

Beyond Assimilation vs. Cultural Resistance

Wayuu Market Appropriation in Riohacha, La Guajira, Colombia

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ABSTRACT

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On the semi-desert Guajira Peninsula of northern Colombia, the Wayuu Indians and the *arijuna* (non-Wayuu) have shared a long history that includes conflict, acceptance, and exchange. Under constant assimilation forces in the city of Riohacha, Wayuu women vendors have adopted market strategies that draw them nearer to arijuna culture and society and yet enable them to reproduce a distinctive, if altered, Wayuu identity. I explore the motivations that Wayuu women have to participate daily in the market economy, and describe how commerce is both a necessity and opportunity for them. Wayuu vendors both represent and stimulate Wayuu culture and identity by selling products symbolic of their culture and broadening the notion of what it means to be Wayuu. This statement is based on findings from fieldwork at four different kinds of Wayuu marketing sites in Riohacha. In the tradition of economic anthropology, I compare my findings with other case studies of indigenous marketing in Latin America to better understand the regional patterns as they relate to the Wayuu. Ultimately, I intend to go beyond the dyad cultural resistance/assimilation by attending to Wayuu perspectives. This research also contributes to the relatively small body of English language literature available on the Wayuu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to gratefully thank several people whose concerted efforts developed and refined the contents of this thesis. The idea to write about the Wayuu people emerged from my visits to Riohacha where at an early age I became familiar with their day-to-day interactions with the townspeople. I first and foremost want to thank my father, my mother, and my Aunt Paulina who instilled in me the attachment, curiosity, and affection that I feel towards La Guajira and its inhabitants.

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Throughout my fieldwork in Riohacha, I relied on the knowledge and guidance of family, friends, colleagues and the Wayuu vendors who taught me about their culture, values, aspirations and struggles. I hope this is the beginning of a long and meaningful relationship with the members of the Wayuu community. Many of the interviews would not have happened if not for the diligent and sensible interpreting and co-interviewing by Rosario Ipuana. I appreciate the continual advice and support that I receive from Guajiro anthropologists Weildler Guerra and Otto Vergara. Also, Ali Valdeblanquez, Raul Romero, and Jairo Rene Escobar all accompanied me to the marketing sites and facilitated my fieldwork and interviews in many ways. The Wayuu marchantas, weavers, and marketplace vendors are the true inspiration to this study and I owe them more than can be written down in words. This thesis is a dedication to their resilience.

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CHAPTER ONE

WAYUU APPROPRIATION OF THE INFORMAL MARKET

The expansion of capitalism in recent decades has been the strongest influence in acculturating indigenous groups to the national societies since the Spanish Conquest.
-Ronald Duncan, *Crafts, Capitalism, and Women*

On the semi-desert Guajira Peninsula of northern Colombia, the Wayuu¹ are the largest indigenous group of Colombia and Venezuela, with an estimated 300,000 members (Guerra Curvelo 2002). For nearly five centuries the Wayuu shared a history of conflict and resistance, acceptance and exchange with the non-native *arijuna* (non-Wayuu) living in urban centers like Riohacha. Throughout this tumultuous historic period for indigenous peoples across the Americas, the Wayuu both retained their territory and adapted to the changing conditions around them. Wayuu anthropologist Weildler Guerra notes that “the Wayuu are one of the few ethnic groups throughout the American continent to have successfully resisted European domination” (Harker and Guerra 1998:front leaf).

¹ Wayuunaiki, the language spoken by the Wayuu, belongs to the Arawak linguistic family of South America. The language can be traced to a Proto-Arawak stock near the convergence of the Amazon River with the Negro River where it diverged from other Arawak languages around 5000BP. Based on another divergence around 1500BP with the neighboring Paraujano linguistic group, and supported by archaeological evidence, Oliver (1990) estimates that the contemporary Wayuu have been on the Guajira Peninsula for at least 1500 years.

In recent times, Wayuu involvement in the market economy of the city of Riohacha has brought them closer to the arijuna society than ever before. Founded at the confluence of the Ranchería River and the Caribbean Sea in 1545, Riohacha is located on the ancestral territory of the Wayuu Indians of the Guajira Peninsula of northern Colombia and is the capital of La Guajira province. Wayuu women vendors sell typical Wayuu food and craft items there in the informal market sector. Such daily market interactions in an urban setting can be a powerful form of socio-economic assimilation, and are capable of causing a break in the cultural continuity of the Wayuu society, as has happened with other indigenous groups.

The Wayuu have adapted their economic strategies, gender roles, and tribal identity to the changes taking place in the world around them. These adaptations may seem like a step towards assimilation into the *arijuna/mestizo* society because of the incorporation of what is widely considered non-Wayuu culture: market exchange, the Spanish language, the purchase of manufactured goods, and urbanization- in essence, another example of globalization. However, these “foreign” elements are being appropriated by the Wayuu, who form hybrid cultures distinctly different from either their original Western or traditional Wayuu forms, in a process aptly labeled *glocalization* (Ritzer 2003:193). When the members of a given society maintain agency or control over the manner that elements are adopted, they continue to reproduce a distinctive culture. A clear example of an appropriation from the early European settlers is pastoralism. The Wayuu were horticulturalists and foragers, relying on a range of subsistence practices, from gardening and coastal fishing, to

hunting and gathering (Perrin 1980), but they incorporated livestock into their economy within 50 years after the European contact in 1499 (Barrera Monroy 2000). Today, although the Wayuu continue to rely to some extent on horticulture, fishing, and foraging, they identify themselves and by and large are identified by the ariajuna others as pastoralists. Currently the Wayuu are finding a balance between maintaining long-standing cultural traditions and values, largely revolving around their semi-subsistent pastoral lifestyle and the adoption of Western marketing. By doing so, the Wayuu vendors also maintain a distinctive indigenous identity.

The Wayuu vendor's adoption of marketing is both an economic necessity for their families and a strategy for tapping market resources beyond subsistence. The main research question that I propose to answer here is if the Wayuu vendor's day-to-day commercial activity can be considered appropriation and glocalization rather than assimilation into the broader national society. I will show that even though some involvement in the Western, urban society and therefore the incorporation of new culture have occurred, the vendors maintain a distinctive indigenous identity through the sale of products symbolic of Wayuu culture and the expansion of the notion of what it means to be Wayuu.

I compare and contrast these Wayuu economic strategies with case studies of other indigenous vendors in Latin America. This economic anthropological comparison of indigenous marketing will serve to challenge the notion that capitalism is necessarily a homogenizing process. By documenting and analyzing

Wayuu marketing, this thesis will contribute to literature on hybrid forms of capitalism on a global scale.

Methodology

My methodology has included bibliographic research of general economic anthropological theory, including indigenous marketing in the Americas, Wayuu history and society, and ethnographic research in the Guajira Peninsula. I will provide a brief justification and synopsis of this research here.

Economic Anthropology

How indigenous groups have been affected by the spread of capitalism has been an important issue in economic anthropology. Historical documentation and contemporary studies attest to the vulnerability of indigenous cultures when indigenous peoples are confronted by capitalism (Bodley 2000; Maybury-Lewis 1990; Metz 2006; Nietschmann 1990; Reed 2003; Robbins 2001; Wilson 1999). Ethnographers have noted that the more indigenous peoples are involved in capitalist modes of production and the “free market”, the more likely they are to abandon their indigenous values and traditions (Cook 2004; Duncan 2000; Ehlers 1990; Littlefield 1978; Wood 2000). However, for other indigenous groups, participating in the market economy becomes a means to supplement traditional subsistence economies, promote traditional craft production, gain social status, and ultimately strengthen their cultural identity (Harris 1995; Stephen 1991; Tice 1995; Wherry 2006).

Whether the Wayuu and other indigenous groups are abandoning or strengthening their culture by participating in the cash economy depends on how much control they maintain over the means and relations of production.

A related focus of economic anthropology is the ways that Western and non-Western societies culturally construct gender. Although ethnographers have recorded enormous gender variability from one culture to the next, the vast majority of societies are patriarchal and have tended to undervalue women's economic roles. According to feminist economic anthropologists, this is especially the case in Latin America (Duncan 2000; Ehlers 1990; Leonard 2005; MacEwen Scott 1986; Van Vleet 2005). The Wayuu women's engagement with global economic processes is similar to those of other indigenous women in Latin America. I will review the vast literature on Latin American women's participation in the market in Chapter Two to guide my analysis of Wayuu women's marketing in Riohacha. I will draw comparisons and contrasts between the Wayuu situation and women's economic participation among indigenous artisans in Oaxaca, Mexico and San Pedro, Guatemala.

Research on the Wayuu

As the largest indigenous group in Colombia and Venezuela², and one of the first to have contact with the Europeans, the Wayuu have been the subject matter of

² In Colombia, there are around 140,000 Wayuu representing 20.5 percent of the total indigenous population (Rodriguez and El Gazi 2007:465). It is estimated that nearly 170,000 Wayuu live across the border, in Venezuela (Guerra 2002:31).

many official documents and reports starting in the Colonial Era (1530s-1820s). Many explorers, missionaries, government officials, engineers, journalists, naturalists, novelists and others have described their observations of the Wayuu over the centuries (Gutierrez Cruz 2005). In the 1940s, when the discipline of anthropology was in its formative stage in Colombia, the first anthropological studies were conducted on Wayuu social organization, shamanism, and mythology by Virginia Gutierrez de Pineda, Roberto Pineda Giraldo, Milciades Chavez, Alicia Dussan de Reichel and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (Silva Vallejo 2006). Since then, other anthropologists and social scientists have broadened our understanding of the Wayuu. Two anthropologists from La Guajira, Weildler Guerra and Otto Vergara, brought to my attention the need for a study of Wayuu commerce in Riohacha's market economy. They and Italian anthropologist Alessandro Mancuso advised me and fueled my interest and dedication in doing research among the Wayuu.

Although there are numerous textual sources in Spanish on the Wayuu people, English publications are very limited. A search on ProQuest®³ for theses and dissertations about Wayuu society displayed ten sources from 1967 to 2008.⁴ Furthermore, a library catalog search at the University of Kansas and an online journal search generated a total of five books and 20 articles, respectively, in English on Wayuu history, language, and society.⁵

³ ProQuest® is a digital research archive containing scholarly collections from multiple disciplines from around the world. The ProQuest® website is: <http://www.proquest.com/>.

⁴ Since the Wayuu have been referred to by different names historically, I used the following terms in a Basic Search to account for this: "Wayuu", "Wayu", "Guajira", "Guajiro", and "Goajiro".

⁵ The same criteria was used for these searches as in the ProQuest search. The time span for the library catalog search dates from 1957 to the present; the online journal (JSTOR, AnthroSource,

The Wayuu are socially and geographically organized throughout the peninsula in matrilineal extended families residing on dispersed settlements called *rancherías* (Guerra Curvelo 2002). These families, in turn, compose 27 matrilineal clans that are dispersed throughout the region but associated with ancestral territories, which are marked by cemeteries used as primary and secondary burial grounds.⁶ Wayuu *rancherías* may be far removed from towns and cities but they are not isolated from them. The entire Guajira Peninsula is crisscrossed with dirt roads that connect hundreds of *rancherías*, and *rancherías* with the arijuna towns and cities.

Although the Wayuu possess many tribal characteristics, such as an acephalous, decentralized political system, clan affiliations, a subsistence economy, and a high level of autonomy, they also have a social hierarchy that recognizes various levels of wealth and prestige, which are acquired by both pastoralism and economic and social ties to the urban society (Bates 2004). The two bordering nation-states and the ever-present Caribbean Sea have been avenues for interaction between the Wayuu and the outside world (Fig. 1). The shared history of exchange between the Wayuu and arijuna runs from the adoption of livestock, alliances with colonial powers, rebellions against Spanish domination, contraband trade from Venezuela into Colombia, power struggles between rebel, military, and paramilitary forces, and the presence of an unknown number of drug-running planes to the

ProQuest) results span from 1936 to 2004. The three most notable books about the Wayuu in English are Bolinder's (1957), Watson's (1968) and Perrin's (1987) translation from French.

⁶ The deceased are buried in a cemetery near his or her residence at the time of death, then two to six years later will be moved by members of the uterine family to be buried in their ancestral cemetery (Bolinder 1957; Lopez 2004).

Caribbean, Mexico and the United States. Despite these interactions and being circumscribed by developing nations and a global market economy, the Wayuu have managed to redefine their identity and maintain some autonomy by appropriating foreign economic practices, such as pastoralism and market exchange. Their resistance to conquest and the above-mentioned encounters attest to their ability to overcome powerful forces of integration and may be a determining factor for their cultural continuity.

Although the Wayuu never conceded to the assimilation processes of the Spanish Empire nor to those of the Colombian Republic, their autonomy and cultural identity are threatened by economic and environmental pressures. There has been a decrease in rainfall over the past few decades that is causing problems for both



Figure 1 Map of La Guajira Peninsula

pastoralism and horticulture, because without the rains there are not sufficient forage and water for the crops. To add to the problems, land degradation through overgrazing and overconsumption of the trees for fuel and construction have increased desertification (Vergara Gonzalez 1990). Pastoralism has allowed them to maintain their livelihood with minimal reliance on the outside world, but pastoralism is becoming increasingly insufficient for subsistence and social exchange. Many Wayuu have been forced to migrate to urban centers to provide for themselves and their families. In 1994, it was estimated that 40,000 Wayuu were living semi-permanently in Maracaibo, the largest city in western Venezuela, because of the employment opportunities found there and to escape the armed conflict in Colombia; this number has undoubtedly increased due to the continued environmental problems and lack of employment opportunities in Colombia (McSweeney and Jokisch 2007). Many of the Wayuu moving to the cities are replacing their traditional ways with those of the Western world, such as dependency on wage labor, market exchanges, loans, and a capitalist mode of production.

Ethnographic Summary

For the ethnographic phase of the project in the summers of 2006 and 2007, collaboration with colleagues, family and friends was vital. For my entire life, I have been visiting Riohacha in northern Colombia, my father's hometown. These accumulated experiences have instilled in me a more intimate understanding of life in this city and a deeper relationship with its inhabitants and the Wayuu. My local

contacts in Riohacha range from academics and scholars to a large number of relatives, friends and acquaintances. Their support of my research gave me multiple avenues of access to information and resources. So when I once again traveled from my mother's hometown of Lawrence, Kansas, to my father's home area of Riohacha in 2006, this time to formally explore the relationship between Wayuu participation in the market economy, gender and identity, I already had longstanding personal attachments to the area. The help that I received from local friends and family greatly facilitated the process of meeting vendors and building rapport.

I gathered information about the relationship of the Wayuu to the market by establishing myself in the community, building rapport, participant-observation, note-taking, and unstructured and semi-structured interviewing (Bernard 2006). During my first ethnographic visit from July 12 to August 8, 2006, I soon realized that Wayuu commerce in Riohacha went far beyond the marketing of "traditional" products, and that Wayuu women were in fact key and unique players in Riohacha's informal economy. The Wayuu women were ethnically identifiable by their colorful *mantas* (Wayuu women's dress), the Wayuunaiki language, and physical characteristics such as facial features and skin color. I found it fascinating how two widely different cultures could coexist for centuries, each borrowing elements from the other yet maintaining visible ethnic differences. I wanted to know the perspectives of Wayuu marketers in regards to the relationship of market participation and Wayuu identity. After observations and informal interviews I identified four sectors of commerce for investigation: 1) *La Primera* tourist district

where weavers sell their crafts to tourists, 2) the *Mercado Nuevo* (New Market) - the largest market in Riohacha where a wide variety of goods are sold to Wayuu and non-Wayuu buyers, 3) the streets of central Riohacha where *marchantas* (ambulatory street vendors) sell produce door to door, and 4) the sidewalks of the *Mercado Viejo* (Old Market) where fresh fish, dried shrimp, and beans are the primary items sold (Fig. 2).

With a clearer understanding of my research question and the personal contacts made with some vendors in the summer of 2006, I resumed fieldwork in Riohacha from July 4 to July 29, 2007. I used semi-structured interviews to ask five

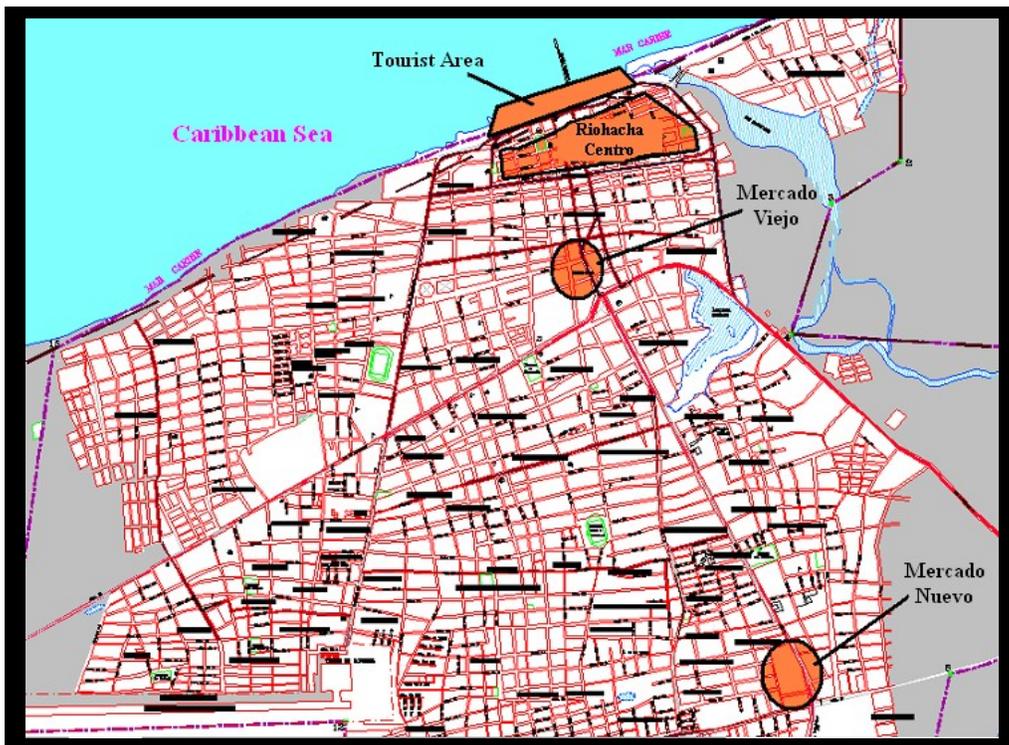


Figure 2 Map of Riohacha showing the four research areas.

in-depth questions⁷ and eight demographic and short-answer questions.⁸ Interview times ranged from ten minutes to one hour and 35 minutes depending on how busy the participant was and her willingness to participate.

In all, my interpreter and I conducted 25 interviews: ten artisans, ten marketplace vendors, three street vendors, and two Wayuu scholars. All participants were women except for one marketplace vendor and the two scholars.

Conducting fieldwork in Riohacha was challenging, engaging and very rewarding. Each day of observations and interviews took me to different areas of town or to the countryside, and presented me with encounters, setbacks, leads, and insights. In compliance with The Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL)⁹ on the procedures for informed consent, before each interview I explained my research and handed the participant a consent form written in Spanish, describing the study and how I could be contacted. For those participants that spoke only Wayuunaiki, my interpreter would orally translate it, and then give them a copy.¹⁰

About 60% of the Wayuu population is bilingual, able to speak Spanish and Wayuunaiki fluently (Amaya 2006:75). I became aware that I would need an

⁷ In-depth questions: 1. What is your occupation (work) and what is it like? 2. What do you do with the money you earn and what do you buy in Riohacha? 3. Do you want your children to do the same as you/their father or something else? Or, do you want to continue doing this work or do something different? 4. What do you think of Riohacha and its people? 5. What differences do you notice between life before and life now as a Wayuu?

⁸ Demographic and short-answer questions: 1. Name 2. Age 3. Education 4. Residency 5. Marital status 6. Number of children/siblings 7. Level of Spanish (high, intermediate, or low- based on observations) 8. Time in occupation.

⁹ HSCL #16702 Robles/Metz (ANTHRO) Wayuu Women Involvement in the Market Economy of Riohacha, Colombia.

¹⁰ See Appendix for a copy of the informed consent statement.

interpreter for about one-third of my interviews. By day ten of fieldwork, after several dead ends in my search for an interpreter, I finally was able to hire Rosario Ipuana (Fig. 3). She was highly recommended by a social worker with whom I was friends, and on July 13 we met at my Aunt Paulina's house to decide how we would work together. She came from a Wayuu community known as Boca de Camarones, 20 minutes southwest along the coast from Riohacha. Rosario turned out to be more than a reliable and efficient interpreter; she became a co-interviewer, skillful at questioning, listening, and interpreting. With Rosario working with me, interviews with non-Spanish-speakers were no longer a problem, and she was not only able to interpret for me but eventually personally conducted interviews with six participants.



Figure 3 Rosario transcribing an interview from Wayuunaiki to Spanish.

Rosario also provided background information since she sold artisanal products on occasion and she lived on a ranchería. On one of my final days in the

Guajira, she invited me to her ranchería to visit the flamingo and sea turtle sanctuary near her home and to see typical Wayuu festivities celebrating the patron saint of their community. The celebration included eating and drinking, cock fighting, a *yonna* (Wayuu dance) contest for the children, a Catholic mass, and a men and women's soccer tournament. Thus I ended my fieldwork on a high note, and I am indebted to Rosario for both her diligent work and hospitality.

Thesis Outline

The remainder of this thesis will consider the theoretical and practical aspects of Wayuu marketing, considering the actors' motivations and using economic anthropology to analyze their condition as indigenous, capitalist women. Chapter Two examines issues raised by economic anthropology, including traits of indigenous and market economies, gendered division of labor, and hybrid forms of capitalism. This chapter also provides concrete examples or case studies of indigenous marketing in various Latin American countries. The case studies will lend themselves as points of comparison with Wayuu marketing. Chapter Three starts by describing how politics in Colombia has affected the Wayuu, then discusses Wayuu economics, including various domestic and market economic strategies and factors that have been motivating the Wayuu to enter the market economy. I return to my own fieldwork material from the four marketing sites to highlight distinctions and similarities between Wayuu vendors in Riohacha and those from other regions of Latin America. Lastly, Chapter Four, the conclusion, discusses the intersection of

Wayuu economics, indigeneity, and gender in Riohacha. The conclusions and contributions of the study are discussed and I give recommendations for future inquiry and research among the Wayuu and economic anthropology.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CULTURE OF CAPITALISM AND INDIGENOUS ECONOMICS

A community can in many ways be affected and even controlled by the wider capitalist world, but this in itself does not necessarily make such a community a replica of the larger society and global economy.

*-Michael Taussig,
The Genesis of Capitalism amongst a South American Peasantry*

Just a few hundred miles away from Wayuu territory and within the same Colombian borders were located the “Pijao Indians” of La Chamba, in the Upper Magdalena River Valley in the Andes. In contrast to the Wayuu, their history serves as a stark example of how integration into the global economy can drastically alter indigenous or traditional communities and cause them to completely abandon even the most unquestioned traditions. Unlike many other indigenous communities that succumbed in the colonial period to land dispossession and peonage on the wealthy mono-crop plantations, ranches, and vast estates that replaced them, the Pijao Indians remained fairly isolated and independent until the 1870s.

Ronald Duncan (2000) relates that the residents of La Chamba went through a series of cultural changes forced upon them by encounters with colonizers, capitalists, and representatives of the Colombian state, such that they quickly were no longer considered indigenous but rather a rural mestizo peasantry. The men went

from being share-croppers and independent farmers to overworked and underpaid wage laborers on lands that had been taken from them. When the women supplemented diminishing household incomes by selling pottery- one of the last remnants of their indigenous past- in the market economy, a road was built to a nearby city in the 1930s, and outside merchants dispossessed them of their control over craft production and converted them into exploited contract workers. Today, in spite of the fact that La Chamba crafts have a high symbolic and cultural value in Colombia, the craftswomen and their families remain poor and disempowered.

A principal theme of economic anthropology is the study of ways that indigenous or marginal peoples receive and react to capitalism. Sometimes market integration virtually replaces traditional economic systems, other times, it remains secondary. Using economic anthropology as a theoretical framework, this chapter reviews literature pertaining to the spread of capitalism and considers its effects on indigenous, non-Western economic practices. The distinction between market and non-market economies is explored, paying particular attention to processes of globalization and glocalization, which I consider as the variety of ways that local communities accept, appropriate or deflect foreign influences, ideas and material culture. Ritzer (2003:193) defines glocalization as “the interpenetration of the global with the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas.” I also address the importance of women’s work within the economic context along with the beliefs and values related to a gendered division of labor. Two ethnographic case

studies of indigenous marketing in Latin America are examined to better understand regional patterns as they relate to the Wayuu.

Indigenous Non-Market Economies

Contemporary indigenous peoples are the descendants of the inhabitants of a colonized territory who used a tribal economy characterized by a communalist ideology and a reliance on non-market, household-oriented practices.¹¹ Work relations in non-market economies are centered around members of the family; consequently, gross inequalities of social stratification are not found in these societies (Bodley 2000). Indigenous or tribal economies are based on subsistence practices, reciprocal exchanges, and “use value” production of goods and necessities for the household.¹² For instance, East African pastoralists such as the Ariaal and Maasai of Kenya raise livestock for personal consumption, fulfilling marriage contracts, public ceremonies, and social prestige rather than simply economic wealth (Bates 2004). This is in contrast to an “exchange value” production system where products become commodities and are produced for sale and for profit.¹³ Non-market practices such as gift-giving, ceremonial exchanges, and balanced reciprocity

¹¹ The term “indigenous peoples” today also includes those native inhabitants of a land who retain elements of their predecessors’ culture while redefining their identity in contrast to the dominant society’s culture. The struggle for self-determination is also a key issue for many indigenous groups (Bodley 2000).

¹² I associate indigenous and tribal economy with a non-capitalist economy, which are terms that are more inclusive, including ancient societies and modern societies such as peasant groups, totalitarian states, or indigenous groups that have non-market economies.

¹³ Aristotle demonstrated how a pair of shoes can be used for use value or exchange value. In the former, the shoes are produced to be worn on the feet of the producer or for his or her family, i.e. “to satisfy natural wants”. In the latter, the shoes are produced to be exchanged for cash or capitalist purposes, i.e. “to gain money as an end in itself” (Taussig 1977:145-146).

are important institutions in tribal economy and politics. Material objects and relationships gain value through symmetrical economic transactions, and social ties are reinforced rather than disconnected as in impersonal or alienating capitalist transactions (Malinowski 1961; Mauss 1954; Sahlins 1968). Another non-market system of economic exchange, known as redistribution, channels goods to a chief or head of household and that person is in charge of distributing the goods when and to whom he or she sees fit. A small minority of indigenous peoples today relies solely on a tribal economy for subsistence; most use a combination of market and non-market economic strategies. The Wayuu use all of the non-market economic practices in addition to market exchange.

In 1800 approximately 20 percent of the global population, or 200 million people, lived in autonomous, tribal societies. How did their subsistence practices shift from use value to exchange value? The causes are linked to the rise of incipient industrialized nations and their colonization of vast portions of the globe.¹⁴ Thereafter, the spread of capitalism and neoliberal policies to the national economies and governments of developing nations further incorporated indigenous groups into the dominant society.

[O]ver the next 150 years, virtually all tribal territory was conquered by colonizing industrial states, and perhaps 50 million tribal peoples died. This process created the modern world system, but at an enormous cost in the ethnocide, genocide, and ecocide suffered by the peoples and territories forcibly incorporated by the new system (Bodley 2000:460).

¹⁴ In Mesoamerica market systems were developed long before the arrival of European colonists.

During the 20th century, it was standard practice for governments to incorporate and assimilate indigenous peoples into the national society. One way of achieving this was by integrating indigenous groups into the market economy, a continuation of practices from the Colonial Period as already discussed with the Pijao Indians. Once a dependency on the state and the market for subsistence is achieved, the native community will no longer be self-sufficient, and the ability to determine its own future is appropriated or at least compromised. Simultaneously, as indigenous peoples follow a course from self-sufficiency to dependency, a shift in values from communalism to individualism can obviate the need for traditional ‘safety nets’ such as reciprocity and sharing in favor of cash savings, loans, and outside services provided by nongovernmental and governmental organizations.

In 1957 and again in 1989, the International Labor Organization (ILO) attempted to give more rights to the indigenous survivors of colonization worldwide by creating Conventions 107 and 169. These failed mainly because of the contradiction found in Article 7¹⁵ of Convention 107, which promoted indigenous rights and culture only when these did not interfere with the government’s objectives such as economic growth. Convention 169, which has been ratified in Colombia and 12 other Latin America countries, was not considered an improvement to the previous convention by indigenous peoples and was rejected by many of these groups because “the qualifications and escape clauses were so numerous that in

¹⁵ Article 7 states “These populations shall be allowed to retain their own customs and institutions where these are not incompatible with the national legal system or the objectives of integration programmes ” (Bodley 2000:475).

many respects, less real protection was provided than in the original covenant”
(Bodley 2000:480).

Gender and Capitalism

Inequalities between genders in Western society generally increased with the rise of capitalism and the importance of the market economy. As exchange value production, carried out largely by men, became the dominant economic practice, women’s use value production lessened in importance (Taussig 1977). Consequently the woman’s status diminished and her household work became under-appreciated or unrecognized by the society. When women did enter the workforce – and women and children made up the majority of the European factory workforce during the 18th and 19th centuries – employment practices upheld that men are the primary money-makers, which negatively influenced how much women would be (under)paid. The trend in the past few decades to create assembly plants overseas has privileged the hiring of women over men to exploit further women’s public sector weaknesses in different societies. Women’s labor is classified as unskilled labor, which serves to justify their inferior wages in often inhuman working conditions. In the words of Robbins, “the work that women do in assembly factories is not necessarily less skilled than other work; it is considered unskilled *because* it is performed by women” (2001:58, emphasis added).

Women and the Informal Economy in Latin America

Anthropologists have been more equivocal about whether women's craftwork and marketing in the informal sector of the economy is exploitative or empowering for women and their families. In Latin America, some, like writer/anthropologist B. Traven who studied Mexico in the 1920s, have found them to be threats to traditional values. "[He] was deeply concerned that the more that peasant artisans played the market game, the faster the commodity culture-social relations dialectic moved away from the intimacy of household- and community-based petty commodity production toward the impersonality of market-dominated, money-mediated capitalist production" (Cook 2004:46).

Others have found that the money indigenous women vendors earn has become an important component of the family income and makes them less reliant on the sole earnings of the male provider. Women workers often provide for their family by being both a laborer and a caregiver. For example, the characteristic flexibility of the craft industry adapts to the daily duties that a woman has, enabling her to execute both jobs simultaneously (Duncan 2000). In *Understanding Commodity Culture*, Scott Cook argues that

the secret to the persistence, and especially to the growth of craft production in the contemporary world market lies in the capacity of labor-intensive, artisanal forms of production to flexibly adjust output to fluctuations in demand and, when necessary, to increase output geometrically through innovative labor organization and, perhaps, with appropriate technological improvisation (2004:49).

How do artisans “flexibly adjust” and “increase output”? The innovative labor organization he refers to is the ability of women to work longer hours and assign some of the workload to other members of her family. The output increases and the profits are kept in the family. Ronald Duncan (2000) also addresses the flexible aspect of crafts(wo)manship within a potter community in La Chamba, Colombia. He noticed that home-based pottery and weaving are cross-culturally considered women’s work because they can be executed simultaneously with or in between domestic tasks, which are also considered women’s work. Women can be both breadwinners and caretakers as is needed for the maintenance of their household.

Whether indigenous women artisans and vendors are exploited or empowered in the informal market, and whether it reinforces or undermines traditional values, may have much to do with whether their societies have some control over how and why they participate in the market economy, rather than being forcibly incorporated into the system.

Some native groups in Latin America have entered the market economy by their own volition to sell their products and provide a primary or supplementary income to their household. Indigenous marketing for these communities has strengthened their ethnic identity and has given them the opportunity for empowerment within their community and at a national level by selling the fruits of their labor. The rural potters of northwest Costa Rica, Otavaleño weavers of

highland Ecuador, and Kuna artisans in Panama illustrate this point. The inhabitants of Guaitil and San Vicente in northwest Costa Rica have revived their Chorotega heritage by relearning traditional handicraft production and selling the goods to international tourists (Wherry 2006). In Otavalo, Ecuador, Quechua-speaking women artisans are participating in national and international commerce while reinforcing their ethnic identity. They are able to maintain control of their means of production and commercial enterprise through market and non-market strategies (Stephen 1991). Women artisans among the Kuna of San Blas, Panama are another example of a community acquiring more national prestige, resource control, and political voice through its participation in the market (Tice 1995). In the following examples, I will go more in-depth to flesh out the risks and opportunities involved when indigenous women directly enter the market economy.

Zapotec Weavers in Teotitlán, Mexico

Lynn Stephen (1991) and W. Warner Wood (2000) described the Zapotec weavers' incorporation into a transnational capitalist system in Teotitlán del Valle in Oaxaca, Mexico. For various reasons Teotitlán became the center of the "weaving production complex" in the Tlacolula Valley of Oaxaca. As early as the 1890s, merchants created a hierarchy in work relations by establishing workshops and subcontracting weavers to mass produce textiles for export (Wood 2000). Stephen (1991) reported that starting in the 1960s production and distribution networks for textiles expanded greatly, and by 1985, Teotitlán had a population of about 5,000,

which consisted of 80% weavers, 10% merchants, and 10% farmers. The craft production of textiles was destined primarily for Santa Fe, New Mexico. This U.S. city in the 1980s became a famous vacation and tourist spot known for its Southwestern style that included Native American arts and crafts. Many of these crafts were made in Teotitlán by Zapotec weavers and imported into the U.S. in order to meet the increasing consumer demand (Wood 2000:138).

Stephen (1991:106) described Teotitlán as “one of the most successful indigenous craft-producing communities in Mexico”. She goes on to say, that the Zapotec community has “maintained significant levels of control over commercial enterprises that build on local cultural institutions” (1991:124). By the 1990s, however, Wood (2000:139) noted that “eventually nearly every aspect of textile production, from the design creation to wool and yarn preparation and dyeing, would come under their [U.S. entrepreneurs’] control, except for the actual work at the loom”.

The ability of Zapotec weavers in Teotitlán to continue their indigenous weaving practices is due in no small part to international demand. Ethnotourism to their communities has added an incentive for them to maintain their weaving production and indigenous cultural identity that authenticates it in the market. Whether their quality of life has improved or worsened because of the capitalist mode of production is difficult to measure. What is certain is that weaving means something different today than it did in the past, and their dependency on the market

has cost them some autonomy, as their ongoing traditions and skills are now largely controlled by foreign investors and consumers. Similar processes of re-signifying the traditional occurs when ecotourism reifies culture, as Hutchins (2007) points out, which is then sold as a commodity. This can cause destination sites and the people that live there to be entangled in a web of identity politics that links them to global tourism with positive and negative effects on the community.

Maya Weavers in San Pedro, Guatemala

In San Pedro Sacatepéquez, Guatemala, Maya women's weaving went through stages of utility for the community. It began as use value production by wives for the inhabitants of the community. Besides cooking and childcare, weaving was a domestic responsibility that historically women were assumed to carry out in Mayan marriages (Ehlers 1990). In the 17th century, San Pedro weavers adopted the Spanish footloom, which almost entirely replaced the *palito* (back strap loom) as a more efficient means of producing woven articles. In the 1930s, San Pedro was known throughout the highlands for its intricate textiles and embroidery. As women increasingly took jobs in income-producing work in the 1950s, weavers saw a rise in demand for textiles. By 1985 weaving for use value was no longer desirable nor was it profitable for exchange value because of the modernization of the town and the shift away from indigenous traditions and cultural products. The replacement of traditional *huipil* blouse with Western dress in San Pedro had caused the market for these products to shrink. In the 1990s, the traditional Maya weaving industry was

no longer the female's principle occupation; it had been replaced by the manufacture and sale of yard goods by men. "Today the majority of female money-making occupations in San Pedro are in the various aspects of retail and wholesale trading, as well as cottage industry" (Ehlers 1990:43). The cottage industry, where self-employed women produced traditional textiles and trade goods like soap, cheese, and bread, has drastically declined. It is replaced by another type of cottage industry where labor contractors and factory bosses hire women to produce piecework at home or in a factory and control the means of production.

The rapid abandonment of the craft industry after centuries of stability and prosperity attests to the influential culture of capitalism that promotes a consumerist mentality, depreciates indigenous traditions, and homogenizes economic practices and values. Although the weavers of San Pedro are losing their indigenous identity due to modernization, they have more access to education, other jobs, and a higher standard of living (Ehlers 1990). Whether or not the quality of their lives is improving may depend on their ability to control the socioeconomic forces that have generally tended to compromise women in the workforce, and consequently, in the household, because of their loss of autonomy to men, capitalists, and ethnic others.

Discussion

Globalization is the interdependence and interconnectedness of the local to the regional, national, and international areas of the world (Steger 2004). Recent studies have documented the challenges that engines of globalization, such as

neoliberal capitalism and accelerating consumerism, present to traditional values and customs (Appadurai 1986; George 1999; Howes 1996; Ritzer 2003; Robbins 2001; Steger 2004). Glocalization, or the hybrid results of global and local elements, is a process by which all local communities engage, make sense of, and manage outside forces, thereby defying global homogenization. For indigenous women, glocalization means that they are not merely passive recipients of present and emerging agreements, policies and trends, but active agents finding new ways to preserve whatever autonomy they have left and defend their rights. The examples presented in this chapter are a testimony to the unique adoptions and appropriations of capitalism, some with positive results for the communities and others with negative consequences.

The shift from non-market to market economic practices is the result of a long and contentious history in which Western capitalist powers have often predominated. The economic, political, and social integration of indigenous peoples with other peoples in the world system of hierarchical relations, whether by force or by choice, always presents the danger that indigenous peoples will abandon their local distinctive cultures in favor of a homogenizing global culture. At the same time, indigenous peoples who participate in the market have some agency in continually redefining their means of subsistence, gender expectations, and ethnic identity. While integration into the capitalist market may provide opportunities, dependence on it comes with the risks of co-optation by more powerful investors, volatility, and unsustainable practices, among others. When a product is in demand,

an indigenous vendor can use the market to make a better living for her family as well as strengthen her communities' ethnic identity. Conversely, when a vendor or craftswoman loses control over the modes of production or demand declines, she and her community are put in a vulnerable position that could quickly spell immiseration. I will now turn to how these issues play out among the Wayuu women vendors of Riohacha.

CHAPTER THREE

WAYUU ECONOMICS

Before there was not so much poverty like there is today. That is why you see so many Wayuu people working in the commercial sector in the city of Riohacha.

-Wayuu weaver, 2007

Wayuu vendors have responded to market forces, environmental pressures, and their proximity to a reliable consumer base by going to Riohacha to sell their goods. The Wayuu craftswoman, Mercado Nuevo vendor, Mercado Viejo vendor, and marchanta in Riohacha form a functional bridge between the Wayuu and arijuna societies. Their occupations bring them into close and prolonged contact with non-indigenous cultures, exposing them to a wide range of arijuna practices and values that they must learn and internalize in order to succeed in their commercial activities. The extent and manner in which they accept and reproduce this non-Wayuu culture will reaffirm their indigeneity or further distance them from the Wayuu culture. In this chapter, I situate Wayuu marketing within the political and economic situation of Colombia and more specifically La Guajira, and describe the importance of gender complementarity within these contexts. Interviews from each of the four sites highlight themes and issues raised by the Wayuu vendors.

During the 1970s and 80s, indigenous movements and struggles across Latin America led to greater political and economic power for indigenous groups (Maybury-Lewis 2002; Warren and Jackson 2002). In Colombia, the Constitution of 1991 recognized 83 ethnic groups within the nation-state, and established for them unprecedented constitutional and legal rights (Rodriguez 2007). Article 70 states that: “Culture, in all its different manifestations, is a foundation of nationality. The State recognizes the dignity and equality of all the cultures that coexist in the country. The State will promote the research, science, development and diffusion of the cultural values of the Nation” (CDI 2006). Each indigenous group gained the right to political and administrative autonomy within their territory, each language became official within its territory, and the Senate reserved two permanent seats for indigenous representatives. Padilla (1996) acknowledges the legal recognition that the new constitution gave to indigenous groups, compared with all the previous constitutions, which upheld that Colombia was of one language, religion, and culture: Castilian, Catholicism, and Colombian.

Legalization and promotion of indigenous identity and culture extends the State further into native society, potentially causing ruptures in traditional leadership roles and moving ethnic identity into the realm of strategic politics (Padilla 1996). While on paper indigenous peoples rights are safeguarded, in reality the injustice is alarming. Of the 700,000 indigenous peoples in Colombia, it is estimated that 50,000 are victims of human rights violations; this includes death threats, displacement, torture, disappearances, property damage, and homicide (CDI 2006).

Besides acts of direct violence to the individual or to the community, structural violence also maintains indigenous groups on the periphery of national interests.

The Guajira Province has been marginalized and isolated from the rest of the Colombian territory for centuries. In La Guajira, as in many places the world over, access to healthcare, employment, education, proper nutrition and other basic needs that allow for an adequate standard of living are determined by one's ethnicity, social class, gender, age and income. According to a regional study, 54 percent of the Guajira population is under the poverty line (Gobernación 2003-2004). The same study found that the Guajira municipalities with the highest percentage of people with unsatisfied basic needs are located in the Wayuu territories of Manaure (100 percent), Uribia (99 percent), and Jagua del Pilar (92 percent), in comparison with Riohacha (58 percent). The poverty of the region is one factor why the Wayuu are entering the market economy and migrating to the cities in search of work.

The first European explorers and travelers to South America brought horses, goats, cows, and donkeys, which early on were incorporated into the Wayuu subsistence practices and social exchanges. By the 18th century pastoralism had become their most important economic activity, and by the 19th century, the goat, locally known as *chivo*, had become their primary livestock. Historians believe that overgrazing led to a reduction of the larger cattle, while goats were able to thrive in the arid environment of La Guajira (Barrera Monroy 2000). The goat has since become a primary item of prestige and bridewealth among the Wayuu. Additionally,

goat meat is the centerpiece ingredient in a typical Wayuu dish. Along the extensive Guajira coastline, the *apalanchi* (of the beach) Wayuu fish for a living and have an intimate knowledge of the sea, which for them was once wild and has now been domesticated (Guerra Curvelo 2006). Reliance on hunting has lessened and is practiced more for enjoyment, retaining a mythic and symbolic importance as noted in Michel Perrin's collection and analysis of Wayuu legends (1980). Gathering wild fruits is only carried out during the dry months and mainly by those without other means of subsistence (Ardila and Pérez Preciado 1990). Besides pastoralism, small-scale fishing, and seasonal horticulture, commerce and tourism have presented additional opportunities for the expansion of Wayuu economic practices.

Early on, the Wayuu were integrated into a global economy by dealing in contraband with other European powers. The Wayuu traded pearls, brazil wood, salt and cattle for firearms with the Dutch and British during the Colonial Period, which allowed them to defend their native territory and their political and cultural autonomy from the Spanish Crown (Guerra Curvelo 2006:269). While contact with Spanish settlements during the Colonial Period was minimal, there were several pacification and reduction campaigns carried out by the Spanish army and Catholic Church, which were met by Wayuu protests, uprisings, and rebellions (Polo Acuña 2005). Perhaps in the same manner as in the Colonial Era, the Wayuu of today are using the tools and strategies of the encroaching capitalist society by participating in the system on their own terms in order to maintain control of the impact of the market economy.

Today, La Guajira is considered an important region for the extraction of natural resources including coal, natural gas, thermoelectricity, and salt. Additionally, an increasing number of national tourists travel to La Guajira for sightseeing, sun, adventure, beaches, ethnotourism, and ecotourism. Development in these sectors has increased Wayuu involvement through employment opportunities, such as with the Manaure salt mining and ethnotours of Wayuu communities, and benefited other communities through royalties and social programs provided by foreign companies such as Chevron and El Cerrejón. Economic growth can have a positive impact for some but deliver unwanted “progress” for others, as was the case with the forced relocation of the residents of Tabaco for the expansion of El Cerrejón, the largest open-air coal mine in the world (Chomsky and Foster 2006). Without proper planning, regulation and active participation by the local communities, economic development can pose a threat to Wayuu society.

Wayuu Gender Complementarity

All around the world, societies create a division of labor between men, women, and children, which tends to serve as an ever-shifting model rather than hard and fast rules. Ethnographic and archaeological evidence among modern and Pre-Colonial indigenous groups throughout Latin America has led scholars to describe women’s and men’s roles as complementary to each other. In the Andean cosmology, *yanantin*, or balanced oppositions, is a concept that places all objects from the most mundane to the sacred in a gendered parallel hierarchy (Bodley

2000:244). Gender plays an important role in regards to subsistence practices and social domains among Amazonian tribes such as the Makuna in the Vaupés region of Colombia. Men are the hunters/fishers whose domain is the forest and river. The women are the horticulturalists, manioc processors, and cooks; their domain is the garden and the hearth, which are all intimately related to the earth (Århem 1988). While the woman's role in food production and distribution accounts for most of the diet among Amazonian groups, the man's acquisition of meat is more esteemed (Bodley 2000). For both Andean and Amazonian cosmologies, gender complementarity links man and woman to each other, as well as to the natural and spirit world.

Gender complementarity also exists in Wayuu society. On the *ranchería*, men are in charge of looking after the livestock, fishing, and teaching young boys the duties of a pastoralist; women dedicate themselves to the maintenance of the household, prepare the meals, care for the young, especially girls, and increasingly, to do business in the cities. Gardening is divided between the two sexes: men assemble the garden, plant the seeds, water the crops, and keep the area clean. Women process the seeds to be planted, collect the fruits, classify them, and prepare the food into meals (Uriana 2007). While my study focused on women's roles in commerce, several of those interviewed mentioned the importance of the men's work as herders, fishermen and horticulturalists, emphasizing that they had no place in the city. A look at Wayuu mythology as it relates to gender will provide some explanation as to why the city is a woman's domain for the Wayuu.

In *The Way of the Dead Indians*, Michel Perrin (1987) explains Wayuu mythology, elaborating on the two most important supernatural figures, Juya and Pulowi. Juya is described as masculine, mobile and unique, whereas Pulowi is feminine, fixed and manifold. Wayuu polygynous marriage practices reflect this duality. Men may have several wives, each one living in the ranchería of their own uterine family and separate from one another. In order to attend to each of his wives the husband must be a wanderer. The entire Wayuu territory is potentially a man's domain, unless conflict or feuds arise, in which case he must flee to a city or remain on his ranchería because his life may be in danger. Wayuu women, however, while symbolically linked to the home are not targeted by intratribal conflicts, are free to travel the lands without fear of being attacked. This independence has given women an added advantage when it comes to commerce and exchange.

Lider (leader) and *alaüla* (boss) are distinctive, gender-related social positions among the Wayuu that are important for the external and internal relations of the group. Lideres are intermediaries or representatives with the arijuna society and government. For the most part, women are better suited as lideres because they are in contact more frequently with the arijuna and able to speak Spanish fluently. They sometimes have arijuna husbands or family ties and do commerce in the urban centers, such as Riohacha, Maicao, or Maracaibo. Furthermore, the Wayuu believe that women can manage money better than men, and therefore are more adept in doing business (Mancuso 2003). For this reason, commerce is mostly considered a woman's activity. The women are in charge of selling the household's animal and

agricultural products, and are also the producers and vendors of craft items such as the hammock and the mochila.

Wayuu men generally assume the role of *alaüla* among their own families. He must “understand the word”, be able to solve problems, and is considered the head of the household in matters relating to the matrilineal kin group. The authoritative nature of this position contrasts with the position of the women *lideres* who are respected but unauthoritative (Mancuso 2003). The woman’s role as intermediary as well as the pride that Wayuu men take in being pastoralists or fishermen are two reasons why women are predominantly seen in the cities. The men mostly remain in Wayuu territory, with less contact with non-Wayuu and urban settings. Ponce-Jimenez (2006:116) reports in her study on women’s participation in formal education that by the fifth grade most Wayuu students are girls, and by college 97 percent are women. For men, working on the *ranchería* is their main aspiration, and formal education does not help them in this regard.

Wayuu Marketing in Riohacha, Colombia

Although Wayuu men are seen in the marketplace selling goat meat, or on the beach selling fish, the majority of Wayuu commerce in Riohacha is performed by the women. The noticeable absence of men and the predominance of women in the city highlight the importance of gender roles and identity among the Wayuu society, discussed previously. The remainder of the thesis focuses on the four economic settings delimited in the study where the Wayuu women conduct commerce.

The first is located in the tourist and hotel sector of Riohacha, along *La Primera* (First Street), which runs parallel to the beach (Fig. 4). Here Wayuu women weavers set up their merchandise on the sidewalk in front of the three main hotels, Las Delicias, La Arimaca, and La Majayura, and by the tourist pier on the opposite side



Figure 4 La Primera, tourist area of Riohacha.

of the street. Others walk along the sidewalk or beach with their woven goods in hand, approaching pedestrians and beach-goers. These Wayuu vendors sell *mochilas* (hand bags), hammocks, *wayreñas* (Wayuu sandals), necklaces, belts, bracelets, and other accessories, all of which they produce.

The second and third occupations are the vendors at the two principle markets in Riohacha. They are known as the *Mercado Nuevo* (New Market) located

on 39th street, close to the southern periphery of the city, and the *Mercado Viejo* (Old Market) located on 8th street near Riohacha Centro. People of the city and surrounding area go to these two markets to purchase their groceries and other necessities. Prior to 1995, only the Mercado Viejo existed, a couple of blocks from where it is located today. The city officials decided that the streets were too congested in that area and built a large facility at the southern border of the city, known as the Mercado Nuevo. Many arijuna and Wayuu marketers relocated to the new complex and were allowed use of the stalls for a small daily tax. There were so many vendors that only those with large quantities of merchandise could sell there and those that had less were forced to leave. They returned to the Centro and reappropriated the sidewalks near the location of the previous Mercado Viejo. The commerce in the Mercado Viejo has not ceased since then and for the most part, the city officials accept the Wayuu marketers although on occasion they will not allow them to sell their products there.

In the Mercado Nuevo, vendors operate permanent stands with a variety of products ranging from Venezuelan manufactured goods, *mantas* (Wayuu woman's dress), bottled gasoline, charcoal, seafood, live animals, and *chirrinchi* (Wayuu liquor). Many of the vendors are Wayuu, and both arijuna and Wayuu alike shop here.

The Mercado Nuevo also contains an open-air slaughter house where the goats are brought early in the morning, slaughtered and skinned by the Wayuu men,

and their sections chopped and cleaned by the women and then sold to the consumer. Adjacent to the slaughter house is a Wayuu-owned restaurant called Restaurante Yandri that specializes in goat-based dishes. Mrs. Epinayuu has been operating it for 17 years, first at the Mercado Viejo and then at the Mercado Nuevo. It is a popular eating spot in Riohacha and attracts many customers, especially during the holiday seasons.

At the Mercado Viejo, Wayuu vendors sit along the sidewalk along one street block and at the corner of another street where they set up temporary covered stalls on a daily basis. The products that are most noticeable at the Mercado Viejo are fish (grouper, sea bass, snapper, kingfish, and others), dried shrimp, and beans. This market is usually bustling in the morning and early afternoon. Many of the Wayuu vendors sell their products and leave by early afternoon although some make a second trip to the beach in the afternoon to buy more fish and return to sell them into the evening hours.

Wayuu women working in the fourth marketing site are known locally as *marchantas* or ambulatory street vendors who sell their goods on the streets of Riohacha. Early in the morning they come from their rancherías or other parts of the city to sell food, which they transport in large containers they carry on their back or in their arms. The products may be surplus from their own garden, livestock, or seafood, which may be purchased in bulk at the markets. The goods range from dairy products (sour milk, yogurt, cheese), seafood (fish, dried shrimp, turtle meat),

prepared goat meat, beans, vegetables, and fruit. The marchantas create clientele that regularly buy certain products and call out loudly as they walk up to the houses announcing that they have a particular product to sell. The sale takes place inside the house or on the front porch. Usually they sell all their merchandise by noon and return to their ranchería or city house to do other tasks. Before returning home in a taxi, bus, or on foot, they may stop at the market or a nearby store to purchase other goods for the household, thus completing a cycle of selling and buying in the cash economy of Riohacha.

In the following sections I take a closer look at the overarching themes that the Wayuu women vendors in Riohacha addressed during interviews conducted in the summers of 2006 and 2007. Of the four marketing sites, only the artisans talked about a proud Wayuu identity that they were helping maintain and bolster. Among all the Wayuu marketers, daily interaction with the arijuna society has undoubtedly caused cultural change away from their traditional cultural practices and values, while it has also given them the opportunity to expand their economic practices within the informal sector of the economy. Common concerns that arose during most of the interviews were: the importance of ranchería life, the preservation/loss of their native language, their meager earnings, the high cost of living, the importance of getting an education, and how Wayuu identity is changing.

Wayuu Weavers

The artisans in front of the hotels were the most approachable and willing to be interviewed. They spent most of their time weaving and waiting for pedestrians to stop and look at their craftwork, so it was not an inconvenience to have me around asking questions. I soon became a familiar face with a group located in front of the Hotel La Arimaca and would stop by almost daily to greet them and see if there was someone I could interview. My acquaintance with Weidler Guerra, a well-respected Wayuu anthropologist from this region, gave me more credibility as a researcher. Early in my fieldwork, an artisan who was listening to me interview another, spoke out matter-of-factly that she knew I was an anthropologist because I asked the same types of questions as Weidler and Alessandro.¹⁶ I took this as a compliment and realized that although I was a novice in this field, I had been placed within a respected category and should behave accordingly.

I first saw Bárbara sitting on a step in front of the Arimaca Hotel where she, along with her aunt, sister, cousin, and friend, had placed dozens of colorful *mochilas* (indigenous handbags), hammocks, and other woven accessories along the sidewalk for pedestrians to view and hopefully, purchase. Bárbara is 27 years old, unmarried, and lives in Riohacha. She learned how to sew from her mother when she was seven years old because she wanted to give tiny mochilas to her arijuna classmates who asked for them. Bárbara was in the midst of weaving a mochila but was willing to have a conversation with me about her job. She spoke Spanish like a

¹⁶ Alessandro Mancuso is an Italian anthropologist also working with the Wayuu.

native Spanish-speaker but said that Wayuunaiki is her native tongue and is what she uses when speaking with other Wayuu. Nevertheless, she recognizes how important Spanish is for selling the merchandise. Most of the Wayuu weavers in Riohacha speak Spanish, she explained. It allows them to talk about how the product is made and barter with the customers.

Bárbara has now moved to Riohacha, but her mother, sister and brother live on a ranchería about five miles from the city. She usually arrives at this spot at 8am and leaves at around 3pm. Most of the time is spent weaving and conversing with those sharing this particular location. She enjoys making the handicrafts and profits from selling the merchandise. When I asked her what she does with the money she earns from selling her products, she said “with the money, I invest it in the mochilas, so that the business keeps going, because if I don’t, the business will die. You must invest it again. So, I take half of my profits and I invest them in the mochilas. And the other half I give to my sister or to my mother.”¹⁷ Her business sense and familial obligations dictate how much she invests in her occupation and how much she should save. She explained that occasionally, merchants will buy ten or 15 mochilas from her and take them to other cities like Barranquilla and Cartagena to sell in stores there. Other weavers have said that they prefer not to sell that many at a time because they feel they are being taken advantage of and would rather sell them slowly, one at a time and make a greater profit for each sale.

¹⁷ “Con el dinero lo invierto en las mochilas, para que el negocio siga, porque si no invierto el negocio se muere. Hay que invertirlo otra vez. O sea, agarro la mitad de mis ganancias y lo invierto en mochilas. Y la otra mitad se lo doy a mi hermana o a mi mama.”

For Bárbara the regional and national markets give the Wayuu more opportunity to sell their handicrafts and to feel proud about their identity. Since women have traditionally woven, this is not such a hard job for them. The men on the other hand, belong on the ranchería and it goes against their customs to have men working in the city. She also spoke to me about how some Wayuu have adopted arijuna customs, such as the hotel owner who has Wayuu ancestry but is no longer ethnically Wayuu. He does, however, allow them to set up their merchandise in front of his hotel and has never asked them to move. All of the weavers that I interviewed shared similar views with Bárbara. I understood that while the Wayuu women are not outwardly exploited under a capitalist mode of production, they have become reliant on the market to provide an additional income that allows them to subsist and acquire goods and services that their predecessors did not have.

Bárbara is a Wayuu weaver that has found a middle ground between two very different cultures. She now lives in the city, relies on monetary profits from the handicrafts she produces, and speaks Spanish without an accent. With the money that she earns, she must pay for utilities, transportation, and thread. These are all key factors in the assimilation process. However, she still uses her native language, maintains close ties to her family on the ranchería, and uses traditional dress and cultural markers that identify her as Wayuu. Unlike her Pre-Columbian predecessors, she now weaves mochilas primarily for their exchange value rather than for their use value. This is not to say that she no longer produces these items for herself and her family. Woven items for the Wayuu, as with other lowland South

American indigenous groups, “can be seen as migrating through multiple regimes of value- from inalienability to commodification” (Dean 1994:10) depending on the intended purpose of the object. She states that all Wayuu women know how to weave, and that you will never see a Wayuu woman buying a mochila. And while she admits that she will occasionally wear pants to a party, she would much rather wear the traditional *manta* (Wayuu dress). The stigma of looking or acting indigenous is not as prevalent in La Guajira as it is in San Pedro and other parts of Guatemala (Ehlers 1990; Metz 2006). It is to her market advantage to display her indigenous identity, which makes her and her products more authentic through the eyes of a tourist, than if the craft were bought from a mestizo. For Bárbara the regional and national markets give the Wayuu the opportunity to sell their handicrafts and to feel proud about their identity.

Mrs. Bouriyu is also a Wayuu weaver working in front of La Arimaca Hotel (Fig. 5). She is 55 years old, married, has seven children, and lives on a ranchería just outside of Riohacha. She is part of a family of artisans that sell or have sold their goods in Riohacha, including her grandmother, mother, herself, and her daughters. Her grandmother and mother, unlike her, did not have a set location, but rather would walk the streets selling mochilas. Prior to selling woven products in the city she relied on the sale of salt, coal, and stones that she collected from the roadside to sell to people for construction projects. She finally decided to dedicate herself to the sale of arts and crafts, which she has been doing continuously for

around 30 years.

Her family has a small garden on the *ranchería* that her husband maintains.

During the rainy, winter season (September-December) he cultivates watermelon, squash, manioc, and corn for



Figure 5 Mrs. Bouriya weaving a mochila.

personal consumption. During the prolonged, dry, summer season (January-August), the garden produces manioc and banana, if and only when the men pay careful attention to watering them. In the past, her family, and the Wayuu in general, met their dietary needs by eating what the horticultural base and herds provided. The household now relies on Mrs. Bouriya's earnings so that they can purchase the groceries they need. With her earnings, she buys rice, sugar, coffee, cooking oil, and occasionally, meat. Mrs. Bouriya feels like everything these days is more expensive and in less abundance than before, a main reason why she must work. Another weaver, Mrs. Pushaina, added that "before, the food of the *arijuna* wasn't appetizing to us. We only ate what was at our disposal on the *ranchería*. Before we didn't know what rice, chicken, tomato, or onions were. Our typical dish prior to all this was the *shapuulana*. We only used corn and beans to prepare it, in the form of a soup."

Mrs. Bouriyu is concerned about the low value that people place on the products that they sell. Competition with other artisans further decreases the price of the mochilas; they have never formed a cooperative to set a standard price. If a customer does not want to pay the price offered at one locale, he or she can move down to the next one and try to negotiate a better deal. Merchants have tried to buy mochilas in quantity at a discount to sell in other parts of the country, but the weavers rarely agree to this because they feel exploited by the transactions, which they consider do not compensate them for the amount of time and labor they put into producing the handicrafts. Mrs. Bouriyu confided that when she makes at least 5,000 pesos (\$2.25)¹⁸ in profit per day, she is satisfied because this allows her to buy groceries. The taxi ride to and from her ranchería alone costs 6,000 pesos (\$2.75). Mrs. Bouriyu said that if she and her family could subsist without the marketing of her products, she would stay on the ranchería and not come to the city.

The Wayuu weavers have applied their traditional knowledge and skills to create a market in which they have complete decision-making rights. They produce the crafts themselves and sell directly to the consumer in the informal market. In order for the product to have appeal beyond the artisan's own society, it must be made in large quantities and at low prices (Duncan 2000). High demand for the product can generate more jobs for people to enter the crafts industry. Since weaving is a common talent among Wayuu women, there are potentially thousands of artisans that can participate in the marketing of woven crafts. Wayuu women

¹⁸ The conversion rate at the time of the study was 2200 Colombian pesos per \$1USD.

understand the potential of the craft industry as a source of employment and many have decided to dedicate themselves to it. This increased production and competition tends to lower the price of the product and therefore the income of the craftsperson, creating a situation where they are exploited and underpaid for their labor, either by the customer, store owners who hire the artisans, or by the artisans themselves who have family working for them. Furthermore, the nature and setting of home-based craft production makes “women workers (and the children who work with them) the perfect laborers for craft capitalism because they can be contracted at low wages, and they will work ‘flexible’ schedules according to market demand” (Duncan 2000:8).

Mercado Nuevo Vendors

When I decided to do this study, friends and family from Riohacha told me to be careful when conducting interviews in the marketplaces and to go accompanied by a local for safety reasons. Understanding the danger involved as an outsider with a camera and a voice recorder in a crowded marketplace, I always heeded the advice. In 2006 my main companion and informant was Ali Valdeblanquez, a well-known and respected Wayuu linguist. He is a good friend of the family and was willing to help me with my study on several occasions during his free time. His presence settled any suspicions my visits may have caused with the people he introduced me to. Mr. Valdeblanquez would explain my project or merely say that I was with him, and thereafter I was able to approach, interview, and photograph the Wayuu vendors.

His companionship, translations, and explanations throughout the first summer of my fieldwork were invaluable to my thesis.

One person that Mr. Valdeblanquez introduced me to was a young woman by the name of Carvinia who is in charge of running a stall that sells Wayuu *mantas* (woman's dress). Our conversation was in Spanish, which she spoke perfectly, although four times during our interview she attended to Wayuu customers and spoke to them in Wayuunaiki. She is 23 years old, unmarried, and lives in Riohacha with her mother and sister. Their family also has a *ranchería* about 12 miles from Riohacha. Carvinia was hired by Mr. Marco who is a mestizo that speaks Wayuunaiki. He also owns two other stalls in the Mercado Nuevo. She is paid between 10-15 percent commission for each manta she sells, and is also paid to embroider designs onto the mantas. For her, it is a good job because many people come to buy mantas, including local arijuna, Wayuu, and tourists. She has been working at this stand for four months to help with the household expenses and to pay for her schooling at the SENA (National Learning Service).

Mrs. Epinayuu has a stand with an assortment of merchandise. She sells retail items like rice, coffee, butter, sugar, pasta, flour, and gasoline, as well as Wayuu products such as *chirrinchi* (bootleg liquor) and *wayreñas* (Wayuu sandals). She works from 6am to 2pm, although other vendors may stay until 7 or 8pm. Among the expenses that her job helps pay include the city utilities (electricity,

water, gas, telephone), transportation, and education for her children. She believes that living in Riohacha is very expensive, especially since she is a widow and must raise her children on her own. At one point during our interview a Wayuu man approached the stand and inquired about the price of a product in Wayuunaiki. Mrs. Epinayuu responded “5,000” in Spanish and proceeded to talk to him in Wayuunaiki. As the interview ended, an arijuna man asked her about a product and they had a short dialog in Spanish. She told me that both Wayuu from the countryside as well as urbanites come to the Mercado Nuevo to shop. For this reason she believes it is necessary for the market vendors to be bilingual. Since the market is located in the city’s southern periphery next to a highway, it is easily accessible to those coming to Riohacha and attracts many Wayuu that make regular trips to the market to stock up on groceries and other necessities they do not have on the ranchería.

At Mrs. Epinayuu’s stand I noticed that even a globalized product such as gasoline is linked to the Wayuu in this region (Fig 6). I was told the gasoline, sold in plastic Coca Cola bottles, is used in the household as a cleaning product and as an insect



Figure 6 Mrs. Epinayuu sells gasoline out of plastic bottles at the Mercado Nuevo.

deterrent. There is a Wayuu-owned cooperative, Ayatawacoop, which transports and sells gasoline brought from Venezuela to the Colombian market. As Gutierrez notes, there is a long tradition of commercializing gasoline around the border zone between the two nation-states that has existed for over a century (2005).

Mercado Viejo Vendors

During the second summer in Colombia, Mr. Valdeblanquez was unavailable and I relied primarily on three people to accompany and assist me during fieldwork. My cousin Jairo Rene Escobar, a local of Riohacha, spent many hours helping me walk the streets and markets of Riohacha. He was my second set of eyes and an excellent conversationalist who would make a situation comfortable when I was unable to do so. My second companion was Raul Romero, 65 years old and a close friend of my family. He would accompany me to the Mercado Viejo during the noon hours and introduce me to Wayuu marketers. Because of him I interviewed four vendors and was able to visit two of their rancherías on the outskirts of Riohacha, where I saw how the Wayuu traditionally live and gained insight as to how the market economy is affecting life there. The third person to assist me was my interpreter/co-interviewer Rosario Ipuana, whose interpretive expertise became an invaluable component of this study.

One early afternoon Rosario and I were at the Mercado Viejo and saw a middle-aged woman next to the sidewalk selling different kinds of beans from a large container. She told us her name was Chely, and that she lived on a ranchería

not far from Riohacha. Chely is 45 years old, has 5 daughters and one son, and is the head of the household. She is in a relationship (*unión libre*), but her partner has another family that he must support and therefore, is not usually around. For this reason, her family has struggled to subsist on pastoralism and horticulture since these are a man's job and her son is only seven years old. She manages by working in the market from 7am to 3pm most days of the week. She went through the process to work at the Mercado Nuevo, but as it became overcrowded with vendors, she, along with others who had smaller quantities relative to the other vendors, were pushed out and returned to the Mercado Viejo. Here, she has continued selling her products, although she feels more vulnerable because of the low prices that customers want and because the authorities will occasionally make her and the other vendors pack up and leave their work area.

In order to start and continue her business, Chely has taken out a loan from a private lender called *paga diario* (pay daily). A loan of 100,000 pesos (~\$45) is lent to the vendor and she is required to pay back 5,000 pesos each day for a month, which ends up amounting to 120,000 pesos (~\$55). Taking out a loan is a common practice among Wayuu vendors, and has further linked them to the cash economy of Riohacha. The loan alleviates short-term needs but a debt leads to dependency, prioritizes profit-making to reciprocity, and commits the vendor to an uneven contract with an impersonal lender, perhaps superseding her own familial obligations.

Chely explained that she must work in the market because unlike today, when she was younger, “there was an abundance of things at a descent price.” If she stops coming to the city to market her products, she would die of hunger. Her goal in the near future is to switch to selling woven crafts, because she believes there is more money to be made in that occupation, which would improve her quality of life and that of her family.

Wayuu Marchantas

The fourth area of my study focused on the marchantas who walk the streets of Riohacha Centro (Fig. 7). They were the most difficult group to interview because most do not speak Spanish and their job entailed constant walking. I relied on Rosario to conduct the interviews with the three marchantas while I would occasionally interject and ask her to translate portions of the interview and expand on certain issues.



Figure 7 A marchanta and her daughter selling sour milk along the streets of Riohacha Centro.

Prior to hiring Rosario, a first encounter with a marchanta at my Aunt Blanca's house provided what I thought would be an excellent opportunity and a suitable location for an interview. My plan was to invite the marchanta inside my aunt's house, as was acceptable in Riohacha, and out of the heat of the Guajira sun. There I could offer her a refreshment and a seat while I inquired about her products. I or my aunt, who regularly bought goods from the marchantas, would make a purchase as a form of reciprocity, and I would explain my research study and ask if she would participate. Unfortunately, after about five minutes of talking to the marchanta about her products it was painfully obvious that I would be unable to either ask her half the questions I wanted to or explain the reason for the interview. We could not communicate in the same language and as a result she had become uncomfortable in the situation and was ready to leave. Before she left I gave her a copy of the consent slip in hopes of locating her in the near future when I did have an interpreter. To my great disappointment, we saw each other on four other occasions, even on my last day in Riohacha, and always without an interpreter!

The marchantas sell products that come from their gardens, from the sea, or products that they buy in bulk from one of the markets, repackaged and sold.

Weidler Guerra (2007) tells us that,

in Riohacha, the Wayuu marchantas are indissolubly bound to the mornings. For more than four centuries they have arrived with the punctuality of the sun to the Creole homes purveying them with food and human warmth... Each

one of these itinerant women appears to have her own circuit in the city, a tacit intercultural contract that ties her *ranchería* with certain streets and homes.¹⁹

Guerra's statement touches on the longevity, constancy, and personal nature of street vending in Riohacha. Wayuu *marchantas* and city-dwellers create a relationship that grows over the years and becomes part of the day-to-day activities of the city, linking the urban to the rural and the *arijuna* to the Wayuu. The *marchantas* conveniently provide a desired food product at a low cost to the homes of their clientele. The communication between the two parties is limited because neither speaks each other's language. Enough is understood to negotiate a price and make the transaction; greetings, small talk, and goodbyes are an added bonus.

Mrs. Ipuana and Mrs. Pushaina are two *marchantas* that Rosario and I interviewed at my Aunt Berta's house. Mrs. Ipuana is 40 years old, married, and has four daughters and three sons. Mrs. Pushaina is 60 years old, in a relationship (*unión libre*), and has seven daughters and one son. Neither speaks Spanish but said that they do not have a difficult time getting what they need and understanding the *arijuna* in Riohacha. They both live in *rancherías* not far from the city and walk the streets of downtown Riohacha selling primarily dried shrimp, which they buy at the Mercado Viejo in bulk. They then repackage the shrimp and sell smaller packages for a price that allows them to make a 100 percent profit. The customers buy the

¹⁹ En Riohacha las *marchantas* wayuu están ligadas indisolublemente a las mañanas. Durante más de cuatro siglos ellas han llegado con la puntualidad del sol a los hogares criollos proveyéndoles de alimentos y calor humano... Cada una de estas mujeres itinerantes parece tener un circuito propio en la ciudad, un contrato intercultural tácito que une a su *ranchería* con ciertas calles y hogares (Guerra Curvelo, 2007).

shrimp to make *arroz de camarón* (shrimp rice) that Riohacha is famous for. Mrs. Pushaina occasionally sells cherries, watermelon, and squash from her own garden plot, as well as mochilas that she makes for customers who place an order. She has been street vending for two years, working most mornings from 8am to 11am, and has earned enough money to open a store where she sells merchandise, also taking advantage of cultural events such as festivals where she sells beer. Mrs. Ipuana also sells corn, beans, watermelon, and squash when there is a surplus on the *ranchería*; she too weaves and sells mochilas when a customer asks her to. Her mother and sisters were also street vendors, and she began vending at 12 years old. After getting married, she stopped working in the city until she was forced to return because her husband's income alone was not covering their daily expenses.

Mrs. Ipuana and Mrs. Pushaina have similar reasons for working as street vendors. They need to work in order to meet the growing needs of the family. In the past, their agricultural products and domesticated animals provided all that they needed. But times have changed and neither subsistence practices nor a single money earner in the market economy is enough to get by. They also shared views on the primary way for improving their quality of life and making a better future for their family: providing a good education for their children.

Discussion

The Wayuu women vendors have adapted well to the urban environment, providing products that only they have access to, speaking Spanish to facilitate

exchange, and understanding the tools and strategies of the market economy. These can include handling currency, setting prices, profit-making, investing, and understanding consumer fashions and purchasing demands. Some of these strategies have developed out of more traditional gender roles such as producing and selling woven products and interacting with the arijuna. Others are becoming characteristic of the Wayuu woman's identity as witnessed in her predominance in Riohacha, her ability to speak Spanish and Wayuunaiki, and her attainment of a higher education.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

I like Riohacha because it offers various sources of work, and I feel like the people don't reject me. Yet, I would not give up my life on the ranchería for that of the city. It is like switching the tranquility found in one to a world in turmoil. –
Wayuu marchanta, 2007

The Wayuu women vendors in Riohacha, Colombia reinforce Wayuu cultural distinctiveness while redefining traditional ethnic and gender identities. The Wayuu market vendors, street vendors, and artisans interact daily with arijuuna society, having to adjust to customs, values, a material world, and a language different from their own. This ethnographic study highlights the interdependence that both the Wayuu and the arijuuna living and working in Riohacha have on one another. For the Wayuu, whose identity has been heavily influenced by their interaction with arijuuna culture, the addition of a cash economy to their subsistence practices has increased their dependence on urban centers but empowered them as well.

Wayuu vendors “glocalize” the market by selling products typically considered Wayuu-produced, harvested, or collected. Such ethnic items for sale include mochilas, hammocks, beans, *friche* (fried goat meat), *iguaraya* (cactus fruit), dried shrimp, seafood, and gasoline. Western items become appropriated and

Wayuu items become commoditized. The result is a wide variety of products that are associated with the Wayuu people and culture.

Wayuu vendors reformulate and maintain their cultural identity in the face of constant assimilation forces by expanding the meaning of being Wayuu.

Contemporary markers of Wayuu identity widely recognized in La Guajira include: New World goat-herding, small-scale fishing and horticulture, homesteading in the Colombian desert, tribal law, polygyny, matrilineality, clan affiliations, a rich mythology and cosmology, hospitality, weaving, bride-wealth payments, unique burial ceremonies, and adeptness in commerce.

While some traditions such as the men's use of the *guayuko* (loin cloth), horseback riding, and pearl diving have all but disappeared, relatively new ones are being invented. For instance, women weavers buy colorful threads, use steel needles, weave cell phone holders, and inscribe bracelets and key chains- items that their predecessors a century ago were unfamiliar with. Formal wear for a Wayuu man now consists of a long sleeve shirt, a wrap-around skirt, towel or pants, Rayban sunglasses, and a Western-style reed hat that they have appropriated and altered to suit their cultural attire. Wayuu women's cultural creativity and resilience, or glocalization, is further demonstrated by their unique participation in a national indigenous radio project. The Constitution of 1991 stipulated that indigenous groups should have greater access to media, and therefore the Colombian government organized a nationwide program to assist indigenous groups by providing them with

radio transmitters and stations. The Colombian government actively sought the permission and input from each of the indigenous groups before it implemented the project. This allowed the groups to decide first, if they wanted it or not, then plan how it would function. The Wayuu imagined that the radio would be useful in disseminating health information, transmitting information on clan events, and maintaining contact with clan relatives across the border in Venezuela (Rodriguez and El Gazi 2007). What they created was a form of indigenous radio, which brought together the global with the local. Significantly, of all the indigenous groups in Colombia that participated in this process, the Wayuu were the only group in which women actively participated and led the discussion and decision-making process.

Poetics, as used by Rodriguez and El Gazi (2007) is both a process and a product similar to the idea of glocalization. It involves receiving an unfamiliar object, idea, or practice and fitting it into the socio-cultural framework of the group that incorporates it, infusing culturally-specific meaning and objectives into its usage. The Wayuu and other indigenous groups in Colombia have ‘poetically’ thought about the benefits and consequences of incorporating modern mass media into their society and decided that it could be used to strengthen their cultural practices and values.

There are signs, however, of a growing dependency on the market economy to meet the household needs for the Wayuu; assimilation into the urban environment

and movement away from their traditional livelihood have already occurred for many.²⁰ The reasons for urbanization are linked to the job opportunities in the cities, access to better schools, and water scarcity in the countryside, making it difficult for agriculture and pastoralism. Notwithstanding, the majority of Wayuu still live on rancherías, with a minimal reliance or contact with ariajuna society.

Urbanization and immiseration will become more pronounced in the 21st century if certain actions are not taken to correct the problems facing La Guajira today. These include regulating globalism, promoting self-determination, and addressing regional environmental problems. The ever-increasing environmental instability and degradation found on the Guajira Peninsula must be addressed. Water scarcity may be the most important issue the Wayuu face and has been a constant issue over the centuries. A concerted interdisciplinary effort for the production, storage and access to potable water is vital for a region with limited rain and fresh water sources.

Solutions to immiseration and impoverishment should be directed towards promoting self-sustaining economic practices rather than further integration in the market economy. Increasing tourism, facilitating market integration, and making consumer items more accessible may provide short-term relief but could result in alienation and a volatile relationship with impersonal institutions and processes.

²⁰ McSweeney and Jokisch argue that urbanization may lead to cultural assimilation but can also complement the political and territorial aims of indigenous groups (2007).

With a looming free trade agreement between the United States and Colombia, Wayuu weavers and merchants may face similar processes of industrialization and exportation that occurred in Mexico with NAFTA. As we have seen, Latin American weavers involved in the market economy have been confronted with a capitalist system that demands mass-production, contract labor, and exploitative work relations. Doing commerce entails a questionable commitment to a set of practices that emphasize individualism, consumption, and competition, and Wayuu weavers have already felt pressure to sell in quantity at the individual level to regional brokers. The liberalization of trade between the U.S. and Colombia could attract foreign investors with a capitalist ideology and model that demand mass-production of Wayuu goods at low costs, as was the case with the Zapotecs. A free trade agreement could also promote the consumption of imported products and the values attached to these items that caused the Maya in San Pedro, Guatemala to replace their indigenous identity for a Western one.

We, as ariijuna, have something to learn from Wayuu values as expressed by Wayuu leader and artisan Iris Aguilar Ipuana,

[Outsiders] have never interpreted our socio-economic reality: we produce what we need according to our own economic laws, which are unrelated to productivity and excessive profit; our production is neither small nor large; it is simply the necessary amount to live the way we want²¹ (Aguilar Ipuana 1990:278, my translation).

²¹ Jamás han interpretado nuestra realidad socio-económica: producimos lo que necesitamos de acuerdo a nuestras propias leyes económicas, que son ajenas a la productividad y a la exageración de la ganancia; nuestra producción ni es pequeña ni es grande; simplemente, la necesaria para vivir como nosotros lo deseamos.

Mrs. Aguilar critiques the capitalist ideology of economic growth, consumption and unlimited wants. When needs are met, Wayuu economic laws limit overproduction and value an equilibrium with the surrounding environment. When these practices become institutionalized, the individual is conditioned in the concepts of reciprocity and mutual respect. This lesson is never learned or dismissed by neoliberal planners and investors. Teaching respect for these indigenous values to the practitioners of capitalism and Western economics is a first step in the pursuit of sustainable practices. Whether the movement launches at the top of the global hierarchy or at the bottom, it must swiftly spread before the resources run out and humanity is faced with an unsolvable existential dilemma. International and U.S. studies done in the 20th century, including *The Limits to Growth* (1972, 1992) and *Global 2000* (1977) have affirmed the dire need for change, otherwise a bleak future awaits us and our descendants (Bodley 2000:497-500). Allying myself with others of the like mind, I propose a synergy of empirical anthropological knowledge with the mathematical rigor and political influence of economics to produce a “glocal/hybrid” paradigm aimed at resource management, an end to excessive expenditures, and equal opportunity for all to make a decent living within the dominant socio-economic system (Bodley 2000; Gibson 1999; Reed 1997; Robbins 2001; Wilk and Cliggett).

The prominence of the Wayuu people and their culture in La Guajira, Colombia is a testament to their ability to overcome powerful forces of subjugation and integration. La Guajira’s strategic location on the border with Venezuela, and its

long coastline along the Caribbean Sea have enabled the Wayuu's realization of a variety of non-market and market economic practices. Their ability to do commerce ultimately has given them the opportunity to resist subjugation and assimilation while other indigenous groups throughout the Americas without such opportunities became victims of genocide and ethnocide. Both native and non-native people residing on the peninsula exhibit Wayuu culture as a symbolic element of the region. This gives the Wayuu a greater sense of belonging within the larger society as well as a space to expand and strengthen their social, political and economic practices. The resilience of the Wayuu has been shaped over time by their adoption of and resistance to foreign elements. This tradition of "poetically" appropriating and distancing continues, clearly expressed by the Wayuu women vendors in Riohacha.

APPENDIX

Oral Consent Statement

English Version

Hi, my name is David Robles. I am a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Kansas in the United States. I am conducting a month-long ethnographic study about Wayuu involvement in the market and commerce in Riohacha. The findings will be used to write my Master's thesis. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw anytime you choose, including the withdrawal of any information you may have given me. Your confidentiality will be protected; I will not use your name.

Upon its completion, the thesis will be available to you and anyone who is interested at the University of La Guajira's Center of Documentation of Ethnic Groups. I appreciate you taking time to share your experiences as an artisan/vendor/merchant with me and I hope that you enjoy this exchange as well. The information that you provide will add to the rich diversity of cultural contact that indigenous groups have with urban centers. If you have any additional questions or comments I can be contacted in Riohacha at the Milomar Building, Calle 4 # 7-54, Apt 201, by cell phone at 300-289-5620, or by email at: drobles@ku.edu

Spanish Version

Hola, me llamo David Robles. Soy un estudiante de posgrado en antropología de la Universidad de Kansas en los Estados Unidos. Estoy haciendo un estudio etnográfico de un mes sobre la participación de los Wayuu en el mercado y el comercio en Riohacha. Los acontecimientos los usaré para escribir mi tesis de la maestría. La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. Usted tiene el derecho de no responder a cualquier pregunta y su confianza será protegida—no usaré su nombre.

Al terminar la tesis, estará disponible para aquellos interesados en La Universidad de La Guajira, en el Centro de Documentación de Grupos Étnicos. Muchas gracias por compartir conmigo sus experiencias como artesana/vendedora de productos de mar y otros alimentos. Espero que a usted, también le haya gustado este intercambio. La información recibida formará parte de la rica diversidad de contacto cultural entre grupos indígenas y los centros urbanos. Si tiene alguna pregunta o comentario adicional, usted me puede contactar en Riohacha en el Edificio Milomar, Calle 4 # 7-54, Apt. 201, al celular 300-289-5620, o por correo electrónico, al: drobles@ku.edu

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