

DESCENT AMONG THE WAYÚ. CONCEPTS AND SOCIAL MEANINGS

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Taking the contemporary rethinking of the descent notion of in Lowland South American ethnography as a starting point, the article provides an analysis of matrilineal descent among the Wayú. Using new ethnographical data, special attention is paid to indigenous concepts and to the way matrilineal descent articulates with other principles of social classification. By virtue of the role that matrilineal descent plays in defining territoriality and in feuds, the Wayú offer a very interesting case for rethinking the theoretical and comparative debate about the indigenous societies of Lowland South America and for reflecting on the complexity of the interactions between structure and history in this area. [Key words: Wayú Indians, descent and kinship, comparative ethnology, Lowland South America.]

La filiation chez les Wayú. Notions indigènes et significations sociales. Reconsidérant le débat contemporain sur la notion de filiation (*descent*) dans l'ethnographie des Basses Terres sud-américaines, l'article fait une analyse de la filiation matrilineaire chez les Wayú et de son articulation avec les autres principes indigènes de classification sociale. Les concepts wayú de la filiation matrilineaire sont présentés en tenant compte de nouvelles données ethnographiques. Une attention particulière est portée sur le rôle de la filiation matrilineaire dans la définition de la territorialité et dans les vengeances. Par leurs caractéristiques, les Wayú offrent un cas très intéressant pour le débat théorique et comparatif sur les sociétés indigènes des Basses Terres sud-américaines et pour la réflexion sur la complexité des interactions entre la structure et l'histoire dans cette aire. [Mots-clés: Indiens Wayú, descendance et parenté, études ethnologiques comparatives, Basses Terres sud-américaines.]

Conceptos y significados sociales de la descendencia entre los Wayú. Retomando el debate contemporáneo acerca del concepto de descendencia en la etnografía de las Tierras Bajas Suramericanas, el artículo presenta un análisis de la matrilinealidad entre los Wayú y de la forma en que ésta se articula con los otros principios de clasificación social. A través de los nuevos datos etnográficos aquí presentados, se propone una nueva interpretación de las categorías indígenas de matrilinealidad, que es aplicada al

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replanteamiento de la cuestión de la relación entre descendencia matrilineal, territorialidad y venganza en esta sociedad indígena. Por dichos rasgos, los Wayú brindan un caso cuya consideración resulta útil tanto para el desarrollo futuro del debate teórico y comparativo acerca de las sociedades indígenas de las Tierras Bajas suramericanas, como para el estudio de las interacciones entre estructura e historia en esta área. [Palabras claves : Wayú, descendencia y parentesco, etnología comparativa, Tierras Bajas Suramericanas.]

INTRODUCTION

As it is well known, during the mid-Seventies the development of Lowland South America (from hereon LSA) ethnology was strongly marked by a rejection of the so-called « descent » or « lineage theory ». Critics argued that LSA indigenous societies « are structured in terms of the symbolic idioms (names, essences, etc.) that relate to the construction of the person and the fabrication of the body » (Rivière 1993, p. 510). That is to say that in this area « kinship » is not a matter related to « group » constitution and « corporation », but to « corporality ». As far as LSA Amerindians are concerned with principles and categories of social classification, these do not take the « reified » form of « group », but a more symbolic appearance. Furthermore, modes and processes of exchange and incorporation take the place of legal statuses phrased through an idiom of ownership and of rights and duties (Seeger *et al.* 1979).

However, it is worth noting that what Rivière (1993) called the « Amerindianization of descent and affinity », has so far resulted in much more new theorizing about « affinity » than about « descent ». It was the former notion, once disaggregated from its confinement to the kinship context, that has become crucial for understanding *all* features of *all* LSA indigenous models of social relationship.

Viveiros de Castro's « grand unified theory » of Amazonian sociality is one of the most recent developments of this trend. Here, it is argued that in Amazonia « potential » affinity, intended as a cosmological and ontological « generic value », must be considered « the generic given, the virtual background out of which a particularized figure of consanguineally dominated kinship sociality must be made to appear » (Viveiros de Castro 2001, p. 26). According to this view, descent, equated with « consanguinity », is simply seen as the last stage of a dynamic process of extraction/construction of de-differentiated identities/collectives from a cosmological background of « potential affinity ». Even if Viveiros de Castro is clear in stating that « the idea of affinity as a dominant principle » (*ibid.*, p. 22) particularly suits for explaining the modes of sociality proper to those societies with alliance-based local groups, he thinks that « the situation does not change much when we consider those Amazonian regimes that feature village or descent group exogamy » (*ibid.*, p. 24) ¹.

However, this theoretical view leaves open the question of explaining how and in which conditions affinity seems to give way to descent relatedness. Looking at this problem, Hornborg (1998, p. 238) makes the hypothesis that, in the patterns of social organization in indigenous LSA, « unilocal residence is a likely point of origin for various... codifications of unilateral affiliation... of which descent groups are merely sporadic expressions ». In a later work, he develops the argument:

unilineality [...] seems an aspect of supralocal integration. It is when the tangible boundaries set by local group endogamy dissolve that cultural construed, classificatory boundaries gain in importance. Whereas the Dravidian kin-affine dichotomy is egocentric, « internal » to the local group, and temporally transient (applicable only to the three medial generations), unilineality is a sociocentric reification of kin-affine boundaries, construing marriage as « external ». (Hornborg 1998, p. 178)

If we follow Hornborg, the issue of how development of « unilateral affiliation » and « descent » is linked with changes in native notions of territoriality and history becomes a relevant one. From this point of view, it is well known how the Lévi-Straussian notion of « House » has been considered in last years a good starting point for rethinking the issues of « descent », « corporation » and group identity's historical consciousness in some indigenous societies of this area. Particularly, both Hugh-Jones (1995) and Lea (1992; 1995; 2001) conclude that both among the Tukano and the Mëbengokre at least, cultural representations of descent are not only an important principle of articulation of spatial and temporal relationships, but they also concern modes of owning and transmitting symbolic items and prerogatives, which are associated with sharing a like-soul component and belonging to the same « House »².

Commenting on these works, Rivière (1993) suggested that, once we admit the possibility of dissociating the notion of « corporate group » (as a « moral person » who owns at least some components defining the statuses of its members), from unilineal descent (as a sufficient and necessary criterion for membership), it becomes easy to consider the « Houses » of Mëbengokre, as described by Lea, as kinds of « corporations »³.

Nevertheless, the way Lea conceives the relationships between « descent » and « corporation » in Mëbengokre « houses » seems to go against Viveiros de Castro's argument (2001, pp. 33-34, with notes) that throughout the region such components and processes involve « potential affinity » as their unique precondition, whereas « substantial identifications », associated with kinship (and « descent »), only figure as a « consequence ». From another point of view, it can be asked if the focus on the frequent embeddedness of descent categories in native « House » idioms means that there is no other room for use of the first ones in looking at LSA models of sociality. Last but not least, I wish to point to the existence of some important conceptual differences between the use of

« descent » in recent LSA ethnology and the way of redefining this notion in some influent attempts to rethink it after the definitive dismissal of « Lineage Theory ».

In fact, also today it is generally assumed that a minimal standard definition of descent to maintain is « a series of filiation links repeated generation after generation » (Parkin 1997, p. 15) ⁴. By this definition,

a person is descended from another if and only if, minimally, he or she is a child's child of the other. The minimal « common descent » relation is the genealogical relation between two persons who have an ancestor (minimally, a parent's parent), in common. (Scheffler 2001, p. 15)

But, if the word « descent » is to be meant in this sense, it becomes evident that a set composed of a person, his (her) children and grandchildren, cannot be considered a set of people related by common descent. Also for this reason, both Verdon (1980; 1991) and Scheffler (2001) have questioned the use of terms like « descent » and « lineality » with reference to rules both of group membership and of acquisition and/or transmission of statuses and assets.

For Verdon, the term « descent » should be used only when talking about one of the possible « elements of aggregation » among « simple » (that is composed of « individuals ») groups into a composite (that is conformed by « groups ») group. Developing some of Scheffler's more ancient ideas (1966; 1973), he suggests talking of « groups » for designating those sets of individuals that are defined by one or more criteria of membership or entitlement to join together in a specific activity. The notion of « group » should be analytically separated from both « corporation » or « moral person » (as a set of individuals that is defined by one or more criteria of membership or entitlement in order to demarcate these individuals' common ownership of an « estate »), and from « social category » (the simple native recognition of membership criteria for pertaining to a distinct set of people). According to Verdon's terminology, when we are talking of a genealogical criterion for belonging to a « group », a « corporation » or a « social category » of individuals, it would then be better to refer to it as agnatic, uterine or cognatic « kinship », as distinguished in turn from the simple criterion of « filiation ». As a consequence, « descent cannot apply to problems of succession. The same conclusion also applies to inheritance, in which individuals are selected, but groups are not aggregated » (Verdon 1980, p. 146)

Scheffler's more recent view (2001) is similar. He argues that there is little or no sense in talking, for example, of a « matrilineal » or « patrilineal » descent rule of group affiliation or of transmission of statuses and assets. For Scheffler, in all such cases, we should rather talk of rules of patri- or matri- filiation, and maintain the term « descent group » only for those groups in which unifiliation is both the necessary and sufficient condition for inclusion. On the contrary, when descent is only a necessary or sufficient membership criterion it would be improper to talk of « descent groups » because these groups are not only or not

always defined exclusively by descent. Furthermore, when non unilineal filiation is the necessary and sufficient condition for membership, we cannot speak of « groups », but of « socially meaningless categories, for there could be no rights and duties entailed by inclusion in them » (*ibid.*, p. 31).

Taking these theoretical stances in mind and going back to LSA area, it then seems to be argued that at least the idea that descent is one of the criteria by which some components defining affiliation to « Houses » are transmitted, turns problematic.

In what follows, I shall try to discuss some of the issues sketched above whilst analyzing how forms of descent relatedness are involved in the models of social organization of the Wayú population. In fact, I wish to sustain that the Wayú case highlights the need to build a bridge between current ethnographical and comparative theorizing on LSA indigenous models of sociality, and contemporary theoretical attempts to systematically rethink the issues which « descent theory » claimed to answer.

THE WAYÚ AND THEIR SOCIALITY

Among LSA indigenous peoples, the Wayú⁵ (known also as Guajiros), an Arawakan language speaking people living in the Guajira peninsula⁶, at the northern extreme of South America, have been considered (Wilbert 1970; Jackson 1975; Picon 1983; Descola 2001) quite peculiar for their precocious adoption of cattle-raising since the first centuries of Spanish colonization.

Also Wayú's contemporary demographic dimensions made them eccentric when compared with the other indigenous groups of the LSA cultural area. According to the bi-national census of 1993, about 300,000 Wayú people live between Colombia and Venezuela. In spite of the massive migration to rapidly expanding urban centres surrounding the Guajira (among which Maracaibo is the most important) from the first half of the 20th Century, a considerable part of them still live in the peninsula's semi-arid environment.

Ecological conditions only permit very limited forms of seasonal agriculture, though not in all the region. Hunting and gathering forms of subsistence have long since lost importance because of growth of human and livestock population. In coastal areas, fishing is practised, but it is equated by Wayú with poverty (Guerra 1990), and, for this reason, opposed to cattle raising, which, in spite of its persistent crisis from the first half of the 20th Century, it is still a very important subsistence activity for the majority of the indigenous population living in the peninsula.

From the colonial period, both the adoption of livestock raising and the Wayú's historical involvement in the commerce and contraband networks between the coast and the insular Caribbean seem to have caused the devel-

opment of some features of social organization which are uncommon among LSA indigenous peoples. In fact, as noted by Descola (2001, p. 110), whereas throughout the indigenous LSA area, « the principle of substituting objects for persons is conspicuously absent », the Wayú are one of the two exceptional cases (the Mapuche being the other one) where we meet « bridewealth » and compensation payments to resolve disputes, including those arising over homicide ⁷. In spite of this, feuds (*átkawa*) are still widespread in the peninsula today, especially in its inner areas, where State control is very limited.

As shown by Saler (1985), among the Wayú the amount of negotiated goods (livestock, which was in the past the more relevant item, is now increasingly substituted by cash) is, both in bridewealth and in dispute payments, highly variable, depending on the parties' social status (*ojutu* = « value »), and in turn redefining it. Through the display of material wealth in these social transactions between persons and groups, a strong emphasis on the hierarchical differences internal to Wayú society is put on all the main fields of social relations. But at the same time, reciprocity obligations hold a very important place. In fact, large networks of people, mainly but not always exclusively related through a kinship tie, participate both in contributing to and benefiting from bridewealth and dispute payment, with the implicit mutual understanding that the one who brings « collaboration » (*ounuwawa*) today will receive some contribution tomorrow, when asking it in return.

THE *EIRRUKU* NOTION

In mythical narrations about the origin of Wayú society, the cultural hero Mareiwa subdivides the first Wayú into several sets of people and calls what are now some wild animals to assign a name to each grouping, so that they can have a clear way to distinguish between themselves. After first efforts fail because of Mareiwa's rejection of some grotesque proposals of name attribution, finally one bird, in almost all versions the bird Utta (*Hypnelus bicinatus* or *Hypnelus ruficollis*, called in local Spanish « Pico gordo »), gives a proper name to each set. From that moment, that name will permit a Wayú to identify his/her set as his/her *eirruku* ⁸.

The literal meaning of this term is « flesh », and, more generally, « substance », « texture », « compoundness » (Jusayu and Olza Zubiri 1988, p. 88). When asked about the procreative process, Wayú people say that the woman's contribution is « stronger » (*katsüinka*) in providing the child's *eirruku*. The reason is that one's person *eirruku* is essentially a product of her menstrual blood's condensation which takes place after contact with man's semen (*awasain*). This contact makes menstrual blood (*ashá*) turn into pulped flesh (*ashula*), as milk to which curdled milk is added turns into cheese.

Sometimes, this theory of the procreative process is indicated as the basis for the fact that the *eirruku* name a person acquires at birth is that of his/her mother. But more frequently, Wayú people say simply that only women « multiply », « enlarge » (*awáinmaja*) one *eirruku*. However, the mythical account of the origin of Wayú social order highlights how the term *eirruku* is also currently used for referring to the set of all those people who bear a same collective name.

Most versions of the myth mention between 20 and 30 names, corresponding to the number of « clan » names reported by the most recent binational census. From the most ancient reports, which go back to the second half of 19th Century, the names mentioned are generally, with few exceptions, the same ones. Furthermore, it must be noted that some names (Uliana, Epieyu, Ipuana, Pushaina, Epinayu, etc.) are borne by one or more thousand person, while other ones are borne only by a few dozen people.

Mythical narrations also tell how a specific area, located in the Upper Guajira, and an iconic sign (*ayawase*, literally « identification », also called *jeerü*, « iron ») to be used as a brand for its members' cattle⁹, was assigned by Mareiwa to each named *eirruku*. Some versions also mention one or more animal species which came to be « associated » with the members of each group¹⁰. However, it must be stressed that, also in these mythical narrations, the names of the *eirruku* groups generally do not have anything to do with the names of the animal species or of the site associated with each of them. In fact, a linguistic analysis of the probable etymology of *eirruku* names, which is possible for most of them¹¹ shows that only in a few cases (significantly those of the names borne by few people), this etymology corresponds to the name of an animal species or a place. Rather, in the majority of cases, it seems to refer to a behavioural characteristic.

In any case, Wayú today generally do not attribute to these names any meaning other than that of « proper names » designating the *eirruku* groups. But, on the other hand, though everybody agrees that nowadays bearing one of the more common *eirruku* names is in no way sufficient for being recognized of high status, people usually say that in the past, and to a lesser extent still now, some *eirruku* names are associated with the prestigious economic or military condition of their bearers, while other ones are, for the same reasons, « despised » and « shameful » for those who bear them.

Often a correlation is established between the less diffused *eirruku* names and a « poor » status. Furthermore, several cases of people who, in a relatively recent past, « changed » (*awanaja*) their own « shameful » *eirruku* name with another more common and prestigious one (often adopted from the group on which they are economically or military dependent) were reported to me.

Besides that, in some cases we meet with groups who are said to bear, besides an *eirruku* name shared with other groups, a second *eirruku* name proper to them. Most of the times, this feature is explained as an instance of *eirruku* groups that, though distinguished by their ancestral origin (a point we will to return later), are

paatawasu, that is « flanked », « paired »¹². Though this expression (which can be used also speaking of the relationship between *eirruku* groupings that apparently have a totally distinct name, for instance Wouliyu and Uliyu, Ipuana and Sapuana) explicitly refers to a privileged condition of close friendly relationship (« as though they were brothers »), it is actually charged with ambiguity because it is frequently considered to mask an asymmetrical subordinate relationship of domestic, working or military service, expressed through an idiom of « nurturing and sustenance » (*epija*). In fact, at other times these cases of bearing another proper *eirruku* name besides the shared one, are interpreted as a sign of the hierarchical difference of status between the proper « owners » of the shared name, who are « valuable » (*kojutshi*), and the other people, who are considered *amo'jula*, that is « lacking », « defected ».

THE APÜSHI NOTION

All ethnographers (Watson 1967; Wilbert 1970; Goulet 1981; Saler 1988) agreed on how both the native theory of the bodily constitution of the person and the emphasis on the subdivision by *eirruku* in the representations of ideal social ordering are congruent with the prominence that uterine kinship has in many of the most important spheres of Wayú social identity and practice.

Particularly, Goulet (1981) argues that a strict connection exists between Wayú kinship categories and native theories of procreation. He found that *kasa anain*, « something related to », is the Wayú term for « relative », which applies to anyone linked to a person by genealogical relationships of consanguinity or affinity. Among their *kasa anain*, people distinguish between their *apüshi* and their *oupayu*. According to Goulet, the proper meaning of people being *apüshi* is that of sharing the *eirruku*, that is to be relatives « through the flesh ». So, *apüshi* comes to designate every uterine kin. The father and agnatic kin are considered relatives « by blood », referring to the assimilation of the father's contribution to procreation (his semen, as said above) to a « marked » form of « blood », but they are not grouped under a specific kin term. Finally, a person's *oupayu* are his/her father's *apüshi*, that is his/her father's uterine kin (Goulet 1981, pp. 163-164)¹³.

One problem with Goulet's interpretation of « uterine kin, genealogically related through the *eirruku* » as being the « intrinsic » meaning of *apüshi*, comes from the possibility, in some contexts, of using this term for referring also to people who are not genealogically related, or, though being so, are not « through the flesh ». Goulet himself noticed that *apüshi* can refer to people who bear the same *eirruku* name, even when (as we shall see soon) it is stressed they are not genealogically related. He argues that such cases could represent an « extension » of the term's « primary » meaning. Nevertheless, this kind of explanation does not account for cases in which *apüshi* also refers to people in no way related

« through the *eirruku* ». So the term can be used for example, to refer to all of a person's relatives (often including the father or a man's children) involved in organizing his/her burial ceremony (Goulet 1981, pp. 240, 243).

All these aspects of the term's use bring little support to the thesis that the « primary » meaning of *apüshi* is « to be genealogically related through the flesh »; to interpret these uses, in fact Goulet himself (1981, p. 170) turned to a different order of explanation, which looks at the generic meaning of *apüshi*: « member of a category » or « part of a whole »¹⁴. This is, significantly, the first meaning of the term found in the Wayuunaiki-Spanish dictionary of Jusayu and Olza Zubiri (1988, p. 51), where it precedes the other meanings given, that are: « member of a clan »; « uterine relative »; « relative in general ». Looking at this evidence, it seems to me that, if we want to point to an « intrinsic » meaning of the word *apüshi*, it is rather « to be tied, linked, connected ». This conclusion is supported by linguistic analysis too, according to which the word *apüshi* is formed from the root *apü*, « lace, string for binding » (see the glossary reported in Guerra 2001, p. 37).

This generic meaning of the term stands in good accordance with its current Spanish translation, « familia, familiar », from bilingual people, and with the possibility of graduating the « intensity » of being *apüshi* through the frequent adding of qualifying markers, as in the expressions *apüshi mai* (« very much »), *apüshi pejejat* (« close »), *apüshi anainje* (« attached, clung »), or *apüshi wattajat* (« far, distant »)¹⁵. This does not contradict the fact that in the first instance Wayú identify their *apüshi* as their uterine kin. As we will see, what they are pointing to by saying this, is that these people, particularly those with whom they share association with a « territory » (*woumain* = « our land ») or join in a feud, are those whom one is more strongly « bound to, part of ».

THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE « DESCENT » ORIENTATION OF WAYÚ KINSHIP SYSTEM

Wayú kinship terminology resembles a crow type, with FZCh = P and MBCh = Ch, and a set of specific terms for affines¹⁶. This appears to be congruent with the emphasis on uterine kinship, but it is well known how Hérítier (1981) rejects the idea of a necessary connection, instead arguing that a frequent association exists between crow-omaha terminologies, an emerging cognatic character of kinship groupings, and semi-complex forms of marriage alliance.

Undoubtedly, such a theory permits to account for some important features of Wayú models of kinship and alliance. For example, besides the absence of any positive marriage rule, stated by all ethnographers (Watson 1967; Goulet 1981; Saler 1988), I found it is considered « good » to marry « far » (*wattasü*) with someone who is a *nátajat*, that is someone who is not considered one's own

relative. In fact, such marriage is said to make possible to extend one's own social and political networks. On the contrary, to marry with relatives results in *patunajirrasü* (« to hug one another ») and *apajirrasü* (« to grasp one another »).

Nevertheless, Héritier's notion of semi-complex systems of alliance does not seem to fit well for interpreting other features of Wayú social models. In fact, only apply to closest uterine relatives (including matrilineal parallel cousins, MZDD, and one man sister's daughter). Besides that, both Goulet (1981), Saler (1988) and I too collected a consistent proportion of marriages among cousins (including, though rarely, matrilineal parallel first ones), which are always explained through reference to circumstantial factors, ranging from strategies of maintaining livestock and territorial presence concentrated, to love feelings or lack of other partners.

The relationship between the cognatic and the matrilineal aspects of Wayú society is in a certain sense involved too in the very debated question of the kinship (« ego-focused ») or descent (« ancestor focused ») orientation of wayú concepts of social ordering by genealogical relationships. In the course of this debate (Watson 1967; Goulet 1981; Saler 1988), which was phrased according to Scheffler's (1973) analytical distinctions and developed before the demise of classic « lineage theory »¹⁷, there was also a constant reference to the question of if and when some groups of uterine kin could be seen as « lineages », which act as « corporations ».

Starting from the first issue, if we put together what is said in mythical narrations about the origin of *eirruku* names and groupings and in Wayú theory of procreation and names transmission, it could seem that bearing the same *eirruku* name entails the sharing of the same matrilineal ancestry. Moreover, people who bear the same *eirruku* name address each other (and, in some contexts, refer to each other) using kinship terms even if they cannot indicate how they are genealogically related¹⁸. For this reason, almost all ethnographers since Simons (1885) concluded that bearing the same *eirruku* name is what identifies Wayú « matriclans », defined as groups of « putative » uterine descent from the same ancestors.

This view has been supported by Watson (1967), who provided an analysis of Wayú social structure according to the conceptual framework of classical « lineage theory ». According to him, Wayú matriclans, called *eirruku* in wayuunaiki and « castes » in Spanish, would actually be dispersed and not « corporate », since territorial concentration and corporateness, particularly in feuds, are associated with more « restricted » uterine descent groupings, which could be analytically termed as « lineages » (see also Wilbert 1970; Saler 1988). Moreover, these matriclans do not correspond to an exogamic unit, which is found only at the « lineage » level of inclusion.

Nevertheless, as Goulet (1981) noticed, although they consider the acquisition of the *eirruku* name by matrifiliation to be a consequence of the mother

alone providing one's « flesh », the Wayú do not believe that all those people who bear that name share a common matrilineal ancestry. Indeed, among such people it is common to find persons who do not consider themselves to be genealogically related at all ¹⁹.

Furthermore, Goulet (1981, p. 167) argues that *apüshi* is an egocentric kinship category. In his view, when Wayú speak of the *apüshi* who join together in a feud, what is significant for them is not these people's sharing a matrilineal ancestry, but their close uterine genealogical relatedness with the victim or the aggressor as well as sharing the same « territory » (Goulet 1981, pp. 223-224). Analogously, Wayú definition of territoriality by reference to sets of uterine relatives, implies that it is only by « matrifiliation » that a person comes to share a rightful claim of restricting access to it (*ibid.*, pp. 129, 135, 167) ²⁰. For these reasons, relying on Scheffler's distinctions, Goulet (1981, pp. 39, 139, 141) concludes that Wayú do not have any kind of descent categories or groups, but only « kinship » ones.

Saler, who did his field research in the same years as Goulet, disagrees with him about this point. He argues (Saler 1988, pp. 78-87) that the recognition of a principle of matrilineal descent is implied not only by mythical accounts of *eirruku* origin, but also by current identification of a group of *apüshi* through reference to the territorial origin of its ancestors. However, he does not provide an interpretation of the meaning of native kinship terms and concepts alternative to the one put forward by Goulet, preferring to focus on the issue of at what extent it is correct to consider the groups of *apüshi* as « lineages ». Saler's conclusion is that it is better to say that a variable « approximation » of the former to the latter exists, which depends on the specific group and the context under consideration (greater « approximation » occurring when a « descent ideology » is « operating » in joining uterine relatives during feuds). So, he finally comes to admit that in a lot of cases, the model of ego-centred kinship appears to interpret the nature of the social networks of uterine kin better than « descent ». His whole argument is thus left with a certain ambiguity, insofar Saler sometimes seems to refer to the « native's point of view », while other times he is clear in stating that the primacy of ego-centred kinship definitely holds only when we are dealing with the ethnographer's observation of real social practice. Saler's approach to the issue of « descent » in Wayú social organization ultimately incurs Verdon's criticism (1980) of the uncertain theoretical ground by which all « classical » theories of descent view « descent groups » as sets characterized by « ontological variability » and different « degrees of groupness » ²¹. Besides that, it leaves unsolved the question of how native notions as *eirruku* and *apüshi* are linked with « descent » and other principles of social classification.

ANOTHER VIEW ABOUT WAYÚ CATEGORIES OF « DESCENT »: MATRILINEAL ANCESTRY, SEGMENTATION AND THE PLACE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

It seems to me most of the problems left unsolved in the controversy about Wayú notions of relatedness can actually be overcome not only by adopting an analytical view of the native concepts of « descent » which goes beyond the tenets of classical « lineage theory », but also taking into account some Wayú notions and statements which have been overlooked or not at all been reported in Wayú ethnography.

To begin with, though the Wayú do not believe that bearing the same *eirruku* name necessarily involves sharing the same matrilineal ancestry, it is wrong to deduce from this fact that they don't group people on this basis. What Wayú say, rather, is that common uterine descent can be claimed only if, as well as this name, people share the same *ekí*, a term whose meaning is « origin », but also « head » or « base ». As Saler already suggested, this « origin » is usually identified through the reference to the name of the site where their first uterine female ancestors (*oushü* = « grandmother ») of the group are thought to have « emerged » (*ojuita*), « risen out » (*eweta*) from the underground. Indeed, many people go so far to say that they belong to the same *eirruku* only if their « origin » is the same, and what happens is rather that distinct *eirruku* share the same name. In this sense, they particularly point to the before mentioned cases of groups which share a common name, but they are distinct for another collective name which only one of them is associated with.

There are some wayú notions of group segmentation which show the instable relationship between pertaining to an *eirruku*, bearing the same collective name and descending from the same « origin »²². Also when it is not stated that only those who share the same origin are of the same *eirruku*, people usually refer to those bearing the same *eirruku* name, but who are « of a different origin » (*katatawasu shiki*), as belonging to one of the « many divisions » (*sulijalepala*) of that *eirruku*. *Alijale*, the term used in this context, means « division, department, partition » (Jusayu and Olza Zubiri 1981, p. 89) of something²³, but this subdivision is not represented as a result of a generative process.

On the contrary, this idea may be present when the Wayú speak of the distinct « segments » (*shiipa*) of an *eirruku*. When this occurs, what is implied is not only that people, though sharing the same origin, belong to matrilineal lines traced from different « grandmothers », but also that the members of these lines act separately when someone is involved in a feud. *Shiipa* actually means « segment, part, piece of something » (Goulet 1981, pp. 170-171) but also « coordinated and simultaneous action », « the continuation or horizon of something » (Jusayu 1977, p. 403; Olza Zubiri and Jusayu 1978, pp. 350-351; Jusayu and Olza Zubiri 1988, pp. 89-90). This term thus seems to imply a dimension of continuity as well

as coordination, shared by the segment's members, which is absent in the meaning of *alijale*, « partition ».

A similar situation is found when regarding the relationships between « sharing the same origin » and having the same brand sign. Wayú affirm that brand marks of people who bear the same *eirruku* name, but who are of a different origin, look totally different. Nevertheless, they admit that differences, also significant ones, in the form of these signs often exist within subgroups of people who share matrilineal ancestry. In these cases, these differences are explained as the result of subsequent modifications (*eirrata*) brought to the « real » (*shimuin*) brand sign of their *eirruku*. These modifications, consisting in adding, prolonging or curving one or more of the composing lines (which Wayú refer as a « head » or « leg » or « arm », of the « original » sign), are said to occur when a group of uterine relatives go to live far from other members of their *eirruku*, or when they want to escape from their enemies during a feud²⁴. In fact, when a serious dispute arises, to have one's own cattle branded with the same mark as that of one's « enemy » (*ai'nuuwa*), is sufficient for being identified with them and so becoming a potential target of retaliation²⁵.

Furthermore, people refer to their common uterine ancestry by pointing to the publicly recognized terminological relationship of the siblinghood of some of their respective identifiable uterine « grandmothers » (that is uterine female ancestors of two or more ascending generations, most commonly no more than four from an adult ego). People who are connected in such way are called *poushüwasu*, which means: « their uterine grandmothers are joined », or *pawalasü noushü*, which means: « their grandmothers are in a real or terminological relationship of siblinghood (*awala*) »²⁶.

It must be noted that, according to Wayú terminology, the term *awala*, « sibling », generically applies not only to full or uterine brothers and sisters and matrilineal parallel cousins, but also to agnatic semi-siblings and patrilineal parallel cousins (even if there is a specific term, *asanua*, to designate specifically these kin). For this reason, it could seem that the range of the possible uses of *awala* makes the claim two people have their « grandmothers joined » as siblings, a dubious way to ascertain common matrilineal ancestry among them. But for the Wayú, this remains a minor source of ambiguity, insofar as they always reduce it consistently through connecting the terminological relationship of siblinghood between their grandmothers with the previously mentioned identity of their common territorial origin (*eki*), or, at least, « provenience », in historical reconstructions. The involvement of these women's uterine descendants in the same past feuds often constitutes the main subject of these historical memories.

The constant reference to the specific history of a group of uterine descendants from the same « origin » provides an important element to rethink the issue of how the range of uterine kin who join in a feud is defined. In fact, such an issue has been at the centre of ethnography regarding Wayú social organization,

often intersecting with the question of whether and in what way Wayú have « lineages ».

There is an agreement among all ethnographers on the fact that, at least at the level of the proper native rule, when a feud arises, neither a man's sons nor the father of either victim or murderer should be involved, but only their uterine kin (Watson 1967; Goulet 1981; Saler 1988). Even so, reporting actual cases, people admit that, particularly nowadays, these rules are subject to some margins of variation. So, even non-uterine close kin as well as the *kerraiü* (that is spouses of the female members) of the uterine group involved may « intervene » (*asoukta*), if they are « very affectionate » (*ajirrasu*). However, these cases are considered exceptions, and these men's uterine relatives tend to discourage such an intervention, because it risks making all of them a potential target of revenge²⁷. Furthermore, in the case of an homicide, even if a dispute is resolved through a compensation payment, father and *oupayu* of the victim only receive a minor part of the payment (which is called *süwüirra*, « for the tears » or *ishoupuna*, « for the blood shed »), while most of the amount (the part which is significantly called « for the *eirruku* » or *süjutu*, « for the value ») is due to his uterine kin²⁸.

The main point of ethnographical controversy has been about the range of uterine kin who join in the course of a feud. Both Watson (1967) and, in a different way, Saler (1988) deal with this subject by looking at the genealogical depth of such groups, concluding that it varies according the degree of economical and political coordination under a « chief ». As seen before, Goulet, for whom it is wrong to consider these groups as based on « descent », maintains that involvement in a feud is defined only by the actual close uterine genealogical relatedness with the first victim or aggressor. The limit of these uterine networks is in turn determined by the actual sharing of a same territory.

The whole issue can be reassessed in better terms once we take into account how the sharing of an ancestral origin (*eki*) and of the same uterine historical grandmothers is related with involvement in feuds. From this point of view, people affirm that those who do not share the same *eki* as that of a particular person, are in no way involved with him in his feud²⁹. On the contrary, those who share his « origin » may be involved. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases on which I collected information, a feud involves only those uterine kin who are actually associated with the same « territory » and bone cemetery, while it does not involve the other people with whom « grandmothers were joined », but whose present territorial association is another one.

Whereas on the one hand this seems to confirm, at the level of real practice, the state of things described by Goulet, on the other hand it must be stressed how this fact is not usually explained as the result of a natural tendency « to separate » (*akatajirrasü*) which occurs among the descendants from the same « origin » when they « territorially disperse » (*awalakawasü*) in the course of time. Rather, in speaking about this topic, people point to the history of how in the past one

group « withdrew itself » (*akatalajunusü*) from a feud in which some one else of their uterine relatives was more directly involved. This withdrawal is sometimes said to have occurred because of the « fathers » having paid compensation to keep their sons out of a feud originated by some of their uterine kin, but more frequently it is explained as the independent decision of a group of uterine *apüshi*. So, people often tell and complain too, of a past feud in which their uterine ancestors had been « united », and of more recent feuds in which the descendants of these ancestors came to act « separately »³⁰.

It is probably looking at such features of the relationships between relatedness by uterine ancestry, territoriality and involvement in feuds that Saler (1988, p. 86, my translation) acutely remarks that for Wayú, the political identity of a uterine descendant group (he says: « of a lineage ») is the « affirmation of a historical particularism » much more than a result of some « structural principles » of genealogical reckoning and « segmentary opposition ».

TERMS AND METAPHORS FOR THE « DESCENT PROCESS »

Relating people through pointing to their common ancestral « origin » and to the siblinghood of their uterine « grandmothers » corresponds more properly to what Lea (2001) proposes to call « ascent », instead of « descent ». Regarding these relationships of « ascent », it is interesting to note how Wayú often talk of the total set of their « grandmothers » and « maternal uncles » (*alaülayu*) as *süpulerrua*, a term which literally means « those who go forward ». This seems to suggest the ancestors are like people who precede, are ahead of us, in occupying physical and social space. Wayú sometimes add that ancestors, once they die, leave behind (*apüta*) their living « descendants ».

Provided that it is not correct to interpret, as Goulet did, the « primary meaning » of *apüshi* as « uterine kin, relatives through the *eirruku* », it can be asked if the Wayú have specific terms to designate a relationship which should be properly interpreted as « uterine descent ».

We can start answering this question by noting that there is a specific collective term, *aikeyu*, which bilingual Wayú commonly translate in Spanish « descendientes, descendencia ». This term is often used in mythical accounts for pointing to the relationship between Juyá, « Rain » – a male « supernatural » figure whose central place in Wayú cosmology was shown by Perrin (1976) – and the entire Wayú people. In « ordinary » discourse, a person's *aikeyu* are all of his/her *aliün*, a term which applies both to his and her proper grandchildren (ChCh), as well as to those of his and her siblings, and to those of the following generations. People say that an *achon* – a term that according to the crow features of Wayú terminology refers not only to one's child, but also to a woman's sister's child (wZCh) as well as one's maternal uncle's child (MBCh) –, and a man's proper *asipu* (mZCh)

– are not one's *aikeyu*, because to have one's own descent implies a generational continuity of at least two generations.

Besides that, there is a specific term, *ouliwou*, which is used collectively to designate the uterine descendants of one person. In existing Wayú ethnography we find very few mentions of this term, which nevertheless is reported in the two Wayuunaiki-Spanish dictionaries by Jusayu (who is Wayú) and Olza Zubiri. In Jusayu (1977, p. 527) the given meaning of *ouliwou* is « children or grandchildren who are left at death, maternal descendants », while in later Jusayu and Olza Zubiri (1988, p. 154) we find « woman's uterine grandchildren »³¹. Even though the two translations do not thoroughly coincide, both show that the meaning of the term implies an uterine link. The Wayú with whom I have discussed the issue state that *ouliwou* does not apply either to a woman's child or to her sister's. This is congruent with the fact that the term used for these relatives, *achon*, also covers MBCh, who is not a uterine descendant. Moreover, Wayú say that, as in the case of *aikeyu*, a woman's child cannot be considered her *ouliwou*, because to have *ouliwou* implies a more extended temporal continuity of her uterine descent (many say: of her *eirruku*). For these reasons, only « grandmothers » have *ouliwou*, the first of whom are her daughters' children.

Views about who are one man's *ouliwou* are more swinging. In fact, some people assert that only women have *ouliwou*, as only they « provide » uterine descent, and « multiply » the *eirruku*. On the contrary, other people say that, as for women, a man's *ouliwou* are his uterine kin of two or more subsequent generations. They often include in this category a man's proper uterine nephews and nieces too. People who support this view explain that, as far as they « continue » his *eirruku*, a man's *ouliwou* must be considered all the « children » (*achon*) of his *éiyetse*. This last term, as reported by Goulet (1981, p. 164), refers to a man's entire uterine female kin of his same generation or one lower (mZ, mMZD, mZD, etc.). In fact, old Wayú people say that all these *ouliwou* of a man (mZCh, mMZDCh, mZDCh, etc.) are covered by the same kin term, *asipu*, though they point to the current widespread « bad use » of the aforementioned term *aliün* for designating mZDCh³².

The more restrictive interpretation that only women properly have *ouliwou* could find support in the derivation of the term from *oulia* « plant, crop » that is proposed by a lot of Wayú people. In fact, an analogy is made between an *eirruku* and a plant³³. People often compare an *eirruku* to a plant whose « base » (*eki*, a term, as we have seen, which also means « head » and « origin ») is a « grandmother », while the *ouliwou*, as Wilbert (1970, p. 321) had already reported, are like the shoots of the new branches which develop from its stem³⁴. At other times the analogy is put in a different way. Instead of representing an *eirruku* as a single plant whose branches are the *ouliwou*, it is said that these latter are like the produce of the seeds (*aiüu*) of a plant's fruits (*achonirrua*), so originating in a new exemplar of that plant³⁵.

However, at other times people propose an alternative etymological explanation of *ouliwou* where its literal meaning would be « footprints of one's steps », *ouli* meaning « foot », « step ». This interpretation leaves more room for admitting that men also have *ouliwou* – people who closely follow them both in terms of genealogical continuity of their *eirruku*, and, practically, in their spatial movements and feuds. In both cases the use of these metaphors shows how the idea of a process of uterine descent is closely linked to the meaning of the word *ouliwou*.

UTERINE KINSHIP AND TRANSMISSION OF ASSETS

Actually, for the Wayú, living near their own uterine close kin is a much sought-after ideal, and indeed, as noted by Goulet (1981) and Saler (1988), it is frequent for a group of uterine siblings and cousins of both sexes to live close to one another in nearby dwellings³⁶.

However, post-marital residence is highly dependent on circumstances and can change during time. From the moment marriage payments begin, but are not yet totally fulfilled, a man should limit himself to « visiting » the woman nightly in the dwelling where she lives. When payments are completed he can decide whether to go to live with her elsewhere or, when he lives in a different village from his wife, whether to bring her to live there. A man who gave « bridewealth » (*paüna*) for his wife has the right to receive the same for his daughters, and compensation payments (*awálaja*) too if one of his children is hurt by another person. If he dies, the same claims can be placed by his close uterine kin, who can also take the widow as wife of one of them, though leviratic marriage (*eisala amuin*) is now on the wane. In any case, even if a close uterine kin goes to live far from the other *apiüshi*, closeness is periodically reasserted through frequent visits and seasonal residence in the same place, and definitively restored after death. In fact, people feel a strong moral obligation to join a relative's remains in the same site where his/her close uterine kin are already buried and in whose neighbourhood some of them are still living. Among the Wayú two burials are made: the first one takes place immediately after the death; the second one is organized some years later. The dead person's remains are then exhumed and definitively buried in his/her uterine group's « bone cemetery » (*jipupala*), even if the corpse was buried before in another site (called *ashulapala*, « flesh cemetery » and often traduced by bilinguals as *cementerio de paso*).

This dynamical and flexible interplay between residence patterns, links of uterine kinship and the importance of burial sites as markers of group identity, is related with the definition of territoriality. There is an agreement between all ethnographers that rightful claims on the land and its resources are acquired by the first to start ongoing exploitation, and are transmitted through uterine kinship ties alone. The presence of a bone cemetery is what permits the close

living uterine kin of the people who are buried there to claim the neighbouring area as their « land » or « territory ». Of course, this set of uterine kin lets other people live in its territory and use the resources within it, but these persons are only temporarily « permitted » to do so, by virtue of having social relationships with one or more of those who are the real owners ³⁷.

In spite of all the ethnographical reports about the strict normative character of the association of territoriality with uterine kinship, until relatively recent times the former seemed to involve restricting access to water sources, good pastureland and small garden plots located near the settlement established by an uterine group, without implying an exclusive ownership of a clearly bounded area. This feature has profoundly changed in the course of the 20th Century. In fact, population increase (also of non Wayú people) in the peninsula; development of exploitation of huge mineral resources; acquisition of tourism potential; urban expansion; and, in the last ten years, the so-called *transferencias* (financial resources destined by the Colombian State for indigenous people living within a legally protected native area), have all endowed land with an increasing intrinsic economic value. As a consequence, at least in the Colombian part of the peninsula, an exponential explosion of land disputes among Wayú people has followed these processes, often becoming the cause of feuds. In such a context, the common practice of letting a man's children reside in his uterine kin's « territory » even after his death, according to the will he expressed before dying, has become particularly charged with ambiguity, as is shown by the fact that these disputes often involve a dead man's uterine kin on one side, and his sons' uterine kin on the other.

However, even when taking account of these changes, and, more generally, the influence of the non indigenous society (particularly that involved by inter-ethnic marriages) in the long run, uterine kinship appears to be more relevant in definition of territoriality than in what concerns familiar transmission of personal property, whose patterns show a considerable variability ³⁸. Regarding cattle (which is individually owned by both men and women), both Watson (1968) and Saler (1988) substantially agree that its transmission is actually towards both uterine and non-uterine kin, though they differ on points such as: considering transmission to non-uterine kin as a by-product of acculturation; distinguishing between « formal » and « informal » transmission; and the extent to which transmission patterns are at variance with the amount of wealth transferred. Nevertheless, there is historical evidence (Picon 1983; Barrera 2000), dating from XVIIIth Century, of a greater prominence in the past of transmission to uterine kin, which is confirmed by most Wayú people with whom I have discussed the issue. Furthermore, I have found several cases of feuds which involved on one side a man's uterine relatives, and on the other side, his sons and their uterine kin, which had arisen because he had transferred most of his animals to his sons before his death. Of course, that is not to say that in the past animals were given

away exclusively to one's own uterine kin. Rather, the point I wish to highlight here is that, in any case, at least Wayú patterns of inheritance of personal property can in no way be interpreted through reference to the idea of a « corporate belonging » of the uterine descent group ³⁹.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In spite of Verdon and Scheffler's arguments cited in the introductory section, the Wayú case brings evidence that it can be quite in consonance with at least some LSA indigenous group's conceptualizations to term a set of people sharing a common point of genealogical origin, and including more than two generations, as a descent « category » or « group », inasmuch the pertinent feature of inclusion is considered that of sharing a common origin, while sharing an « ancestor » (minimally a parent's parent, as previously defined) might not be implicated. Besides this, it suggests that what we have to study are the specific meanings that the recognition of these forms of relatedness assumes in particular contexts, instead of tracing, in whatever way, a distinction between « groups » and « categories » in which these latter always come to constitute a residual notion whose significance is never fully explained. From this point of view, the issue of how modes of transmission of assets and statuses are variably correlated with the presence of descent affiliation may still be considered a theoretically relevant one.

Regarding this last point, I have tried to show how Wayú concepts of uterine descent are configured and shape their ways of conceiving and practising relatedness without needing to be « phrased » into a House idiom. Among the Wayú, historical memories about territorial origin and spreading of uterine descent groups, as well as about cohesion and divisions among their members in past feuds, appear two important contexts in which descent relatedness is defined and « works » through.

Besides this, people make a constant reference to the bone cemetery of their uterine descent group to point both to the historical and demographical limits of this group's identity and to its « ownership » of the land wherein that cemetery is situated. For this reason, as already noted by Goulet (1981), when the second burial takes place, decisions concerning the site where to bury the bones of a dead uterine kin, are an important moment by which both uterine descent and territorial identity are reaffirmed and/or redefined. The massive presence of guests who are not uterine kin of the dead person turns burial ceremonies into a moment of public recognition of such identity in front of the whole Wayú society.

At the same time, while in feuds group affiliation by uterine kinship involves (at least ideally) excluding the relevance of all other kinds of other relationships, in burial ceremonies we also find an emphasis on the extended networks of social reciprocity as a necessary condition for the uterine group's perpetuation. For this

reason, Wayú burial ceremonies might in some way be compared with those rituals associated elsewhere with the definition of « House identity », as in the case of Gé naming ceremonies or of the Tukano complementarity between *He* and « Foodsgiving » ceremonies (Hugh-Jones 1995).

Nevertheless, among the Wayú, what definitely permits to identify a set of uterine kin as a distinct unit it is not the reference to a « House » associated with some specific elements, symbolic items and prerogatives proper to it, but – even more than genealogy – the ancestral and/or actual connection with a specific land and cemetery. It is such connection which comes to be « enacted » in the ceremonial as well as in the feud context. As we have seen, with the possible exception of land, an association of the collective identity of the descent groups with specific belongings proper to each group is instead generally absent or weak, even in what concerns *eirruku* and personal names and the use of marking one's cattle with a brand which is ideally the same for all people who have the same « origin ».

Perhaps, a correlation might exist between this absence of the « House » as an idiom of the descent group identity and hierarchy, and the persistent strength of uterine kinship as exclusive criteria of collective identity in Wayú feuds. On the other hand, the development, to use Descola's terminology, of a mode of exchange based on « hetero-substitution » (Descola 2001, p. 110), and expressed by the social uses of cattle and other kind of material wealth, could also account for this particularity, and explain too why the reference to the idea of a « corporate belonging » of the descent group seems to have little relevance even in familiar practices of inheritance of personal property.

For all these reasons, Wayú may offer a very interesting case not only for recasting descent in the current ethnographic and comparative theorizing about LSA indigenous models of sociality and relatedness but also for stimulating reflection about the interactions between structure, agency and history in this area. *

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NOTES

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1. It is worth noting that even Rivière (1993, p. 514) seems to subscribe to this view, at least as far as he considers that « the existence of third term [potential affinity as a category of social classification] as a mode of articulation in a concentric dualistic structure is perfectly consistent with the generative process that we call "descent" ».

2. The old question of how distinguishing between « phratries », « clans » and « lineages » unexpectedly reappears in these ethnographical analyses, if only to argue that there is little sense in asking to which level of inclusion native idioms of « House » refer, although at the same time suggesting that there is a good degree of correspondence with the « clan » notion.

3. This conclusion is unexpected if one thinks that most early criticisms of the « African model » in LSA ethnology assumed the equation between « group » and « corporation », thus arguing that in LSA societies it was quite inappropriate to talk of « groups » at all (Overing Kaplan 1977; Maybury-Lewis 1979; Murphy 1979).

4. Filiation in turn is defined as « the relationship of child to parent per se » (Scheffler 2001, p. 17), though admitting that how this relationship is established can vary cross-culturally. I do not enter into the complex issue, debated, among others, by Schneider (1984) and Ingold (2001), of definitions of filiation and descent which are grounded on principles of generation different from procreative relationships, because this issue, although stimulating, only marginally regards the Wayú case presented here.

5. I use here the orthography « Wayú » rather than « Wayuu », which is more widespread in actual Colombia. Wayú terms reported in this text have been generally transcribed under their root form, but in some cases I cite a prefixed or suffixed form of term, which is that most currently used. Two different systems of orthographical notation for the writing of Wayuunaiki actually exist, but here I decided not to adopt either. Nevertheless, in some cases I have indicated presence of a stress by a tilde, the glottal by an apostrophe, and long vowels by their duplication.

6. The peninsula is politically divided between Colombia and Venezuela. I carried out a total of 24 months of fieldwork in the Colombian Guajira between the years 2000 and 2005.

7. He also suggests a correlation exists between the development of these « modes of exchange » based on « hetero-substitution », and the historical process of these two groups having adopted forms of relationships with animals based on rearing.

8. See the versions published by Gutiérrez de Pineda (1963), Paz Ipuana (1973), Perrin (1976; 1979), Chacin (2003).

9. Perrin (1986) provides evidence which should support the thesis that Wayú brand signs were adopted from those one used by Spanish colonists during the 17th Century. Guerra (1987, and personal communication) however suggests that the likeness between Spanish and Wayú brand signs does not exclude the possibility of an indigenous origin. He points to formal affinities of Wayú brand signs, which are also found depicted on various rocks of Alta Guajira and used as personal tattoos, with some Amazonian petroglyphs. The question, which had been already raised by Lévi-Strauss and Belmont (1963), remains open until a definitive date for Guajira rock painting is established.

10. Old Wayú people who have not attended school explain that in ancient times animals were Wayú, but they assumed their present form when « land changed », or for having eaten raw meat. However, it is not made clear whether association between a single *eirruku* and an animal species already existed before this latter assumed their present visible form. Narrations concerning the origin of a specific association are rare. When they exist (I found for example some versions concerning the association between the dog and the Jayaliyu *eirruku*) it is told that once a female of this species (significantly almost always a domestic one), who had taken on human form, had sexual intercourse with a man of a determined *eirruku*, hence the current association of this species with that group. However, as already noted by Simons (1885), the meaning the contemporary Wayú attribute to the association between *eirruku* groups and animal species is little more than an emblematic one.

11. I made the trial and discovered that this etymology is almost always congruent with what is stated in the version of the myth on the origin of *eirruku* published in Spanish by Paz Ipuana (1973). In this version, which reports 36 *eirruku* names, the mention of each name is followed by an indication of the characteristic proper to the people pertaining to the corresponding *eirruku*. To give a few examples which concern the most common *eirruku* names: the name Epieyu, which is glossed « those who come from their own house », is clearly related to *kepia*, « to have and to live in a house »; Epinayu, « those who pound hard on their road », is actually composed from the verb *epina*, « to pound »; Uliana, « the ones with the silent walk », is linked with *ouli*, « foot, footstep »; Ipuana « those who live on the rocks » is linked with *ipa*, « rock »; Pushaina, « the one with the seething blood », is formed from *ashá*, « blood », in all of these cases being *-yu* and *-na* suffixes for the plural.

12. As an example, one can cite the case of the Epieyu, who are often divided in « real » Epieyu, Epieyu Woluwoliyu, Shooliyu, Alapainayu, Wunujunaja. It must also be noted that other times, some

of these second names (Alapaina and Wunujunaja) are rather referred to groups whose « primary » *eirruku* name is Uliana, suggesting that these cases cannot be interpreted only as a result of the segmentation of a larger group. Anyway, I never met with a concept, as it is presented in the myth published by Paz Ipuana (1973), of a systematic aggregation of all the *eirruku* (identified by their name) in phratries.

13. In the case of *oupayu*, Goulet (1981, p. 152) suggests that the main basis for grouping these people into a special terminological category lies in the fact that in Wayú model of social organization they share a condition of « potential successors » to some components of the father's status.

14. The Wayú word for « whole, all » *supüshüwa*, seems clearly to be formed from *apüshi*.

15. Viveiros de Castro (1998) shows how the existence of what he calls « gradients of genealogical or sociopolitical distance », is a common feature of many LSA indigenous kinship terminologies, which is particularly relevant for understanding Amazonian Dravidian systems.

16. Following Lounsbury's typology (1964), Wayú terminology resembles to Crow type I « semi-bifurcated », but it presents some atypical features that cannot be analyzed here. Detailed descriptions of Wayú terminology are provided by Wilbert (1970), Goulet (1981) and Saler (1988).

17. Although published only in 1988, the essay of Saler, where he traces the history of the controversy and proposes his proper point of the view on the whole issue, was actually written in 1979.

18. This also occurs, but only in addressing a person, with people whose *eirruku* name is the same as that of one's own father and grandfather.

19. Not even association with an animal species is considered relevant to the matter, even in those cases of people who bear the same *eirruku* name, but claim to be associated with different animals. Both Simons (1885) and Perrin (1976) deductively interpreted these latter cases as being the result of a process of subdivision of larger « clans ».

20. This explains how, over the course of time a « territory » may frequently come to be associated with a different uterine kin group from that with whom it was associated in the past, which would not be possible if territoriality were defined and acquired by sharing matrilineal ancestry with previous owners. In fact, as seen before, several conditions may bring people to live in a different area from that where their uterine kin have territorial rights. When previous claims on this land by a different uterine kin group do not exist or are already extinguished (as attested by the definitive abandonment of an already existent cemetery), these people can not only establish their own claim to it, but also choose this site to bury his/her bones and those of their closer uterine relatives. In this way, they come to have a separate « territory » from that of their other uterine relatives. For these reasons, even the aforementioned use of kinship terms in addressing and often also in referring to someone who bears the same *eirruku* name, must be simply seen as a form of « courtesy », which is not of social relevance, excepting few limited contexts (for example when asking or giving concession for pasturing animals during transhumance migration).

21. Verdon distinguishes three theoretical models of linking together the descent notion and the group notion: the jural, the cultural and the ideological one. In all of them, « the groups that descent will form either as a rule of group membership, as a rule of behaviour during a process performed by many individuals, or as an ideology, will consequently be "ontologically variable" » (Verdon 1980, p. 38). Verdon sees the reduction of groups to interpersonal behaviour as the root of a theoretical « malaise » which renders comparative and accurate sociological analysis impossible. For this reason, he proposes his own « operational » definition of « descent » and « group », which I sketched above.

22. This instable relationship is probably a result of the particular historical and demographical processes which Wayú population went through during the centuries which followed the Europeans' arrival. However, this remains a conjecture, due to the lack of relevant information in historical sources.

23. So, *sulijele nunuiki* means: « division of a discourse »; *sulijele müichi* is « division of a house ».

24. In both situations, an alternative option is the adoption of the brand mark of one's own father's *eirruku* or of that of the *eirruku* of people in whose territory one is « hosted », but this represents a temporary solution which nevertheless can become definitive when a low status group of *apüshi* decides to change its *eirruku* name too.

25. This can involve raiding cattle as a preventive strategy to debilitate the owners, either for inducing them to negotiate a compensation payment rapidly, or as a first step for undertaking a revenge (*pasalawa*) against them.

26. At this respect, the Wayú are quite similar to another « matrilineal » group of LSA, the Canela, who « explain longhouse genealogical relationship, at least these days, reckoning from ego “up” and “across” through alive or recently dead “sisters” (i.e. parallel cousins) not “up” to and “down” from a common ancestor, link by link » (Crocker 1979, p. 240).

27. Alternatively, an uterine kin group can express its dissociation from those members of it who fight in a feud alongside their non uterine kin, by giving preventive payment compensation to the enemy uterine group of these. Conversely, if these members are injured or killed during the feud, their kin group can claim compensation from the uterine kin group in whose support they intervened.

28. This amount is materially delivered to one elderly prestigious man among them whom they consider as their « chief » (*alaüla*, a term which also means « old person » and « maternal uncle », though actually he might not be the victim’s proper MB, but a more distant uterine kin).

29. This excludes clearly defined « allies » (*eme’juna*) who provide reciprocal support in their respective feuds, or the so-called « accompanying people » (*amajachi*), who serve as « soldiers » for the group which they are tied to by previous subaltern economic or political relationships.

30. We can find an example of this trend in the story, from the 19th Century till the present time, of the feuds concerning two groups of uterine kin, the Uliana and the Jayaliyu, which is narrated by Nemesio Montiel in his historical novel *E’irrukuirra (Linajes)* (Montiel 2002). The two groups are respectively the uterine group and the father’s uterine group of the author, who is Wayú.

31. In his list of kin terms used for address, Goulet (1981, p. 175) reports *ouliwa* as an alternative term which covers all those people who are considered *aikeyu*, but, in agreement with what it is asserted in Jusayu and Olza Zubiri’s dictionaries, all people I worked with denied that the term can refer to any type of non-uterine kin.

32. According to Goulet (1981, p. 175), « all classificatory maternal uncles and sororal nephews and nieces can be also termed as grandfathers and grandsons ». His informants said that in fact MMB can be termed as both *alaüla* (« maternal uncle ») and *atushi* (« grandfather »), and conversely mZDCh can be termed both as *asipü*, (mZch) and *aliin*, (ChCh) (*ibid.*, pp. 182-183).

33. The use of vegetal metaphors for representing kinship relatedness is reported for other LSA indigenous groups, both where concepts of unilineal descent exist, as among the Canela (Crocker 1979) or the Tukano (Hugh-Jones 1979; S. Hugh-Jones 1995) and where it does not, as among the Achuar (Taylor 2001).

34. Indeed, Wilbert (1970) reports *awüliaajuna*, considering it as a sort of connotative term, whose translation would be « the shoot that sprouts at the base of the stem », for *asipü*. Probably, this is an erroneous transcription of *ouliwou*. Alternatively, if the derivation of *ouliwou* is from *oulia*, « plant, crop », it may be another substantive form composed from the same root, as in the verb *awüliirra*: « to become green again », reported by Jusayu and Olza Zubiri (1988, p. 76), who also mention the word (*ibid.*, p. 154) *oule*: « first fruits to ripen ».

35. It is interesting to compare these statements I have collected with what it said in the myth of *eirruku* origin published by Paz Ipuana (1973, p. 197): « the core of the family shall consist of five members, closely represented by your five fingers. Tajapu, the hand, shall represent the common origin of your tribe [*eirruku*]. Soushu tajapu shall correspond to the maternal grandmother, represented by your thumb. Shii tajapu shall correspond to the mother, or your index finger. Sü’läü’la tajapu shall correspond to the maternal uncle, or your middle finger. Süchon tajapu shall correspond to the son, or your ring finger. Süliin tajapu shall correspond to the grandson, or your little finger. Thus the intimate circle of your family shall be: the grandmother, the mother, the maternal uncle, the son (who is also the nephew) and the grandson » (english version in Wilbert *et al.* (eds) 1986, p. 107). The terminological identity between the terms designating the five fingers and the kin terms for « grandmother », « mother », « maternal uncle », « son », « grandson », is partially confirmed by Perrin (1982, p. 23). It must be underlined how the members of the « core of the family » mentioned in this myth correspond

to a genealogical depth of five generations. Furthermore, it can be observed how the term *tashi* (F = FB = FBS = FBDS) – which, unlike those ones mentioned, does not refer to any kind of uterine kin – is not included.

36. In the peninsula, most Wayú settlements look quite scattered, with each house sometimes at a distance of several hundred meters from the next. A few people live in each dwelling, generally related by close links of consanguinity and/or affinity. Surrounding one or a few of such dwellings, there is a kitchen, a poled and roofed space for receiving visitors and holding meetings with more distant relatives, and fenced ranches for goats, sheep and, when owned, cows and horses.

37. Marriage is of course one way through which free allowance is gained. Polygyny, which is still very common (also with women related to each other by close kinship links) is highly valued not only for being a status-marker, but also for this reason. In fact, both transhumance migrations (*oonowa*) and strategies of sharing out one's own flock and herd between different pasturing areas controlled by relatives (not only uterine ones) were (and partly still remain) very common for managing seasonal or prolonged periods of drought as well as other risk factors (for example diseases, robbery or raids, this last practice occurring when people are involved in a dispute and/or a feud) which could determine the loss of animals. Other means for having access to land and its resources are those of giving the owners a payment, called *alewou*, a term which literally means « for the stomach » (that is, for « compensating » feeding of both people and livestock); or being tied to them in a subordinate relationship of domestic, working or military service.

38. Forms of transmission of livestock to consanguine relatives occur not only at a person's death but also during life. These forms include gifts received from birth, and frequently for a woman, the transfer of animals from one or both parents to her when she goes to live elsewhere with her husband. This constitutes a form of endowment to which ethnographers, with the exception of Watson Franke (1987) very rarely paid attention, when analysing the transactions which take place at marriage.

39. Goulet (1981) already stressed this point in his criticism of the analysis of Wayú social organization provided by Watson (1967).

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