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From borderlands to borders: empires, nation-states, and the peoples in between in North America," *American Historical Review* 104: 3 (1999), 814-841.

<sup>36</sup> Kathleen DuVal, *The native ground: Indians and Colonists in the heart of the continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2006). Phillip J. Deloria, "What is the middle ground, anyway?" *William and Mary Quarterly* 63:1 (2006), 15-22. Richard White, *The middle ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011[1990]). For an interpretation of the Anishinaabeg similar to my interpretation of the Wayúu, see Michael A. McDonnell, *Masters of empire: Great Lakes Indians and the making of America* (New York: Hill and Wang 2015).

and ritual practices related to the past, Wayúu law, and territorial claims in the present; the role of second burials and ancestral cemeteries in determining property rights and adjudicating claims; the marking and telescoping of historical time in terms of the passing of older generations; reparations and the veracity and authority of Native sources; place names, genealogy, and fidelity to the ancestors and spirits of the dead.

Taken separately, each issue takes us beyond the boundary of history—including ethno-history—and, taken together, these issues pose a seemingly insurmountable challenge to its disciplinary protocols and procedures. Under the sway of Foucault, anthropology has largely eschewed historical approaches, such that these issues also pose a challenge to anthropology.<sup>37</sup> Salomon's call to move from "histories of South American Indians" to "South American Indian histories" is easier said than done.

In this section, I make the cultural logic that is largely implicit in *Warrior Spirits* explicit in order to contextualize Wayúu historicity as manifested in myth, oral tradition, ceremony, and ritual. I read Wayúu creation myths historically and provide an overview of the current situation of the Guajira, along with an analysis of Wayúu discourses and rituals connected to the past. This exercise in contextualization is necessary because we decided to forego omniscient narration in the documentary. As it stands, however, the film lacks the context necessary to understand it, which this section and the previous section are designed to provide.

Though there has been almost no archeology in the Guajira, particularly not in the Upper Guajira, the Wayúu know where they come from and how they got there. The god Mareiwa created them out of clay from a mountain called Itojolo, located in the Sierra de Macuira, the peninsula's most fertile sub-region, which features multiple sources of fresh water, abundant forests, and the best land for the cultivation of fruits and vegetables as well as pasture. Itojolo appears in passing in *Warrior Spirits* in the section that takes place in Nazareth. Itojolo was a person before becoming a mountain; along with his brothers Epits and Camaichi, Itojolo set out to the northeast to reach the sea, but got tired and dehydrated in the sun, so remained in place.

Mareiwa was born when Jaguar ate Mareiwa's mother. Jaguar's mother raised Mareiwa and his two brothers as her own, but once they grew up and found out what Jaguar had done to their mother, Mareiwa and his brothers tricked Jaguar into eating his own mother, whom they had boiled and dismembered. Jaguar and Mareiwa then took different forms and continued to struggle, until Mareiwa fell in love with and touched a young weaver of cotton who became the sea, which flooded the peninsula and forced Mareiwa to take flight to the tip of Itojolo, which he then made taller. He ordered the birds to drink the water, but it was Kashi, the moon, who dried the peninsula up, at which point, having created the birds, with the help of Jepirech—the

<sup>37</sup> Lesley Gill, "Power," in James G. Carrier and Deborah A. Gewertz, eds., in *The handbook of socio-cultural anthropology*, (London: Bloomsbury 2013) pp. 49-67. Forrest Hylton, "Forgetting peasants: history, "indigeneity," and the anthropology of Revolution in Bolivia," in Leigh Binford et al., eds., *Fifty years of peasant wars in Latin America* (New York: Berghahn Press 2020), 167-193.

northeast wind—and Igua—goddess of spring rains—Mareiwa made the Wayúu, whose maternal uncle was Juyap, the rainy season, son of Palaa, the sea.<sup>38</sup>

Mareiwa also made cattle for those clans fortunate enough to own them. The poor would not own them, and would therefore cut wretched figures. They would have to live off wild fruits. Mareiwa divided the people into *alijunas* and Wayúu: the former obeyed his call without asking, while the latter asked him what he wanted. Mareiwa then divided the Wayúu into clans with cattle brands signifying their totemic animals, which dispersed across the peninsula. Mareiwa gave each of them goats, horses, donkeys, pigs, as well as watermelon, corn, and melon seeds. The animals were going to be Wayúu people, but the Wayúu ate them, so instead Mareiwa assigned them to clans to remind them of their primordial transgression.<sup>39</sup>

In one version of the story, Mareiwa wished to see “the people multiply and take possession once more of what used to be their flourishing world. Let them rebuild their lives and prosper on the ruins of the past.”<sup>40</sup> This may point to the effects of Spanish colonial presence. Although the Spanish were confined to Riohacha in the mid-sixteenth century and afterward, the introduction of diseases and livestock overturned previous patterns of Native politics, production, trade, warfare, jurisprudence, and kinship, such that survivors had to rebuild almost from scratch. Mareiwa explained Wayúu kinship arrangements: “All the women who belong to your *eir-ruku* through their mothers shall be your mothers, without exception, no matter what tribe their mothers belong to.... All the older men who belong to your tribe through their mothers shall be your uncles permanently.”<sup>41</sup> Mareiwa also noted how kinship would relate to territory and law: together, the clans would implement laws in “a land without borders,” and share customs as well as a common language, and mobilize their collective energies through blood ties. Men would work for wives, mothers, and mothers-in-law, using the knives and machetes Mareiwa gave them.

These stories of creation would seem far-removed from historical discourse or consciousness, but they offer clues to both. First, they testify to ethno-genesis in the colonial Atlantic world: cattle and branding irons, along with livestock and *alijuna*, are present at creation, as are divisions of wealth, status, and power defined in terms of property rights in cattle and livestock, and the size of kinship networks. Though such stories may well incorporate elements that pre-date the arrival of German and Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century, such as migration to the peninsula from elsewhere, they testify to the changes resulting from Spanish colonialism without conquest, and enmeshment in the Atlantic capitalist economy.

If mythic discourse contains crucial hermeneutic keys to Wayúu history, the converse is also true: mythical arches buttress the ostensibly historical discourse of the protagonists of *Warrior Spirits*. Sergio Kohen Epieyú is the main protagonist of

<sup>38</sup> “The origin of the Guajiro,” “The mountains of La Guajira,” “Three brothers,” “Epitsü and Itojulu, two Guajira mountains,” “The epic of Mareiwa,” “The great epic of Mareiwa,” in Wilbert and Simoneau, eds., *Folk literature of the Guajiro Indians*, vol. 1, 34-35, 39-42, 65-78.

<sup>39</sup> “The first Guajiro and the origin of clans,” in *ibid.*, 93-95.

<sup>40</sup> “Origin and names of the Guajiro tribes,” in *ibid.*, 96.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

the film due to his genealogical relationship to Antonio Paredes, but also due to his standing within his clan and the peninsula more broadly—in part as a result of his music and songs, which he makes into CDs. When Sergio took us to the ancestral cemetery that contains Antonio Paredes's bones in an urn—signifying second burial—he made reference to the main figures of Wayúu mythology, Juya and Pulowi, as well as to the role of dreams in guiding Wayúu visions of the future.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, when Germán Aguilar described the migration of his clan from Cabo de la Vela, he mixed history and myths concerning the origins of *eirrukus*.

Compared to Sergio, Germán knew more about Wayúu jurisprudence and the history of conflict among the Wayúu, as well as the world of public administration and *alijunas* in Bogotá, where he worked for fifteen years in the General Accounting Office, but Sergio is more knowledgeable about shamanism, ritual practice, songs and poems, and the topography of the Upper Guajira. Thus Sergio took responsibility for performing the proper rites according to Wayúu custom to guarantee that the film would not invoke the wrath of the spirits of dead warriors, European as well as Wayúu. This is illustrated in the scene at the fortified Spanish garrison settlement called Sabana del Valle, located in Topia, which the Spanish built and the Wayúu attacked in the 1770s. There, as a way of asserting Wayúu dominion over the land, Sergio offers tobacco and liquor in the four cardinal directions to the spirits of both the Spanish and the Wayúu who died fighting. His account is intended to sustain Wayúu control of territory into the future, even though Sergio's clan has no claim on Topia. It would therefore serve to construct ethnic as opposed to clan memory. Sergio was also in charge of sacrificing a black goat at his ancestral cemetery to propitiate any evil spirits connected with the history of Spanish-Wayúu conflict—again, so that the spirits would not punish us for making the documentary, or Sergio for sharing his ancestral knowledge with us. As he notes in the film, Sergio's schooling in the landscape and history of the Upper Guajira took place as a boy, when his elders—presumably his maternal uncles—walked with him or took him on horseback so he would know where to find water, where crops could grow, and where sacred places were located.

Sergio explains to viewers in Spanish and Wayúunaiki his goals for undertaking the project: he wants evidence for his claims, reparations from Spain, and respect and reciprocity from *alijuna* filmmakers in the form of a copy of the film (we also gave him a digital copy of archival documents, and a photocopy of the principal published primary sources in Spanish). His motives are equally clear. He is worried about the loss of ancestral knowledge due to a breakdown in the channels of oral transmission between the older generation and the younger, which is partly a result of the Colombian educational system. He sees the *alijuna* filmmakers, their technology, and their modest production budget as an opportunity to reach Wayúu youth. Thus Sergio wants the film to strengthen and amplify his authority in his clan and beyond, within the Wayúu world more broadly. It would be more difficult to affirm that Sergio performs indigeneity—a descriptive term that frequently passes for a concept, though its meaning is indeterminate—since his principal audience

<sup>42</sup> For Juya and Pulowi, see Michel Perrin, *The way of the dead Indians: Guajiro myths and symbols* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press 1987b), 78-95.



and potential constituency is Wayúu. Sergio's use of Spanish is presumably directed toward *alijunas*, however, and is perhaps best understood as an effort to speak directly to us, the filmmakers, rather than potential viewers. Or perhaps he is speaking to both.

In the film, Germán Aguilar Epieyú's narrative emphasizes the relationship between Wayúu jurisprudence, authority, and historical knowledge, and migration from the Upper to the Lower Guajira. Germán also stresses the role of genealogy and ancestral cemeteries, where secondary burials take place, in determining territorial limits. Germán was educated in an *internado*—a boarding school run along colonial lines by Capuchin missionaries, which is how he mastered Spanish and *alijuna* cultural norms. Like the Spanish empire before it, the Colombian nation-state delegated conquest to the Capuchins. The part of the Guajira in which Germán exercises his profession as a jurist and authority as a clan elder is precisely where Wayúu warriors burned Capuchin missions in 1769.

Germán explains the nature of authority in Wayúu society in terms of a gendered division of labor and authority. Men define and enforce the law, which mediates collective conflicts (since there are no individual conflicts in Wayúu society, strictly speaking). In theory at least, they do so with some knowledge of their clan history. This earthly power is conceived as secondary to the spiritual power of women, who act as shamans and interpreters of dreams.<sup>43</sup> Since the Wayúu are ultimately guided in the terrestrial realm by the interpretation of dreams, according to Sergio, because of their privileged access to this realm, women determine the direction of Wayúu society, and have done so historically; they also act as healers, thereby guaranteeing the reproduction of Wayúu society.

Finally, women are in charge of managing clan property in livestock and other goods, and of distributing it when old men die. Thus although Wayúu women rarely appear in Spanish sources, based on Germán's story, we can guess that they were integral to the construction, administration, and maintenance of the accumulated commodities that *alaulayus* exchanged in the colonial Atlantic world, including younger women as well as Cocina and African slaves. How are we to explain the particular forms of subordination of women, which Spanish and European observers noted from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries? How are we to understand the role of women as mediums of exchange between *alaulayus*, and between these and the agents of European merchants? These questions require further research.

Sergio's narration of the past in relation to the present has a number of features worthy of comment. First, Sergio authorizes his version of the past by reference to Wayúu oral tradition, place names, and the knowledge and practices of his ancestors. He does so in order to legitimate the territorial claims of his *apüshi* in conflict with another *apüshi* from the Epieyú clan. This conflict dates from the early 1970s, and has spilled over into violence at a number of points since then. Sergio's claims to territory, made on behalf of his *apüshi*, hinge on the location of his ancestral cemetery, where Antonio Paredes is buried. Filming a ritual sacrifice at that cemetery is part of a broader effort to substantiate such claims.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, *Practicantes del sueño*.

Besides Sergio and Germán from the Epieyú clan, we also talked with authorized elders from the Jayariyú and the Ureiwana clans about the campaigns to drive the Spanish out of the Upper Guajira. Indicating the location of his ancestral cemetery, and referencing land titles in Uribia and Riohacha, José García Ureiwana told us that his clan, which is native to the Sierra de Macuira region, retains its territory, but is much diminished. So is his father's clan, which is from Topia, on the eastern shore of the peninsula, where the Wayúu killed Spanish soldiers and settlers at the garrison of Sabana del Valle in the 1770s. According to José, there was a time—presumably either the sixteenth or the seventeenth century—when the *alijunas* and the Wayúu traded peacefully, because of the willingness of Wayúu elders to tolerate them. And useful things were gained thereby—metal tools such as axes and hatchets in particular.

But with the passing of generations, another group of *alijunas* came—the Spanish—and introduced moral corruption and degeneration, raping women and children, getting old men intoxicated. These *alijunas* thought and acted as though the territory belonged to them. With a plant native to the Sierra de la Macuira, in the 1770s, Wayúu women poisoned the water supply before Wayúu warriors killed off survivors. This suggests that kinship ties cemented an alliance uniting Wayúu leaders and clans in two different micro-regions—the Macuira and Topia.

To authorize his account, José makes reference to his father and his father's sister in Topia as valid sources. When I first heard José's story, having read the diaries of Spanish counter-insurgents, I mistakenly assumed I was listening to a mytho-poetic tale of warfare with the lowest possible cost in lives lost for the Wayúu. Returning to Spanish sources, however, I found that Spanish troops had suffered a fatal illness at Sabana del Valle prior to being attacked and killed, and the description of the autopsies was consistent with poisoning. Historians should avoid approaching oral traditions in neo-positivist fashion as a repository of facts that can be used to verify written archival sources. Yet testimonies like José's add depth and weight to the pithy summaries of these deaths in Spanish documents. Furthermore, in the Sierra de Macuira, near Nazareth, José's version was independently verified by Marcos Jayariyú. Marcos told us that the name of the plant used was a secret, and that Wayúu women had devised the strategy in a multi-clan assembly. This shows that not only men sought ways to confront and expel the Spanish invaders.

As an academic historian, I am concerned with chronology, and therefore find it interesting to note how Marcos, like José and Sergio, compresses time through the narrative device of the passing of generations. This mode of telling an historical story allows Marcos to discuss Mowana, the rise of slave trading in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the use of firearms without differentiating between the republican and colonial periods—a distinction that may be meaningless in the Sierra de Macuira and among the Wayúu the more broadly. Mowana appears in a photograph in a traveler's ethnography published in the 1920s, and Marcos's characterization of him squares with what we know from that source.<sup>44</sup>

Similar to the late eighteenth century, then, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a new phase of capital accumulation and slavery based on the

<sup>44</sup> Bolinder, *Indians on horseback*, 91-116.

export of agricultural commodities, but with the addition of petroleum.<sup>45</sup> Based on the limited secondary literature, it appears that the Wayúu were much less successful in maintaining their autonomy and authority in this period of crisis, in which the Colombian and Venezuelan nation-states advanced enough to create borderlands regions. It seems that during this era, which coincided with the drought and famine cycle of the Age of Empire—what Mike Davis has called late Victorian holocausts—the basis of Wayúu capital, property, and trade switched from cattle to goats in response to the rise of cattle ranching in Zulia and desertification in the Guajira.<sup>46</sup>

What are we to make of Marcos's tale of Wayúu historical decline? First, he locates the origins of conflict among the Wayúu in the period when Mowana was dominant, which is to say the 1920s and 1930s, and explains it in relation to the loss of Wayúu identity as reflected in the rise of *alijuna* patronyms. Second, he emphasizes that this era was one of increasing inequality and misery for poor Wayúu, who could not defend themselves against powerful and wealthy slave merchants. Third, conflicts among leading Wayúu slave merchants intensified as they sought to eliminate Mowana as a middleman and establish direct contacts and autonomous trading networks with the slave dealers who came to the ports Marcos that names: Castilletes, Puerto López, Bahía Honda, Bahía Portete, and even Riohacha.

We realized that there is no way to avoid being pulled into Wayúu politics when undertaking a project like *Warrior Spirits*, and the film lays itself open to the charge that we were either partial to the Epiyú clan, or were used by them to further their aims and claims.<sup>47</sup> This criticism is valid: we did not conduct interviews with a full range of clans, which would have been impossible given time and budgetary constraints. Nor did we conduct interviews at each place where a fortified garrison settlement once existed. We found that the history of the Spanish counter-insurgency campaigns and Wayúu responses to them were as fragmented and de-centralized as the clans themselves; that there were histories of such campaigns, hermetically sealed within kinship networks, but no broader or general history of what had happened. That is what we were creating, albeit on a small scale, yet we merely scratched the surface of the story—in reality, a rich multiplicity of stories.

For both Sergio and Germán, the film was designed to strengthen and build a Wayúu identity that transcends clan divisions and overcomes factionalism. This nascent ethnic nationalism responds to Colombian government efforts to impose state sovereignty in the Lower Guajira in order to fortify and amplify private property rights for multinational mining corporations and domestic agri-business. And it hinges on the interpretation of the 1991 Constitution concerning provisions for indigenous autonomy and systems of jurisprudence. For Sergio and Germán, the film was also designed to fortify particular claims on behalf of the Epiyú clan and the Kohen *apüshi*.

<sup>45</sup> For the rise of Maracaibo, see Miguel Tinker-Salas, *The enduring legacy: oil, culture, and society in Venezuela* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2009), 15-38.

<sup>46</sup> Mike Davis, *Late Victorian holocausts: El Niño famines and the making of the Third World* (New York: Verso 1999).

<sup>47</sup> See Ari Kelman, *A misplaced massacre: struggling over the memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2013).

Sadly, Sergio's dream of using the documentary to educate younger Wayúu has yet to materialize, and since there are no existing channels or funds for distribution and film screenings in the Guajira, it is hard to envision that happening. Ironically, the film's very modest public has been largely *alijuna*, namely academic audiences at public universities in Colombia, Bolivia, and Brazil, and private universities in the USA, as well as audiences composed of central government functionaries from distinct ministries in Bogotá. The *alijuna* scholars address the first public, and Germán Aguilar addressed the second; of the two publics, the latter is of course far more important for the present and future of the Wayúu as a people.

Based on his knowledge of and experience with central government ministries in Bogotá, and state government offices in Riohacha and Maicao, in the Lower Guajira, up until his death, Germán met regularly with bureaucrats to discuss public policy. He also traveled to Bogotá for meetings. He asked Colombian government officials to watch the film to give them some grasp of elementary aspects of Wayúu culture, society, and history. Germán's main critique of Bogotá concerned its centralist arrogance coupled with its Olympian ignorance of the particularities of his region and people. Because of his experience as a Wayúu jurist and in public administration in the Colombian nation-state, Germán was one of a handful of leaders who negotiated beyond the level of the clan.

Another potential criticism is that the film reproduces the patriarchy of Wayúu culture and society, since *Warrior Spirits* features a range of male clan elders discoursing on topics on which they are authorized to speak in the name of their *apüshi* or *eirruku*, but there are no female voices. This is because we set out to make a film about historical narratives, which are or have become the property of men; we might even say that historical discourse is related to the construction of masculine identities and authority. Nevertheless, it would be intriguing to explore the connection between spiritual and socio-economic power among women in relation to juridical and political power among men. One way to do that would be to conduct and incorporate the ethnography of everyday life for women of different generations, and to solicit their ideas about the relation between the two spheres of power for which they are responsible. However, taken too far, such an approach runs the risk of diluting the film's focus on little known, poorly understood events in Atlantic and indigenously history, and might work better as a separate documentary.

The ideal solution would be to compile an audio-visual archive composed of historical narratives told by men, on the one hand, and interpretations of dreams narrated by women, on the other. As noted, both Sergio and Germán testify that the spiritual authority through which older women manage the realm of dreams is ultimately superior to the earthly plane of history and power that older men dominate. The trick would be to create an archive in which the two spheres mix together in dialectical tension and contradiction.

Like Native historicities in North America, Wayúu historicity includes source criticism, and as Germán stresses in *Warrior Spirits*, *püchüpü'üs* possess historical knowledge. In April 2016, I discussed my interpretation of events in the 1770s with Germán, and asked what he thought about what I had discovered concerning the conflict between Antonio Paredes's sons and nephews over his legacy. He told me that in seeking out Spanish Governor Galluzo, Paredes's nephews had violated

Wayúu law, since they should have relied on one of their maternal uncles to resolve the dispute through a *pütchipü'ü*, instead of bringing an *alijuna* into it. I also asked what he thought about me publishing my findings, since I felt some trepidation about airing dirty laundry of the Epieyú clan and Sergio's *apiüshi*. Germán assured me that because I published my findings in English in an academic journal, none of my potential readers could use my work as evidence for territorial and/or genealogical claims against the clan or Sergio's *apiüshi*.

Ironically, academic publishing's cosmopolitan reading public works to my advantage. Had I tried to broadcast what I learned in the Guajira itself to the detriment of either the Epieyú clan or Sergio's *apiüshi*, I would have violated Wayúu law about discussing the ancestors of a clan to which I do not belong, and together with my family, I would owe damages.

## Conclusion

How do we integrate the genre conventions of academic scholarship with the genre conventions of documentary filmmaking, and how do we make room in the process for Wayúu historicity, which breaks with those generic conventions and operates according to different categories? This paper represents an initial, experimental attempt to bridge the three separate universes in the hope of addressing key themes about claims-making, historical representation, and the relation between past and present. The paper also reflects the difficulties and limits of such integration, and suggests the need for further experimentation.<sup>48</sup>

This essay has asked us to re-think the nature of knowledge production, scholarly authority, and collaborative research in relation to Wayúu ways of knowing the past. It has questioned the primacy of written sources and their interpretation within the discipline of history and asked us to consider what oral traditions have to teach us about the relation between history, myth, and landscape.

In closing, I want to signal the epistemological, ethical, professional, and political stakes, as well as the formal dilemmas, at play when we accept non-academic Native American historians and intellectuals as partners in a shared project of historical inquiry, recovery, and advocacy.<sup>49</sup> Insuperable inequalities—themselves a product of differential positioning in relation to dominant poles of political, economic, and socio-cultural power—separate ethnic (Wayúu) conceptual constellations of history from our own professional academic understandings, protocols, and procedures.

<sup>48</sup> For inspiring examples, see Richard Price, *First-time: the historical vision of an African American people* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2002[1983]). Idem, *Alabi's World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1990). Idem, *The convict and the colonel: a story of colonialism and resistance in the Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of twentieth-century Aymara activists as intellectuals in Bolivia, see Waskar Ari Chachaki, *Earth politics: religion, decolonization, and Bolivia's Indigenous intellectuals* (Durham: Duke University Press 2014). For the limitations of the concept, see Tristan Platt, "Conclusion," in Gabriela Ramos and Yanna Yannakakis, eds., *Indigenous intellectuals: knowledge, power, and colonial culture in Mexico and the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press 2014), 261-278.

This is also true for documentary filmmaking, and in both cases inequalities of power, wealth, and status are determined by the structural context in which we work, rather than our good faith efforts.

How can we best mitigate those inequalities? As academic intellectuals concerned with argument and evidence, and with reaching a public broader than the one that reads specialized academic essays and monographs, how do we contextualize cultural materials whose meanings may be immediately apparent to Wayúu or other Native peoples, but which are so foreign as to be unintelligible to *alijunas*? To what extent are we obliged to take formal risks with no guarantee of success—risks that artists, musicians, poets, and fiction writers take as a matter of course, but which frighten most academics, regardless of their disciplinary backgrounds?

These questions are loaded and fraught, not rhetorical. Ultimately, I do not think academic historiography in the Americas (much less in Europe) can accommodate indigenous historicity without a radical revision of its own protocols. This is most unlikely given that academic disciplines operate in highly bureaucratic, corporatized institutions, and through restrictive hierarchies based on rank and the reproduction of guild practices. There is at present no room for indigenous intellectuals—unless they are academics—in debates about how we know what we know about the past.

Beyond the narrow disciplinary confines of history, an equally radical change would need to take place in the design and implementation of research agendas across disciplines. Instead of individual researchers, most of them located in the North Atlantic, writing in English, and competing for relatively scarce funds, indigenous representatives and communities would need to participate in every stage of the process, which would take time and cost money. At present, it is impossible to envision institutional commitments from universities, governments, and foundations to funding democratic deliberation and debate between (mostly Northern) scholars and (mostly Southern) indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, the task at hand is beyond the disciplinary competence of any individual scholar. Only an inter-disciplinary research team of historians, archeologists, folklorists, and anthropologists-linguists—one that included indigenous leaders as intellectuals—could meet the challenge posed by what indigenous peoples know about their history and how they know it. Hence I am highly skeptical about a practical resolution to the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological quandaries this essay has posed. I do not, in other words, see any way out of the conundrums I have signaled, but it seemed worth articulating them nonetheless.

**Supplementary Information** The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-021-09637-2>.

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