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Introduction

- ¹ In this paper I review and compare the main sources of information about the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals (literally: “doing together imitation of the goat”; *ka'ula*: “goat”; *ayawaa*: “to imitate”) among the Wayùu, an Amerindian people inhabiting in the semiarid Guajira peninsula, today politically subdivided among Colombia and Venezuela. These festivals, associated with the horticultural cycle and arrival of first rains, have not been performed anymore in last decades; their staging seem to have become very rare already since the midst of twentieth century, due to several factors of changes occurred in Wayùu economy, society and culture¹.
- ² Previously known in the ethnographic literature as *Guajiros* or *Goajiros*, the Wayùu adopted livestock raising almost just after the beginning, in the sixteenth century, of the Europeans' presence in the areas immediately near to their territory. Historically, the very limited availability of water sources and the same requirements of livestock rearing have always pushed towards the maintenance, inside the peninsula, of a pattern of dispersed settlements (in Wayùu language: *miichi-* or *piichipala*, that is

“group of houses”)². In spite of the growing historical involvement in livestock raising and in trade with nonindigenous people, in many Wayùu settlements horticulture maintained an important place till about the mid-twentieth century.

- 3 In describing and characterizing the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals, the available documentation agrees on a number of points and shows some differences on others³. These festivals were associated with collective work (*yanama*) carried out in the context of horticultural activities, especially those that depend on the arrival of the rains. The performance of these festivals expressed in several ways the importance that the rains have not only for the life of Wayùu people but for that of every living being with whom they share their environment (Perrin 1983; Guerra Curvelo 2019; Simon 2020). Several authors (e.g. Pineda Giraldo 1950) have tried to establish to what extent this performance was intended to “propitiate” or, rather, to “celebrate” the arrival of the rainfalls and their contribution to fertility and the regeneration of all form of life. Furthermore, they link this question to the issue of the ritual, ludic or theatrical character of the festival as a whole, as well as of each of its components.
- 4 In my review, I will focus on those sources that provide original information on these festivals. In two of his writings, dating back to 1898 and 1907, the French explorer Joseph de Brettes, who visited the Guajira peninsula in the last years before 1900⁴, made short references to the *ka'ulayawaa* or, better to say, to some of its components, remarking that they were based on personal observation of several of these feasts. In 1946, the Capuchin missionary José Mackenzie, who had long been director of the indigenous *internado* of Nazareth, in Upper Guajira, gave a rather detailed description, fruit of personal observation, of these festivals in his book “Así es la Guajira” (Mackenzie 1991: 160-164). In 1950, Roberto Pineda Giraldo, who had a professional background in anthropology and had taken part in the Expedition of the Instituto Etnológico Nacional de Colombia in the Guajira peninsula between July and September 1947, devoted a chapter of his essay “Aspectos de la magia en la Guajira” to the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals (Pineda Giraldo 1950: 121-140). However, he makes clear that all information he collected about the festivals came from the accounts given by his Wayùu collaborators and not from direct observation. These sources dating back to before the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals stopped from being performed, cover then a period in time that goes from the end of the nineteenth century to about 1950, a period during which Wayùu society, economy and culture went through very intense changes (Gutiérrez de Pineda 1950; Picon 1983; Rivera 1988).
- 5 Both Perrin (1983) and Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez (2010) have provided new information on the *ka'ulayawaa*, based on the memories of people who took part in them, or that anyway preserved some knowledge about them⁵. In the case of Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez, their study is the result of a project of collaborative research on the present state of horticulture among several Wayùu settlements in Upper Guajira. This research also led them to investigate the link that existed in the past between the horticultural activities and the staging of the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals; in this regard, they relied on the memories of some elderly people. Furthermore, during the field research these latter expressed to the scholars the desire to organize a restaging of the festival. This restaging was then actually carried through in the settlement of Siapana, even if in a context which, as it will be shown, was different for some important aspects from that in which the festival was performed before the midst of twentieth Century⁶. Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez make clear that their

information on the *ka'ulayawaa* comes from the assemblage of their observation of this event with the interviews with old people about «the meaning of the play and its components» (2010: 95).

- 6 Presenting their study, these scholars note how: «the *ka'ulayawaa* ceremonial complex has been practically absent in the anthropological works on the Wayùu, which is surprising and inexplicable when one takes a look at the symbolic richness and the importance it must have had in [their] life half a century ago» (*ivi*: 92).
- 7 Through the review and the comparison of the main sources of information on the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals, my purpose is only to point to some traits on which their descriptions and interpretations differ, and to put forward some hypotheses about the reasons for these discrepancies. I suggest that in some cases they could depend on how the subjectivity of the authors has influenced their descriptions and interpretations of the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals, as well as on the particular conditions under which they had access to them. However, I argue that these differences reflect variations in form, meaning and context of these festivals' staging. These variations are partly due to contingent circumstances linked to the internal flexibility of their structure and "framing", partly to the ways by which these festivals have been reshaped in the course of time by processes of historical change through which the Wayùu "socio-cosmology" and economy have passed through. Obviously, I do not intend to deny that the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals shared many elements in common. Rather, what I want to highlight is simply that any attempt at reconstruction cannot fail to take in account the fact that these festivals have been subject to adaptations and re-elaborations in the course of history.
- 8 Some caution is therefore needed in attempting to provide a "reconstruction" of the form, content and meaning that the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals had during all the time in which they were performed, as if all these dimensions had always remained unchanged. The analysis conducted in the article should be understood as a first preliminary step necessary to undertake an analysis of these festivals from the point of view of the current anthropological debates on the relationship between rituality and playfulness⁷. For the space limits of this paper, here I will try not to go into any theoretical perspective of analysis of this cultural expression. Nevertheless, since all the documentation on the *ka'ulayawaa* highlights the importance of the "playful imitation"⁸ of various aspects of the Wayùu life-world in the different types of performances staged in these festivals, I will accompany my exposition with the necessary references to the "ordinary" cultural meanings given to the actions and situations that were imitated.
- 9 I devote the next section to a short presentation of the horticultural activities among the Wayùu. In the following sections I will review the ethnographic sources about the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals, building at the same time a framework for their comparison. In the concluding section, I expose the results of this comparison, discussing how any reconstruction of the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals for aims of anthropological analysis should take in account not only their commonalities of form, content, meaning but also their aspects of variation, flexibility and adaptability according to the circumstances in the course of history.

Wayùu horticulture and its crisis in historical perspective

- 10 Geographically, the Guajira peninsula is the northernmost part of South America, extending itself inside the Caribbean Sea along an axis SW-NE. Conjunction of climatic and soil conditions, which results in very high levels of evapotranspiration, makes the peninsula an overall semiarid environment, though differences in the type of dominant vegetation and in the average yearly levels of rainfall exist among the various sub-regions. The rainfall seasonal regime plays a fundamental role in shaping livelihood activities and rhythms of Wayùu life, especially concerning horticulture and livestock rearing. Furthermore, rainfalls strongly shape the landscape, which greens after rains and becomes filled with large pools of water and temporary streams, whereas it becomes full of extended patches of cracked bare land when the dry season and times of drought prolongate.
- 11 Both Wayùu and climatologists distinguish two rainy and two dry seasons in the year. A first, “short”, rainy season, called by the Wayùu *Iiwa*, has its peak in April, coinciding with the occulting of the Pleiades (*Iiwa*) after sunset and lasting till May. It follows a long dry season that lasts from June to the end of September/beginning of October. This season is characterized by the blowing of the Eastern wind, which the Wayùu call *Jouktai*, that gives the name to this epoch (*Jouktaleu*). The “long” rainy season generally starts in Mid-September and, according to the Wayùu, has its peak in concomitance with the occulting of the star Arturo (*Jy'ou*: literally “eye of rain”) after sunset in October. This season, called *Juyapu*, generally ends in December, to give way to another dry season that ends by the end of March. This season is relatively cold, being for this reason called *Jemiai* (“cold”) by the Wayùu, and associated with the blowing of the fresh Northeastern wind, *Jepirach* (see Perrin 1983; Cano *et al.* 2010). The relevance of the rains’ regime for the Wayùu is shown by “rain” (*Juyá*) being their name for a year’s period. As Perrin (1983) abundantly documented, *Juyá* is conceived by them as a superhuman personal being, identified as their “father” and as the master of horticulture (*aittie*).
- 12 However, the beforementioned seasonal quadripartition does not make justice to the much more detailed way by which the Wayùu customarily segment the year cycle into shorter periods, each one of which is marked by the fall of a particular kind of rains, and named after the star that occults or reappears after sunset and/or the flowering of a given wild species of plant as well as the reproductive behavior of a wild animal species during such a time (Perrin 1983; Guerra Curvelo 2015; Paz Ipuana 2016a; Simon 2020).
- 13 In general, for the Wayùu rainfalls have ambivalent effects on their lives: on the whole these effects are benefic, given that rainfalls not only permit the growth of cultivars but provide drinking water for human people as well as for livestock and wild animal species. But if excessive, they produce floods, which in turn can provoke the death of livestock, destroy gardens and make impossible the movements throughout the peninsula. The customary migrations of flocks and herds (*o'onowaa*) can so be motivated both by the lack of rains and by their excess. Moreover, lack of rains and droughts are associated with hunger, the growth of malnutrition, dysentery and other sicknesses. On the other side, cold, humidity and the water pools which form after strong rainfalls

create favorable conditions for the spread of mosquitos, flies and other insects that propagate epidemics and illnesses between people and livestock (Paz Ipuana 2016a)⁹.

- 14 Ambivalent conceptions about the rain undoubtedly depends on the high degree of unpredictability and irregularity of the arrival, distribution and intensity of rainfalls in a given year or during a span of more years (Picon 1983; Cano *et al.* 2010). Given the irregularity of seasonal rhythms and of climatic variables, the detailed knowledge that Wayüu have of them played, and in part still play, a fundamental role in decisions on the undertaking of key subsistence activities, as the sowing and the harvest of crops, as well as the pasturing and the transhumance of livestock and, in the coastal zones, sea fishing. Simon (2020) underlines the special habitus of carefulness which characterizes the ways by which they interpret the cues and signals that announce the approach and the end of rainfalls. The relevance that horticultural activities had in many Wayüu settlements until few decades ago did not receive due attention from the early ethnographers, probably because the ownership of livestock was the main mark of wealth and social status among the indigenous population and shaped key social institutions, as bridewealth, payment compensation for offences, and offerings of a banquet (and sometimes of living animals) to the mourning guests during funerary rituals (Goulet 1981; Saler 1988).
- 15 More recent ethnographical studies (Rivera 1988; Cano *et al.* 2010; Paz Ipuana 2016b) have shown that, especially in wetter areas but also in the drier coastal ones, gardens can occupy, still today, an extension of some hectares, where few tens of different crops (varieties of corn and beans, watermelons and pumpkins are generally prominent, but also manioc and millet are frequently found as cultivars), both of alimentary and medical value, are grown. Gardens are generally situated not far from the settlement, but quite distanced from houses and paths; where streams exist, as in the Makuira hills, gardens can be situated quite near them (but not too much, due to the risk of floods) and more distant from the settlement. Sometimes, they can be subdivided in different plots, each of one managed by a nuclear family. Other times, a garden area is on the contrary owned by a nuclear family, this variation also depending on the investment of resources and work by particular people. An area to be cultivated can be also borrowed by the owners to people that for some reason had to migrate from their settlement, but with the condition of not planting and growing trees, because in time this could be generate disputes about possession of the plot; this borrowing is called *o'onowaa*, that is with the same term used for referring both to transhumance and the borrowing of pasturelands (Cano *et al.* 2010: 25-26).
- 16 The rhythms and calendar of horticultural activities are largely a function of the rainfall regime. Initial land clearing is a male activity and, above all in the past, was often carried out through the organization of a collective work (*yanama*) by part of the garden's owner, which compensated the workers with food, fermented *chicha* of corn (*ishiruna*) and, sometimes, through the obligation to reciprocate the work if asked. Before sowing (*apunajaa*), successive weeding (*ajaaralaa*) must be done both by men and women. Gardens (*apain* or *yüja*) are generally fenced, to prevent livestock and other animals to enter and to damage the plantations. Sowing can be done both by men and women and it is carried out after first rains begin to fall both in *Iiwa* and in *Juyapü* wet seasons. However, it is not the starting of rain in itself that is considered to give the signal to sow. More important, in fact, are the expectations that rains will continue to fall. From this point of view, people customarily rely on a number of concomitant

signals, like the cry of the howler monkey (*alaala*), the singing of some birds (as the stone curlew [*karai*], the owl [*monkuluseru*], the turtledove [*wawache*]) or the position of the moon (if it is “seated” at the moment when rainfalls start, they will follow abundant, if it is “bedded”, they will not) or the way the leaves of some wild plants exude (*ivi*: 50-51).

- 17 Cultivars are selected by the time they employ to ripen. In the case of corn, millet and beans, the Wayüu grow two varieties, one (*pejetch*) with a shorter period of ripening (30-40 days) but less productive, the other (*wutsü*) with a longer period of ripening (60-90 days) but much more productive (three times than *pejetch* varieties). The latter ones are sown only at the start of the long *Juyapü* rainy season, and are evidently more exposed to get lost if rains in the following weeks are too scarce or, on the contrary, too abundant. The more common crops, like watermelons and pumpkins, have short cycles of ripening, so they are sown in both the short rainy season of *Iiwa* and in the long rainy season of *Juyapü*. Other cultivars, as the manioc, require longer cycles of maturation, so they can be profitably harvested only if the rains during the *Juyapü* season are well distributed and abundant (*ivi*: 52-53). In order to limit plagues, a second and third weeding (respectively called *ousajaa* and *apokolojoo*) of the garden are carried out when plants reach a highness of about 20 cm and fruits start to develop. Furthermore, during the growth of crops, people watch over the gardens to prevent birds, rabbits, foxes and other small mammals to damage the plants and their fruits (*ivi*: 58-62). For doing these activities, the owner can call workers also from other settlements in order to organize sessions of collective work (*yanama*) which can last for weeks. Harvest (*ashanaa*) is prevalently a female task; as for all other moments of the gardening, both observation of cues in the environment and coming of particular dreams are taken in account for deciding the moment for carrying out it. As said before, though a good harvest is not sufficient to provide food throughout the year, till the recent past it made an important contribution, at least in some parts of the Wayüu territory, to the feeding of the people inhabiting in a rural settlement.
- 18 According to Rivera (1988), the growth of human and livestock population during the last two hundred years resulted in a reduction of savannah and grassland areas in the peninsula. Moreover, by the mid-nineteenth century the Wayüu lost control over several of the more fertile areas situated in the margins of the peninsula, following their occupation by non-indigenous people. In the last hundred years, the growth of several urban centers in these areas made the situation worse, increasing Wayüu's dependence on external food markets, and so discouraging horticulture and, at a lesser extent, livestock raising. The repeated occurring of long periods of drought throughout the twentieth century was another factor in the crisis of both horticulture and livestock economy. The development of oil economy and of a formal and informal labor market in near Venezuela and especially in Maracaibo also concurred to this process.
- 19 At this regard, it is also important to take in account the changes in Wayüu social organization and stratification which occurred between the end of the nineteenth century and the midst of the following century. In the centuries following the arrival of the Europeans, development of livestock raising and of trade with non-indigenous actors caused the rising of new forms of social stratification among the indigenous population, increasingly based on wealth and, particularly, on the ownership of large herds and flocks. This kind of social stratification intertwined in complex ways with a system of sociopolitical bonds in which a strong emphasis on links of uterine

consanguinity coexisted, especially in the case of wealthy and high-status people, with the importance of other kinship and territorial relationships built through marriage alliances (Goulet 1981; Polo Acuña 2012; Mancuso 2020). By the point of view of both sociopolitical affiliations and conflicts, this means that bonds based on kinship and marriage alliance coexisted with more marked hierarchical bonds, as patron-client relationships, and also with the presence of serfdom and slavery.

- 20 These features of Wayùu society, at least between the seventeenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, are also important to consider in regards to the organization of the work related with horticulture and livestock raising, as well as the changes this organization went through the twentieth century. During the first half of this latter century, the custom of wealthy Wayùu families to keep slaves and servants, who were the remains of the families defeated in a war feud or – in the case of servants – of patron/client relationships, and that were employed both in pastoral and horticultural tasks, metamorphized in a trade managed by Venezuelan people who resold slaves to work in the then developing agricultural haciendas in the Western regions of Venezuela (Gutiérrez de Pineda 1950). For about the half of the twentieth century, slavery and slave trade were repressed, to give way to a large labor market both in the agricultural and in the activities led by the oil industry in Maracaibo which attracted a growing mass of Wayùu from the peninsula. Growing availability of cash among the Wayùu employed by the labor market in Venezuela, as well as their remittances to relatives who had remained to live into the peninsula, permitted to increase the acquisition of most agricultural products (including those, as rice and potatoes, not grown in Wayùu gardens) through buying them in the markets. For all these reasons, the organization of work in horticulture and livestock raising underwent profound transformations in the following decades.
- 21 This enchainment of all these processes of change can be held responsible not only for the strong crisis of horticulture at the midst of twentieth century but also for its enduring character. In any period where prices in the agricultural market increase and labor opportunities decrease (as it is recently happened with the economic crisis in Venezuela), this has meant a higher exposition to risks of malnutrition among large sectors of the rural Wayùu. The same interconnected factors that stayed behind the crisis of horticulture can in part account for the decline and apparent abrupt end of the performances of the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals after 1950.

The link between collective work (*yanama*) in the gardens and the celebration of the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals

- 22 Almost all information on the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals agree in saying that their performance was associated with the gathering of the people who were recruited to carry out work in the gardens, after the arrival of first rains and the apparition of first fruits¹⁰. Mackenzie (1991 [1946]: 160-161) specifies that workers had above all to take care of the weeding of the gardens, to ensure the sowing of short-cycle crops, the further growth of all crops, and the fruits' ripening in the case of continuing rains; Cano, Van der Hammen, Arbeláez (2010: 99) add that people could also participate in the harvest. Whereas the initiative of performing the *ka'ulayawaa*, as well as its sponsoring, was the task of the owners of gardens as well as of herds and flocks, people

who acted in it as players and dancers were mainly the workers, with an audience which comprised both part of the latter and inhabitants of the settlements nearby the place in which the festival took place. Sometimes, as in one case referred by de Brettes (1898, in Niño Vargas 2017: 283), the sponsor was one single rich man; but other times several owners of different gardens close to each other agreed to share sponsorship. Sponsorship involved the offer of food (as corn buns and also meat) and beverages (including alcoholic ones, as *ishiruna*, that is fermented beverage of corn) to the workers, as well as to the participants to the festival; de Brettes (1898, in Niño Vargas 2017: 284) refers, rather vaguely, to a “salary” for one of the feasts he attended. No source provides information about if work in the gardens caused discontents and remonstrances, but both De Brettes (*ibidem*) and Mackenzie (1991 [1946]: 160) argue that the performance of the festival could be an “incentive” which permitted to attract the workers and to put up the work’s hardness during the day, alternating it with moments of “fun” and “amusement” after the daily working.

- 23 The *ka'ulayawaa* lasted till the end of collective works in the gardens; the daytime, from dawn to sunset, was devoted to this work, whereas the evening and first hours of the night (between before midnight and two a.m.) were devoted to the feast. Mackenzie (1991: 161) explains that the workers, after having finished the cleaning of a plot of one owner, moved to that of another to undertake the same task. The total duration of both collective work and of the feasts depended in turn on a number of factors. Continuities and discontinuities in the rainfalls were one of them (Cano *et al.* 2010: 96). Pineda Giraldo (1950: 122) says that a *ka'ulayawaa* festival could last throughout the rainy season, that is from some weeks to a few months, but not necessarily in a continuous way; Mackenzie (1991: 161) speaks of about a month.

Configurations of social and gender relationships

- 24 As noted by Rivera (1988: 101), it is not entirely clear which was the configuration of social relationships between the sponsors both of the collective work (*yanama*) in the gardens and of the *ka'ulayawaa*, the workers and the festivals’ players. By the point of view of hierarchies of social status and wealth, these relationships appear differently configured according to the sources, and one may wonder to what extent this depended on purely circumstantial reasons or on historical changes occurred in the time span that separates the sources of information. De Brettes highlights the difference of status and wealth between the sponsors and the workers, being some of the latter the people that acted as dancers and players in the festivals. In one of his accounts, he describes how the beginning of the dances in the festival did not include the participation of women, who entered the scene only at a later time. Mackenzie (1991: 161) explains that the sponsors invited several rich “heads of a family”, each one of whom provided some of his slaves and servants both to work in the gardens and to act as dancers and players in the festival, but he adds that also other people, especially unmarried women, «maybe in search of marriage» (*ibidem*), were engaged in both activities. In any case, the average number of workers/festival players was generally about of thirty people, of whom half were men and the other half women. A higher number of people attended to the festival as spectators.
- 25 Mackenzie stresses that women of “good family” never took direct part in the festival’s dances, because of their “relaxed” character, which would have bordered on

“lewdness”, both for the direct contact between both sexes and the drunkenness of most participants¹¹. Pineda Giraldo (1950: 122-135) supports Mackenzie’s remarks, particularly in what concerns this point; he adds that the presence of unmarried women (*majayut*) was a stimulus both for the participation of unmarried men in the work in the gardens and in the dances, games and plays in the festival; furthermore, only men participated in those games (as wrestling) which involved displays of physical strength.

- 26 The people with whom Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez (2010: 99) worked gave them a rather different account, in which differences in social status appear not so relevant: the *ka'ulayawaa* festival was generally convoked by an owner of large gardens who had unmarried daughters and nieces; he invited other “heads of family” with their close relatives, including unmarried women, to participate to the feast, with the aim to attract young men, arguably themselves generally unmarried, to work in their gardens. Unmarried people who acted as dancers and players in the feast, formed “couples of partners” (*juluwas*) in dance and in plays, who, at the end of the festival, could decide whether or not to join in marriage.

The opening of the feast in the early sources

- 27 The feast was carried out in a plain field (*pioui*)¹² of about 100-150 meters of length and 50 of width, which had been previously cleaned from weeds, branches and stones (De Brettes 1898 in Niño Vargas 2017: 283; Mackenzie 1991: 161). This collective work (*yanama*) was deemed very important, in order to avoid accidents (such as being injured by a stone or a snake bite) for which the sponsor was held responsible, with the effect, according to the Wayüu custom, of having to pay compensation to the family of the injured person (Montiel Jayaliyu 2001: 38; Cano, Van der Hammen, Arbeláez 2010: 100). Every night, the feast was announced by the play of the drum (*kasha*)¹³ and from the repartition of fermented beverages, especially of corn (*ishiruna*) (Mackenzie 1991: 161)¹⁴.
- 28 All early descriptions agree that the start of the *ka'ulayawaa* was marked by a series of sung dialogues between the “leaders” of the dances which will be performed during of the feast. Two groups of dancers were formed, each of which was headed by its “leader”. We know from subsequent studies that these leaders, in charge of conducting the festival and orchestrating the different performances, were called *jayeachimajachi*, “those who lead the songs (*jayeachi*)” (Guerra Curvelo 2019: 227) and also *eirujali*: “those standing in front of each other” (Barboza, Esis 2017: 19).
- 29 After a signal, the two rows of dancers moved towards each other until they faced each other. At this point, their “leaders” started a sung dialogue, which was a playful imitation and a sort of “parody” of spoken dialogues which among the Wayüu occur at the arrival of guests, in a number of situations of high social relevance. It is no clear to which extent the repertoire of the situations to be imitated in this sung dialogue was restrained, but apparently this latter started by imitating the exchanges of greetings with which the person who holds positions of authority in a settlement welcomes a visitor who has just arrived. De Brettes connotes the content of this sung dialogue as «conventional» and «platitudo» (de Brettes 1907, in Niño Vargas 2007: 537) and reports some examples. The first is a playful imitation of the welcome greetings that take place when the relatives of a deceased person receive the guests for her funeral ceremony¹⁵:

- I knew that your brother (or father or any other relative)¹⁶ died and I come to mourn him.
 - Mourn him; but the rum which I asked to bring here has not still arrived. So, I cannot give you anything to drink.
 - You are a liar. The rum is here, but you alone want to drink it. You must compensate my tears because I came to mourn the dead (he begins to cry).
 - Ok, then take your drink (de Brettes 2017: 283).
- 30 At this point, the first man offered a gourd to the other, who brought it to his lips to discover that it was empty. As de Brettes remarks, in a “normal” situation, that is out of the “frame” of the festival, both the accusation of lying and, particularly, the following deceit, would be understood among the Wayüu people as offences serious enough to produce a backlash. The “offender” then simulated to fear the latter by running away and hiding among the members of his row; the other row then chased him. According to the French explorer, this sequence of sung dialogues followed by such pattern of action was repeated more times. All dialogues and actions were accompanied by laughs and a general atmosphere of cheerfulness both among the dancers and the spectators. Evidently referring to the choreographic aspects of the performances, de Brettes writes that «the spectacle’s physiognomy totally changed when women arrived» (*ibidem*). The women entered into the two lines, alternating with men and holding them by hand. The subject of the dialogues then became a marriage proposal. What changed in the dances were the «figures» formed by the two rows through their movements: they crossed each other, or joined into a unique line, forming «circles, ovals and loops. They made all this with such accuracy that one thinks that is attending a circus play» (*ibidem*).
- 31 The French explorer did not seem to have understood what it is clear in later sources: the imitative character of the dancers’ movements and the forms they composed, as well as the role of the leaders in saying, through their sung dialogues, what the dancers had to imitate.
- 32 In fact, in his other writing on the *ka’ulayawaa* festival, the French explorer gives some other examples of these sung dialogues, but does not make clear if their content was that of the sung dialogue performed before the start of the first dances at the opening of the festival, or that which accompanied the subsequent dances and scenic plays and games. He simply writes that these sung dialogues had to end with an answer like “go and find that”, after which the members of the two rows turned and came back to their starting point. In one case, what was asked to find was something to drink, in other cases the subject of the dialogues was to go and look for a girl who has just finished the period of ritual seclusion to which she must undergo upon reaching puberty, in order to make a marriage proposal to her family¹⁷:
- I fell in love.
 - Is she beautiful?
 - As the dawn.
 - Which is her name?
 - Mekora.
 - Where does she live?
 - Far, in Merunai.
 - Go and find her (de Brettes 1907 in Niño Vargas 2017: 538)¹⁸.
- 33 What can be evinced by such examples is that these dialogues had to somehow end with a formula that allowed the dance movements to start.

- 34 Mackenzie's (1991: 161-163) description of the arrangement of people and of the movements in the dances is for many aspects similar to that of de Brettes. He too mentions that each row was led by a "leader" (*cabecilla* in Mackenzie's text) who acted as a singer and started his lines addressing the "leader" of the other row of dancers imitating the dialogue which takes place when a visitor arrives in a Wayüu settlement. Mackenzie transcribes in Spanish the text of one sung dialogue:

First singer: Brother-in-law (*tané*), I greet you. Why have you come in these lands? I want to help you. Where you come from? It was long ago since the last time I met you. I am glad to see you.

Second singer: My good friend (*walekai*), I come from the Eastern coasts where moaning is heard and I will go on westwards. I have come to find my good friend, and maybe I walked in vain. I need all class of seeds. I took my hard path looking for your help, hearing people that told: "my good friend has got a good harvest".

First singer: Let's walk then, my friend, to skip through these fields, where our cots rocked; and let you rest our joy and peace in them. Let's drink a toast with the gourd which served you as encouragement, to dispel your sadness; and let's go to remember our children's life... (Mackenzie 1991: 162).

- 35 At this stage, one of the two rows of dancers ran away back, in the same time moving aside, toward one of the borders of the dance field, while the other followed it for after returning to its starting position. Then, the first singer addressed again the second one:

First singer: My fellow [*compadre*], you have come to have fun with me. I am alone, as an orphan, without friends. But at your arrival, both of us will treat each other as brothers. Because my brothers are my unique solace. I offer you my sister so that she will be your partner. She is the only woman who gives me company.

Second singer: Let's drink a toast with the gourd which mitigated my sorrows during the hard and boring hours. And in the name of our old friendship, let's play joyfully with our partner, whom you have just entrusted me (*ivi*: 162-163).

- 36 Then, the two rows repeated their running and moving aside to the borders of the dance field and the second singer followed:

I acknowledge your good manners. I follow on westwards, bringing with me your toasts and memories of your old friendship. We'll go to pass more pleasant times, joined with your partner and mine (*ivi*: 163).

- 37 According to Mackenzie, when the first two singers were tired, another couple took their place and continued their sung exchanges. He stresses that, though the songs (*jayeichi*) maintained all the same metrical and melodic structure, the topics and the words were subjected at a relevant degree of improvisation: the lines of the songs referred to «the rainy season, the sowing and the hardness of the work in the gardens» (*ivi*: 161). In short, according to the missionary's account, the sung dialogues began with the imitation of those welcoming a guest, in a context in which references to the good harvests were intertwined with those to matrimonial exchanges. The general situation that was playfully imitated seems to be the common one in many cases of ceremonial feasting among the indigenous societies of the South American lowlands. As Gasson writes, especially in the past, these kinds of ceremonial feasting include

speeches, singing, dancing, and the public consumption of food and alcoholic beverages [...]. Special feasts for harvest, first fish catch, fertility, marriage, mourning, alliance, and war were once widely distributed among the indigenous groups of the area, constituting the most important (if not the only, in many cases) form of public ceremonialism and as well the main social arena in which different villages could meet in a peaceful fashion, thus having a critical role in the constitution of collective identities. Moreover, in some instances those ritual

occasions were opportunities for public display of wealth and political power (Gasson 2003: 179).

- 38 In the case of the *ka'ulayawaa*, the sung dialogues seem to have focused on a playful imitation of those held in situations where the ambivalence of the relations between hosts and guests could virtually lead to tension and conflict. As underlined by Urban (1991: 123-147) in his discussion of the various forms of “ceremonial” discourse in the indigenous societies of South American lowlands, in these situations, marked by several kinds of “social distance” between hosts and guests, multiple forms of “stylized dialogicality” are often used, in which the presence of special formal linguistic as well as paralinguistic devices is aimed to signal that the meaning and value for their relationship of what is said depend more on them than on their referential content¹⁹. The sung dialogues in the *ka'ulayawaa* feasts “played” with the conventions, not only of style and form, but also of content, of the “ceremonial” dialogues between hosts and guests in situations such as a funeral ceremony, a marriage proposal or, even, a ceremony to celebrate the arrival of rains and early harvests. The inclusion in a game and joke setting, or “frame”, was therefore clearly understandable, and at the same time reinforced by the laughter of the dancers and spectators.
- 39 Retrospectively, it could be argued, in accordance with what is summarized by Barboza and Esis (2017), that, in the first parts of the development of the *ka'ulayawaa*, what remained most constant was the following sequence, which they describe above all from the point of view of the choreography of the dances: a) *asakia* (“to greet”): the “leaders” of the rows greeted each other, introducing their own “families”. Movements of the dancers are lateral; b) *asawaa* (“to drink together”): invitation to drink together, followed by an exchange of toasts; c) *talataa* (“to be cheerful”): singers and dancers showed their joy, with dancers hugging each other by the waist and moving around zigzagging, laughing at the same time; d) *jekuleyawaa* (“imitation of the centipede’s movements”): dancers, accompanied by songs, imitated the centipede’s rolling up when it is touched; the rows, moving fast, took first an U-shape and then a spiral shape; sometimes one row encircled the other; e) *ajuluwaa* (“choosing a partner”): the rows of dancers crossed each other and men and women chose who throughout the festival would be their dance partner.
- 40 It is useful to compare this description with some of the information provided by Pineda (1950). As Mackenzie before him, he explains that both the songs and the choice of the acts to be performed in the *ka'ulayawaa* involved both customary transmission and improvisation; particularly in the songs, the former prevailed in the melody whereas the latter in the verbal lines. Pineda adds that some of the songs’ texts dealt with the mockery of other groups, and other ones with seduction and display of manliness. Unfortunately, while he transcribes some short excerpts of them, he does not specify if they were part of dialogues. We can only suppose that this was the case and that the topic with which a song dealt with served to indicate to the dancers which situation had to be imitated through scenic acts and games²⁰.
- 41 Pineda distinguishes two types of dances. In the first one, the rows were composed of several couples of partners formed by a man and a woman. Each couple hugged the other through the belly and, at a signal of the couple that stood ahead, they walked ahead. The man who led the row started then to sing: “lend me your partner so that I travel with her”. At this point, writes Pineda, the first couple turned on, and «the first indio [sic] quit the partner to the second and so, successively, all the row of dancers

does. The dance continues [with the row of dancers] going around and walking till the first female partner returns to her first partner» (1950: 122). In the other kind of dance

each man takes a woman, unmarried for general rule. They hold one another by hand, doing the same with the other couples who take part in the dance. Once clung on so, they all walk in line, neither onwards or backwards, but instead from left to right. Then, always holding one another by hand, they run in circle, keeping as axis the first of the row till they fall lying on the ground, for the impulse caused by the speed of the running. Then they stand up and start again the dance (*ibidem*)²¹.

42 There is not a full correspondence, by the point of view of temporal sequence, between the accounts of Pineda and those of de Brettes and Mackenzie. For the latter two, at the start of the feast, dances involved only men, whereas women took part at a later moment, after the topic of the “dialogues of welcome” between the leaders of the two rows of dancers had shifted to dialogues about a marriage proposal. In Pineda’s report, this differentiation of temporal sequence is not mentioned. Anyway, regarding the form and style of the dances, his report largely coincides with that of the before mentioned authors.

43 In view of the next steps of the analysis conducted in this paper, it is appropriate to dwell on Pineda's considerations on one of the performances of the festival, which he calls “The pardon (or forgiveness) of the serpent” (I translate so “la condón de la serpiente”).

44 In dealing with the *ka'ulayawaa*, the Colombian anthropologist continually intertwines his description with questions such as: to what extent is it a “magic rite of propitiation” of rains or crops, or a “celebration” of the fertility of the cosmos or, instead, an embryonic form of theater? In what way the performances that are staged are comparable to theatrical representations? What does the imitation of the represented situations focus on? Since in many of the performances what seems most important is the demonstration of physical dexterity, to what extent can they be assimilated to competitive games? Based on these conceptual categories, as outlined in the anthropological debates of the time, Pineda tries to interpret and classify each of the performances of the *ka'ulayawaa* of which he offers a description. He leaves at the end the description of the “forgiveness of the serpent”²², as, in his opinion:

it has different characteristics from all the other representations we have described, because it does not constitute a demonstration of skill or strength, nor do teams of opposing players intervene in any sense and, for this same reason, there is no dialogue but only a monologue sung by the leader of the group, followed by all the participants, and in which the facts relating to the snake are told (Pineda Giraldo 1950: 139).

45 In this performance, he writes, a row alternating men and women holding themselves by hand ran with small steps and waving, that is imitating the movements of a snake. All the people conforming the row sang more times the following verses:

I am the serpent. I go crawling. I do not hurt anybody. But if someone dares to step on me because I stand on the ground, then I will punish him: I will bite and cripple him. Sometimes I will kill him. I will leave him in the hammock suffering for a long time because he stepped on me, thinking that I was defenseless only because I crawl my body on the ground” (*ivi*: 140).

46 Although briefly, Pineda notes the symbolic associations, documented elsewhere in his study (1950: 60-61), that the Wayuu he had worked with did between the snake and difficult pregnancies and births, as well as miscarriages. These symbolic associations can in turn be related to those documented by Perrin (1983, 2001) between the snakes

and *Pulowi*, a superhuman female entity, which for the Wayùu is the mistress of the wild world. As such, *Pulowi* is an ambivalent figure in many ways: she can allow a good success in the capture of game and seafood, but she also punishes excessive hunters and fishermen with disease and death. Snakes are considered both one of the forms that she can take and a kind of living beings that depend on her. She (they, in fact, since *Pulowi* is considered a plural principle that has many manifestations) is also believed to be the wife of *Juyá*, “Rain”, to whom she is linked by a relationship at the same time of complementarity and of contrast, equated to that which frequently occurs between husband and wife among the Wayùu. Finally, “Rain”, as we have seen, is associated, in fact and symbolically, although not without ambivalence, with the fertility and reproduction of the life of the cosmos and, in particular, with that of flocks and horticultural products.

- 47 It could be inferred that, by imitating the snake’s “point of view” (Viveiros de Castro 1998), this performance highlights an unsolvable contrast between this being and the life of the Wayùu, linked, among other things, to the fact that the fertility of the gardens, which allows them not to suffer hunger, often implies the killing of these reptiles, but also the possibility, sooner or later, of being bitten and killed by them, and therefore of their “revenge”. Contrary to the case of other wild animals that enter the gardens or even those that are hunted, the lyrics of this song seem to suggest that the conflict with snakes cannot be resolved by engaging in a fight with them, but only by trying to avoid it.

“Breaking” or “playing with” the ordinary patterns of gender relationships and fecundity?

- 48 All accounts on the *ka'ulayawaa* festival underline the cheerful atmosphere which reigned throughout its duration and the playful character of the different kinds of expressive performances – songs, dances, imitative plays and competitive games – which were staged in it. Their common denominator was the “ludic imitation” of situations, interactions, phenomena which, ordinarily, were, and actually are, matters of high concern for Wayùu people. In this case, the “imitation” was apparently meant as a way of “distancing” themselves by these concerns, at the same time signaling the importance of what was imitated for the life of people (see e.g. Guerra Curvelo 2019: 138).
- 49 According to Mackenzie (1991: 161), the dancers, coordinating and hugging one another, had to imitate through their movements the situation expressed in the song of the “leaders”. He gives several examples of these situations actions or behaviors, some of which only - it is important to note - concern horticulture and good harvests: the fight between the peccary entering in the gardens and the watchdogs; the hungry buzzard; the hunt of sea turtles; the flying snake; a crab; the hunting of little owls (*chochoin*) and parakeets (*jirijir*) which entered in the gardens; the rainfall; the cold weather; a war attack; a dispute on the imprisonment of a not guilty person; a marriage negotiation (*ibidem*). Mackenzie does not describe how the dances “imitated” the situation to be performed, but connotes them as «obscene and vulgar» (*ivi*: 160), because of the physical contact between men and women in the dances. Furthermore, the missionary remarks, as Pineda too, that in these dances, some couples of dancers, formed by a male and a female partner, frequently lost balance and fell to the ground,

dragging with them some of the other dancers, so causing uncontrolled physical contact between them. Though these “accidents” were reason of laughter and part of the “relaxed” atmosphere of the festival, the Capuchin Father did not only see in them the risk of the shifting into lewdness, but also of disputes when someone got harmed, or if the accident was the occasion to force a marriage. He writes that this indeed happened regularly, also due to the frequent drunkenness of all the participants (*ibidem*). For Mackenzie, therefore, the playful atmosphere of the feast did not exclude but rather often led to disputes and conflicts. For this reason, he hoped that these festivals could be replaced by other, “more decent” forms of festive after-work, promoted by the State and the Church.

- 50 However, what more disturbed him was that, from the start of and throughout the *ka'ulayawaa*, unmarried men and women chose a “partner” (*juluwai*) with whom they have to “imitate” a married couple. These partners behaved “as if” they were married not only when acting as players and dancers: they had “to take care” of each other during all the festival; this included the possibility of having pre-marriage sexual relations. This kind of relationship, to which Mackenzie only alludes, is more explicitly exposed by Pineda. Mackenzie, on the other hand, just describes the acts that marked the closing of the festival, called “the ripening of the feast”, which coincided with the end of all the works in the sponsors’ gardens. On this occasion, each sponsor offered a large jar full of fermented corn drink to distribute among the attendees, and a final dance session was performed. On this final night, each man gave a gift to the “leader” of his dance group to give it to the woman who had been his favorite dance partner during the festival, and the latter reciprocated the gift with some other object. After these exchanges, the men challenged each other in competitive games of strength and skill; Mackenzie mentions wrestling (*aapirawa, onojirawaa*) and a game in which they, positioning themselves at a distance from each other, tried to hit each other by throwing a piece of cactus that the other competitor had to avoid (*ainirawaa yosu*). He adds that the unfolding of these games was accompanied by “gloomy chants” for the festival’s conclusion, which referred to the farewell dialogues and exchanges of gifts between the favorite dance partners throughout the festival (*ivi*: 163-164).
- 51 As said, Pineda dwells, more than Mackenzie, on the relaxations of extramarital sexual life during the *ka'ulayawaa*. Highlighting that only unmarried women participated in the dances and that those «of the rich class do not take part to these gatherings» (Pineda 1950: 129), he explains that the couples of “favorite” partners could have sexual relations during the time of the festival. According to Pineda, before the end of the *ka'ulayawaa*, the man could decide whether or not to put forward a marriage proposal; if he did not want, his only obligation was to exchange some little gift with the woman. If a child was born as a result of their intercourse, he was simply affiliated to the woman’s kin group (*ivi*: 123).
- 52 For Pineda, this possibility should be seen in the background of Wayüu marriage customs. Since early ethnographic testimonies on the matter, dating from the second half of the eighteenth century, marriage is legitimated by the delivery of bridewealth, constituted by valued goods (livestock and jewels above all), to the family of the woman; forms of prescriptive marriage are never been recorded by contemporary ethnographers, but it cannot be excluded that they were practiced before the time to which the first detailed ethnographic information on these aspects dates back (Mancuso 2020). The fulfillment of bridewealth payments is essential for the

maintenance and/or establishing of alliance and friendly relationships between the families of the married couple. This is so even when a couple of young people “escapes” from their homes before bridewealth proposals are made or accepted by the families; compensation should follow in any case such an act. Furthermore, virginity at the moment of the marriage is highly valued and sexual intercourse before or outside the marriage is badly seen. Significantly, in “ordinary life”, the unique exception to this pattern were the relationships between a female slave and her masters, which were the product of the disbalance of power between the partners (Gutiérrez de Pineda 1950).

- 53 Pineda (1950: 123-128) remarks that during the *ka'ulayawaa* these rules, which if broken “ordinarily” would have caused serious disputes and conflicts, seemed in part to have been suspended or, as the author puts it, “transgressed” (*ivi*: 127, 130). At the end of the festival, as already mentioned by Mackenzie, the couple of *juluwashi* could decide to proceed to a formal marriage according to the rules, but if they did not want to do so, it was enough they took leave through the exchanging some gifts.
- 54 Not even Pineda, nor any other scholar who has dealt with *ka'ulayawaa*, has addressed the question of why this “transgression” of ordinary customs concerning sexual relations between unmarried persons was allowed in the festival, although it could have enduring important social consequences, such as the birth of children as well as the rupture of bridewealth circuits. Pineda simply argues that there is, in general, a relationship between the festive, almost “carnavalesque” character of the *ka'ulayawaa* festival, and the possibility of “transgressing” social norms, even if, as will be shown better in the following sections, such a possibility seems in fact to have been allowed only partially, both for what concerns the sphere of inter-human relations and for that of the cosmological order. On the other hand, the fact that de Brettes, Mackenzie and Pineda all insist on the low social status of unmarried women who participated in the dances during the festivals they describe does not, in itself, allow us to go further in the search for explanations of this aspect. For reasons of space, in this article I cannot address this problem in more detail and I simply point it out.

“Celebrating” or “propitiating” fecundity?

- 55 As mentioned, Pineda repeatedly wonders to what extent the *ka'ulayawaa* festival should be interpreted as a “ritual” aimed at “propitiating” the fall of the rains or, instead, as a “celebration” of the fecundity the rainfalls bring to all forms of living beings. Ultimately, he argues that the two aspects coexisted. In his view, the festival celebrated:

the recreation of the world of the indigenous people living in these steppe lands: with the arrival of rains, the sea of sand transforms in a world of greenness; the dry beds of streams [become] powerful sources of water; [...] anxiety of thirst disappears; the weariness of sun and desert is substituted by relief; hunger by plentiful, anxiety by the hope of fruits' ripening and the disappearing of the misery's specter which goes around for hills and plains. [...] the dance of the little goat looks like a festival for *propitiating* the rain and, at the same time, for *celebrating* its arrival and fecundity: fruitfulness of the crops, fecundity of the animals [...] and fecundity of human beings freed from all the obstacles that the community imposes on its members in daily life to maintain social order (1950: 127, 130, my emphasis).

- 56 In this sense, he argues that most of the “games” played during the *ka'ulayawaa* referred to the human as well as the non-human beings' fecundity and its control, at the same time expressing the Wayüu people's mixed feelings towards both of them.
- 57 In one of the “games”, which, according to later reports (Cano *et al.*: 113) was called “*julamia*” (that is the name to designate those maidens who, after being passed for the female puberty ritual of seclusion, are recalcitrant to marry), a woman, among the dancers, had to resist, without moving or laughing, to tickling to “prove” their virginity. If she “passed the trial”, the singer praised her virginity, otherwise he said the woman she was not virgin; in both cases, the tone was clearly playful. The play was repeated with more women, separating those who “passed the trial” from those who “succumbed”. Finally, the singer, perhaps imitating a bridewealth delivery, simulated to offer a gift to the “winners”.
- 58 According to Pineda, mixed attitudes towards sexual intercourse were reflected in at least other two “plays” performed during the festival, dealing with sexual behavior of some animals during the rainy season. In “the little male goat”, the players imitated the being in heat and the following courtship among the goats, a behavior whose period is associated with the starting of rains. It is quite remarkable that, although the whole festival takes its name from this performance, Pineda is the first author to describe it; Mackenzie probably avoids doing this precisely because of its direct appeal to attraction and sexual reproduction.
- 59 Pineda describes so the game: a group of players (arguably the same dancers), holding by hand, formed a circle which represented the corral where the goats stay during night. Some other players, presumably women, stayed inside the circle. Outside, other players represented the male goats in heat: they tried to enter into the “corral” but were warded off by the players of the circle. Finally, one or two succeeded in trespassing the circle and imitated the behavior of the male goats which want to mate, stalking and smelling the females and simulating the sexual act. At this point, a singer, interpreting the owner of the herd, arrived and, after having praised in his song the well-being of his flock, took out each “goat” from the corral, simulating to make the cuts that among the Wayüu mark ownership of goats and sheep (cattle is instead marked with iron brands) (Pineda Giraldo 1950: 129)²³.
- 60 Speaking of the “imitation of the little goat” and of another game, “the sea turtle”²⁴ (maybe corresponding to Mackenzie's “the hunt of the sea turtles”), Pineda connotes them not only as proper «theatrical representations», but as competitive games in which the players displayed their qualities of skillfulness and dexterity.
- 61 According to the account collected more recently by Cano *et al.* (2010: 106-113), the *ka'ulayawaa* play was sung and performed already in the opening night of the festival and repeated throughout its duration; even the bleating of the male goats in heat was imitated in the tune and melody by the players. Moreover, there would have been two variations of the play: in the first dance (*epeiawjüshi*) there was only a male dancer simulating the young male goat in heat; in the second one (*epepajaa*), there were several “male goats” (cf. Barboza, Esis 2017: 19-20).

Problematizing the distinction between dances, scenic acts and competitive games

- 62 In describing the common character of the performances staged during the *ka'ulayawaa* festival, Mackenzie (1991: 160-161) speaks of “imitative dances”. De Brettes used the term «pantomime» (de Brettes 1898, in Niño Vargas 2017: 284) and refers to what he saw as a «theatrical representation, spoken as well as performed» (de Brettes 1907, in Niño Vargas 2017: 537). Pineda argues that some caution had to be used in connoting the festival as “theatre”, insofar the players aimed more to show their dexterity in games than their «acting skills» and, moreover, in his view, the festivals were also held to propitiate rainfall and fertility (1950: 121). At the same time, he approaches many of the performances staged during the *ka'ulayawaa* to «theatrical representations» (*ivi*: 123) for the general atmosphere of joyfulness, and because the imitative actions did not explicitly have the aim to produce what was imitated; he sees another reason to considerate the “theatrical”, rather than “ritual”, character of the festival in the distinction between participants/players/dancers, from one hand, and the spectators, from the other hand.
- 63 In short, both him and Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez (2010) connote these performances as “games” or “plays”. Even Perrin evidently relies on Pineda, speaking of «games of theatrical and competitive nature» (1983: 122). As said, Pineda remarks that most of these «representative plays» (1950: 132) involved not only a display of dexterity and physical strength, but also a competition.
- 64 He lists twelve of these games, subdividing them by three kinds of subjects: a) situations regarding the social life of the Wayùu; b) situations referring to cosmological and meteorological phenomena and c) situations in which animals and/or their relationships with Wayùu people are involved. This classification seems to be more the fruit of Pineda's conceptual distinctions than of those drawn by the Wayùu. In fact, as remarked by Guerra Curvelo (2019: 153-154), clear-cut distinctions between “society”, “nature” and “cosmos”, or between human agency and non-human agency, of the kind that prevailed in modern Western thought, remain still today quite foreign to the way of thinking of many unschooled Wayùu.
- 65 In any case, Pineda ascribes to the plays/games related with the first subject “the visit of Upper Guajira to Lower Guajira”, “inter-clans war”, and the “horserace”. The first one seems in effect to be the same whose sung ceremonial dialogue was reported by Mackenzie: in fact, the description of the dances and of the content of the dialogues between the leaders of the two rows are quite similar, with the difference that any reference to the “borrowing” of a woman to the guest is absent.
- 66 Even “inter-clans war”, or “dispute” (*putchi*), had been already mentioned by Mackenzie. In their acted imitation, the players organized into two groups, formed only by men. One member of the first group simulated to kill one member of the second, then running away and taking refuge among his companions. A singer then intoned a song in which it was said that the cause of the murder had been jealousy. At this point, a singer belonging to the victim's group intoned a song in which, after having described the rage of the kin-group of the victim, imitated to submit to the murderer's group the request for a compensation payment. Then, the gathering and the delivery of the payment were simulated. The singer of the victim's group intoned a song in

which the compensation was judged insufficient, and war was declared. In the other group, the singer then told his companions to get ready for receiving the attack. The two singers in effects represented the chiefs of the two groups in war. The fight was imitated with the “warriors” of the two groups who launched each other pieces of cactus, and imitating vocally the hissing sound of the shot arrows and bullets. Who was hit fell to ground, as if he were dead. When cactus “bullets” ended, some women simulated to pick up the dead; the group with lesser “dead” was deemed to be the winner. In short, this play kept together an aspect of fictitious representation, prevailing in the first part, and of competitive game, prevailing in the latter part. It can be added that the launch of pieces of cactus, here performed as imitation of a war battle, is mentioned by other authors (Mackenzie 1991; Cano *et al.* 2010) as a competitive game, which was performed during the opening or the closing of the festival²⁵.

- 67 In another play mentioned by Pineda (1950: 135-136), the dancers in turn praised, in a sung form, the qualities of their horse and then proceeded to a horserace (*suwachira ama*), a competition that among the Wayùu is convened in other occasions, being followed by a lot of spectators in an atmosphere in which gaiety frequently mixes with tension to the point of escalating in disputes and even killings between the horses' owners (López 1990 [1957]).
- 68 It should be noted that in several of the competitive games that Pineda describes, it was just one of the conflicting parties that was expected to win. It is in particular the case of the games associated with phenomena which have a cosmological relevance for the Wayùu. Pineda (1950: 135) mentions two of them which he calls “the fight between the devil and the people [Wayùu]” and “the devil and the cloud”. The choice of the term “devil” is in fact altogether inappropriate; as explained by Pineda himself, the personage performed was a *yoluja*, name given to the specters of the dead, that are considered to attack and to fall sick living people²⁶.
- 69 In the first game, a player, dressed in a black rope, impersonated the specter who attacked and killed a human person. Other players arrived, replacing the latter, till the specter remained killed in a fight against more people. But the *yoluja* came back again, finally killing all the people. In the other game, a group of players put themselves under a blanket, simulating to be inside a cloud or a smoke. A player impersonating the *yoluja* (or the *wanülü*, see the previous footnote) arrived and simulated to attack them, being in the end defeated by the “cloud”²⁷. Pineda himself remarks that these games rework, in a playful register, some fundamental cosmological contrasts in the Wayùu worldview, as the opposition between the dead and the living people, and the opposition between the dead and all that refers to rain (celestial waters) (see Perrin 1983).
- 70 In this sense, the fact that in the first play the *yoluja* finally killed all the Wayùu whereas in the latter the cloud defeats him, reflects quite closely the thought of the Wayùu – as expressed in many customary mythical stories – on the final results of these encounters, when they “really” take place. Through his analysis of customary tales, oneiromancy, concepts of disease, death, and therapeutic practices among the Wayùu, Perrin (1983: 121-122)²⁸ has shown more clearly this cosmological background which informs the “rules” of several the games performed during the *ka'ulayawaa*. He focuses on two of them, which are clearly related with the previous two mentioned by Pineda: “the fight of the *wanülü* with the cloud” and “the fight between the sea and the rain”.

Perrin highlights that in both cases the “team” staging the rain had to win the fight, and saw in this predetermined result the expression of a general principle of Wayüu cosmology: the conflict between *Juyá*, “Rain”, as a bringer of life and fertility, and the beings associated with the side of death and sickness (the sea is one of the privileged habitats of *Pulowi*, the mistress of wild and dangerous places), whose result, as represented in myths and “traditional” tales, is the victory of *Juyá*, “Rain”²⁹.

- 71 This predetermination of the results of the competitive games organized during the *ka'ulayawaa* can be highlighted also in those ones, mentioned by Pineda (1950: 136-139) in which imitation concerned some animal species' behavior, or their conflicts with other animals' species or human people. In “The bees and the thieves of fruits”, the simulated situation was that of some thieves that enter in a garden to steal ripe fruits but are attacked by the bees (of the species called *waya*) that come out from the hives that the owners of the garden had previously collected and put to the entry of the garden with the aim to keep far the intruders. Others of these games also referred to animals which enter in the gardens looking for food, and are driven away by the owners. Pineda mentions: “the hunt of parakeets” (the players formed three groups, the first representing the parakeets, the second representing people who caught them with a net once they enter in the gardens, and a third, composed only by children, representing the crops)³⁰, and “the fox, the rabbit and the watermelon” (two players simulated the two animals who contending a watermelon, represented by a child).
- 72 Other games, as “the jaguar and the dogs”, “the dogs and the peccaries”, “the hunter and the wild pig”, “the hunter, the dog and the rabbit”, imitated instead proper hunting situations. In the former two, the fight between the two animals was simulated by wrestling matches, but in the first “the jaguar” was expected to win, whereas in the second one the winner could be “the dogs” or “the peccaries”. In the other two games, the hunt was represented by a chasing in which the “hunter” tried to hit the “wild pig” by throwing him little stones with a sling³¹.
- 73 As seen before, Pineda argues that the only performance which did not present features associated with “competitive games” was the “snake's dance”, and guesses its complex relationship with the subject of fertility and of horticulture. As argued before, contrary to the cases of other wild animals that enter the gardens or even those that are hunted, this “play” seemed to suggest that the conflict with snakes cannot be resolved by engaging in a fight with them, but only by trying to avoid it.

The references to the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals in Wayüu customary tales

- 74 As seen, Perrin (1983) did not deal extensively with the performances staged during the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals. In effect, more references to the *ka'ulayawaa* in his work can be found in some of the customary stories he recorded, transcribed and translated. In particular, Perrin collected two customary tales, to which he gave the titles “*Epeyüi* and the epidemic” and “The supernatural jaguar and the Goat festival” (Perrin 1980: 132-143, reproduced in Wilbert, Simoneau, Perrin 1986: 549-553). Among the Wayüu, the *epeyüi* is deemed to be a superhuman being whose attitudes mix “human” as well as “jaguar” features. In some customary tales, he kidnaps and brings with him young girls who are still secluded during the ritual of female initiation. For his ambivalent features, the *epeyüi* can be associated both with “Rain” and the shaman (he generally holds

tobacco and offers it to the people who meet him) but also with the *wanüluu*, that is the beings held responsible of producing serious sicknesses and epidemics.

- 75 In the first tale reported by Perrin, he meets a Wayùu, offering him tobacco and instructing him to stay indoor in the following night. The man follows his advice and does not go to a *ka'ulayawaa* festival which takes place in a nearby settlement where the *epeyüi* instead goes, together with his «drunken friends, the *wanüluu*» (*ivi*: 550). During the night the man hears cries, loud voices and drumming, being uncertain if he is or is not dreaming. After dawn, he goes to the settlement and finds in the dance area all people dead, rounded by black vultures. They had «died from the sickness called “lost head”, a headache so violent that it drives people mad» (*ibidem*). This tale seems indirectly to refer to people's experience that the *ka'ulayawaa*, gathering a lot of people, were at times the occasion for the spreading of epidemics³².
- 76 In the second tale, during a *ka'ulayawaa festival* a young Wayùu distinguishes for his strength during the game after which the festival is named. Another young Wayùu, well dressed, approaches him, advising him to participate in the game of the jaguar against the dogs. The young man feels a thrill, because his advisor is actually a *wanüluu epeyüi*:
- The wrestling began in the middle of the night. “Some of the young men will play the jaguars”! said the people. The singers of the festival had a varied repertoire. The other people surrounded them, forming a circle around them. The Guajiro [that is, the young Wayùu] was to play a female jaguar, and the *wanüluu* a male. “Are there any dogs to chase the jaguars?” asked the singers. “Yes, they're there!”. “Well, let a jaguar come forward!”. They began to fight. The Guajiro, the one that came from the west, defeated one after the other. The only one left was the one that the “dogs” had placed in reserve. The Guajiro rested for a moment and then they began to fight. To! The Guajiro fell to the ground and was dragged outside (*ivi*: 552).
- 77 At this point, the *epeyüi* engaged with the “dog” who had won the other players, a fight so furious that the “leaders of the game” ask them to stop, by starting to sing «in a different manner» (*ibidem*). But the two fighters do not desist and so, all other people go home. The *epeyüi* defeats and kills the man, then carrying him off over the shoulders into the savannah, where he dismembers the human fighter into little pieces. People go in search of them, but they find only one man and a jaguar's footprints, so concluding that the former was eaten by the latter. They then ask to the young Wayùu who was the man that had come with him playing the role of the “jaguars”: «“I didn't know him”, he answered. The man he had met was not a human being, he was *epeyüi*, [...], the one who in the old days used to pursue young girls» (*ibidem*).
- 78 I have dealt extensively on these two customary tales because they show an aspect associated with the *ka'ulayawaa* which is not mentioned in the sources I have reviewed until now. In fact, these sources highlight its festive and joyful character, what is not directly contradicted in how the festival is described in these tales, even if in these latter it is as if in the *ka'ulayawaa* too, the “darker side” of Wayùu's “lifeworld” could creep.
- 79 It must be added that references to *ka'ulayawaa* festivals also abounded, till recent times, in Wayùu's mythical accounts referring to cosmogony. In particular, among this people we find a kind of story, widespread in all indigenous South America, which since the review of Metraux (1946) has been called “the twins' myth”, insofar the central subject is a fight between mythical twins of extraordinary birth and powers and primordial jaguars, at the end of which the current order of world and society is established. In most published Wayùu versions of this tale (for example, Paz Ipuana

1972, 2016a; Pimienta 1998), the mother of twins remains pregnant in a *ka'ulayawaa* where most of the dancers are in effect star-people and the players of musical instruments are “human” animals. The cause of the woman’s pregnancy is extraordinary: a cold air or dew which enters in her belly after she had danced with a like-human star-being (as seen before, Wayüu strictly associate stars’ course with periods of rainfall and cold weather). One may wonder if there is any connection between this extraordinary pregnancy in myth and the possibility of sexual intercourse out of marriage during the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals. More generally, in this cosmogonic myth we find the same connection between both human and non-human fertility, on one hand, and the rains, on the other hand, which was celebrated in these festivals.

The “*ka'ulayawaa* spirit”: an open issue

- 80 The sources that I have reviewed so far agree on a number of points. One is the association of the *ka'ulayawaa* festival with the arrival of the rains and the ripening of the first fruits in the gardens and, more generally, with the first signs of a “recreation” of all forms of life in the Wayüu world. Another feature is its concrete link with collective work in the gardens.
- 81 From the point of view of the framing of the actions carried out throughout the duration of the festival into a “playful” dimension, according these sources its opening was announced by the sound of the drum and the distribution of food and drinks. The entry into the field of the dancers can be considered a further step towards the instauration of a festive “frame”. However, it is only with the exchange of toasts between the singers leading the rows of dancers, and its association with a situation parodied and understood as such by the participants, through their laughter, that the festive setting was definitively inaugurated. From this moment on, the “playful” character of all performances was taken for granted. The closing of the festival was also associated, “from the outside of it” (Handelman 2006), with the end of collective work in the gardens. “From its inside”, instead, according to Mackenzie and Pineda, its closing was marked by the farewell and the exchange of little gifts between the dance partners; after this act, people understood that dances and games had to come to an end before the following dawn.
- 82 On the other hand, these reports show that at least some of the actions carried out during the festival could have relevant social consequences even after its closure. The dance partners, the *juluwashi*, could marry or not and, in any case, the result of their relationships during the festival could be a pregnancy. More generally, as Mackenzie observes, subsequent conflicts and disputes could arise from the “incidents” that occurred during the festival; these “incidents”, therefore, could “broke” the festive “frame”.
- 83 However, such a reading of the *ka'ulayawaa* festival needs to be partially reconsidered in the light of the report provided by Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez (2010: 97-125)³³. Whereas their study supports in many respects the accounts provided by previous authors, it differs from them for other aspects, which are of relevance to undertake the analysis of how all the performances of the *ka'ulayawaa* feast were put into specific “frames” (Handelman 2006) which marked distinction from ordinary cultural patterns of behavior.

- 84 In fact, the majority of people, especially the elderly, with whom these scholars worked, constantly underlined one point: the organization, the development and the good outcome of the *ka'ulayawaa* festival, in the past as in its re-enactment, was a *very serious matter* for them. Even the choice of the field in which to hold the festival and its starting date had to be based on the indications derived from the specific dreams occurred to some of the participants, among the sponsors or among the “leaders” of the dances (Cano *et al.*: 98-99).
- 85 The elderly people who had taken responsibility for the convening and organization of the festival insisted that for its good outcome it was essential to first evoke and welcome a “female spiritual being”, the *jaajutka ka'ulayawaa*, “that who take a seat in the *ka'ulayawaa*”, considered to be the “mistress of the festival”. Without this act, she would become enraged, sending «suffering and death to all the attendees, especially the young women, the organizer and the *jayeechi* singers» (*ivi*: 100)³⁴. For this reason, some goats were sacrificed and their blood was shed on the field chosen for carrying out the festival «as a sign of welcome and thanks to the female spirit that would accompany the people for as long as the ceremony lasted» (*ibidem*).
- 86 On the day set for the start of the festival, the elderly man who had taken charge of the organization, that is of being the “host” and the “leader” of the feast, after arriving in the place chosen for the event, made a direct appeal to call anyone who was willing to «accompany him in the song of the little goat» (*ibidem*). The acceptance of this invitation by part of another older man implied that both men shared the responsibility for the evocation of the “spirit of the *ka'ulayawaa*” (*ivi*: 101-102).
- 87 The two men began their sung dialogue with the “guest” who addressed the “host” as his “grandmother”, as if the host impersonated the “spirit”³⁵. In his reply, the second singer, speaking in place of the female spirit, confirmed her arrival, explaining that she was accompanied by *Juyá*, “Rain” and the “old Wayuu” (arguably the spirits of the dead people), and hoping to be honored in an appropriate way, with sumptuous banquets and feasts. In his further reply, the first singer stressed that “they, her grandchildren”, had invited her (requesting her presence) and that her arrival was a reason for welcome.
- 88 In the subsequent rounds of phrases exchanged in the sung dialogue between the two singers, the “grandson” expressed his wish that the “spirit” would continue to bring rain, thus allowing the crops to ripen, while the “grandmother” made it clear that, if the customary rules of the feast were followed, she would guarantee its good outcome. Finally, the singer interpreting the “spirit” accepted the “invitation” upon condition of being well-treated. After that the singers had “evoked” the “*jaajutka ka'ulayawaa*” and it was deemed that she had arrived and was “present”, the two men acted as if they were capturing the superhuman being, enveloping her into a vine. The wrapping was displayed in the field where the festival was performed in the night during all the time of its duration, but nobody was permitted to watch inside it. The female spirit was considered not only attending but also “talking” through the *jayeechi* sung by the leaders of dance and as if herself “leading” all the actions and plays, to guarantee the good course of the festival. During the day, when no play or dance was performed, the wrapping was kept in a little building, near the house of the main organizer of the festival (*ivi*: 101-104)³⁶.
- 89 After this first sung dialogue, the two singers intoned another one, simulating the welcome greetings between a “human” host and a “human” guest; this time the singers

addressed each other as brothers-in-law or, respectively, son and father-in-law, or nephew and uncle. At the end of their dialogue, the singers exchanged a toast, represented by a little piece of wood: it is the act described by all previous sources as that giving start to the dances and the other performances, which began with the “imitation of the goat”, during which each male dancer, imitating the male goat who tries to mate with a female one, chose a woman as his dance partner.

- 90 The *ka'ulayawaa* game was repeated every night during the restaged festival. Furthermore, during all the time of the re-enactment of the festival, several imitative plays and competitive games, of the kind described by previous authors, were performed; their choice was in advance decided every day by the “leaders” of the festival³⁷. In the last night of the festival, a ceremony of farewell to the *jaajutka ka'ulayawaa* took place: as in the opening night, the “coordinator” of the festival addressed her, interpreted by a second singer; a sung short dialogue then took place between the two men. A dance was successively performed. Furthermore, as mentioned by other authors, in this closing night a sort of recapitulation of all dances and plays performed during the festival was enacted, with the adding of a session of customary wrestling and the farewell between the couples of partners of dance with the exchange of little gifts. The closing act of the festival was carried out at dawn, when the wrapping, deemed to contain the spirit of *jaajutka ka'ulayawaa*, was buried³⁸. After that, a sacrifice of a cow was done and meat distributed, together with other food and, this time, alcoholic beverages. Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez (*ivi*: 122) write that, leaving the site of the burying, people commented that they would have not celebrated another festival, for fear of disturbing the “spirit”, till when she would appear in dreams to some of them. They add that during all the time of the festival several people made dreams in which specters (*yolujá*) appeared them asking for offers of *chirrinchi* (homemade aguardiente) or recommending that “leaders” of the dances wore the headdress with feathers (*karatsü*) used customarily by male dancers.
- 91 Previous sources make no reference to the relevance of the spirit *jaajutka ka'ulayawaa* during all the festival, and particularly at its opening as well closing. More generally, they do not mention any discourse on the intervention of “superhuman” beings during the festival, rather concentrating on its relaxed and cheerful atmosphere, even if not excluding that it could generate accidents and subsequent interpersonal tensions and conflicts. However, the reference to the importance of a female superhuman spirit for the good outcome of the *ka'ulayawaa* festival is also found in the family history, though partially fictionalized, written by the Wayuu anthropologist Nemesio Montiel Jayaliyu (2001). Telling of a *ka'ulayawaa* hosted by his ancestors in about 1850, Montiel writes that, at the beginning of the festival, after the call of the drum, the leader of the hosts' row presented himself as “the female goddess [*sic*] of the *ka'ulayawaa*”, and addressed the leader of the guests' row, welcoming and calling him *tachonne* (“my son”). The leader of the guests' row answered addressing the first as *maache* (“mother” or “grandmother”), implicitly acknowledging that he was addressed by the female “spirit”. Subsequently, the two singers, addressing this time each other as “my friend” (*tatunajut*), engaged in a ceremonial dialogue focused, with minor variations, on the same subjects mentioned by de Brettes and Mackenzie. Even in the closing night, according to Montiel, the farewell ceremony involved not only the partners of dance: in fact, the leaders of the row of dancers addressed again the female “spirit” of the *ka'ulayawaa*, saying her goodbye; he adds that the very closing act of the festival was the burial of a clay pot containing fermented *chicha* (*ujot*, beverage of corn) and

“representing” her or, alternatively, its breaking by throwing the pot against a tree trunk (*ivi*: 36-41). In short, though the account of Montiel differs from that of Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez in one important respect – it is the host of the feast that takes the part of the “spirit of the festival” – the two converge for everything else.

- 92 There is another point on which these two reports are similar, and different from those previously reviewed. In both cases, the two reports highlight the difference between the role of hosts and guests in the festival, but this does not seem related to the fact that the sponsor of the latter, as well as his family, kept away from participating as actors, and not only as spectators, of the dances and other performances. Montiel (*ibidem*), whose ancestors belonged to families of high social status, tells how one of them was the organizer of the festival he describes, in which many of this man’s close relatives took part in the dances; as said before, the same is suggested in the description of Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez, where there is no reference to the difference in social status between sponsors, actors and spectators of the *ka'ulayawaa*.

Concluding remarks

- 93 In this paper, I reviewed and compared the main ethnographic sources of information on the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals among the Wayùu. For their peculiar mix of songs, dances, plays and games, inserted into a same festive framework, these festivals are particularly interesting to be studied as expressive metacommentaries (Turner 1982) of Wayùu social structures, cultural values and worldview. Nevertheless, they have not so far been the subject of a specific anthropological analysis, also because they ceased to be celebrated around the middle of the twentieth century, that is, before the beginning of the first professional ethnographic studies on this population.
- 94 Any attempt of “reconstruction” of the form, meaning and context the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals, and, of their place in the Wayùu “socio-cosmology” must take in account not only the convergences and the divergences in the descriptions present in the ethnographic documentation available, but also, and above all, the continuous processes of change that have affected the Wayùu, at least in the last five centuries and, with an accelerated pace, in the last hundred years, and to which their sociocultural forms dynamically adapted.
- 95 Through my review, I focused on some aspects of difference in the sources of information about the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals which, in my opinion, though partly due to the observers’ different gaze, are the result both of their internal flexibility and of changes in the external historical context. I argue that the discrepancies in the historical and ethnographic sources with respect to the description of the status hierarchies and the gender relations between the different actors (sponsors, dancers/players, spectators) who took part in these festivals are probably due to changes that have occurred over time both in the interweaving of social and gender stratification models in the Wayùu population, and in this people’s subsistence economy, particularly regarding the organization of work linked to horticulture. The distinctions between hosts and guests, common to many festive and ceremonial forms throughout the indigenous peoples of Lowland South America, appear in this case intertwined and overlapping with the variable relationships between the organizers of the festivals and those who carried out the collective works in the gardens, to which the celebration of the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals appear constantly connected. Furthermore, in some of these

festivals the distinction between the gardens' owners and the workers almost totally overlaps with that between sponsors, spectators and actors of the dances and other performances that were staged, whereas in other ones this overlap appears much less marked. A similar consideration can be made with respect to the social status of the women who participated in the *ka'ulayawaa* dances.

- 96 Most historical and ethnographic sources argued that in the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals “theatrical” expressiveness prevailed over symbolic efficacy, and cheerfulness and jest over seriousness. However, as suggested by both Pineda and Perrin, there are very strict and complex relationships between this “festive” and “playful” character of the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals and a series of fundamental cosmological oppositions of the Wayuu's worldview, as described in the ethnographic studies of these, as of other anthropologists (e.g. Goulet 1981; Simon 2020). From the analysis that I have conducted, it can be said that the imitative and competitive games performed during the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals conformed and, at the same time, “played” with, these socio-cosmological oppositions and the order that they imply. This argument is reinforced by the most recent historical and ethnographical sources, which highlight how the success of the festival was perceived and considered among many Wayuu people as a “serious matter” and a source of concern and care on the part of all participants, especially the organizers, to the point of requiring prior intervention and approval of superhuman entities. As explained at the beginning, it is appropriate to take in account the coexistence of these traits in the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals in view of their possible analysis from the point of view of current theoretical reflections in anthropology on the relationship between rituality, playfulness and cosmology.

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NOTES

1. Rivera (1988: 107) reports that in the Makuira hills, where horticulture is more developed and garden are larger, the last *ka'ulayawaa* was performed in 1977. However, the people with whom Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez (2010: 97-99) worked, told them that in the area where they lived, which is itself situated in the Makuira hills, the last *ka'ulayawaa* had been staged in 1955. Among the causes for having definitely left these festivals' performance, they pointed to a long period of droughts during the following years, to the development of migrations in Venezuela and also to a strong war involving several kinship groups inhabiting in the area. The researchers add to these causes the negative attitude of Capuchin Fathers whose *internados* (colleges associated with missionary schools) received during this and the following decades a growing number of children who were prevented, for as long as they were hosted in these institutions, even after reaching adolescence, to take part in such festivals. Perrin (1983: 122) mentions «the change in economic practices brought about by the development of the markets in the border regions» as one of the reasons that led to not celebrating the festival anymore. All these changes contributed to the loss of importance of horticultural activities, with which the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals were associated. In this paper, I highlight the enchainment of these changes with the deep transformations, in the same period, of previous patterns of sociopolitical stratification in the Wayüu population, which had strong repercussions in the organization of work associated with horticulture and livestock raising.

2. Dwellings are quite distanced, though it is common to find close relatives - especially uterine siblings - living in houses which are relatively close each other. However, already in the twentieth century, Wayüu rural population showed density rates for km² that were sensibly higher with respect to those found among other groups inhabiting in semiarid environments (Picon 1983). According to the more recent estimates (Alarcón 2018), Wayüu population is approximately 600,000 persons. Ethnographers who carried out field research between 1970 and 1980, reported a population of no more than 100-120 thousand people (Picon 1983: 65; Saler 1988: 33). The Wayüu, then, seem to have experienced a demographic explosion during the last forty years. Today, a good part of them live, permanently or temporarily, in or near urban centers as Maracaibo, Riohacha, Maicao and Uribia (the latter two were founded in recent times, respectively in 1927 and 1935), situated at the borders of the peninsula. However, an equally important portion of Wayüu population continues still today living in a lot of settlements, dispersed throughout the peninsula. Here, most settlements count few tens of people, with only some reaching more than 200.

3. I carried out field research among several rural Wayüu settlements in Colombian Guajira between 2000 and 2005, for a total of about 24 months spent in the field. Though the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals were not among my main subject of research, the people with whom I worked gave me some references to them, but these do not add new relevant information to that which is contained in the sources I will review in the article.

4. De Brettes' writings on the Wayüu were originally published on journals like "Le Tour de Monde" and "Journal des Voyages et des Aventures". He accompanied his descriptions of the *ka'ulayawaa* with two painted designs of the dances (now in Niño Vargas 2017: 270, 538). For more information about de Brettes and his travels in Northern Colombia, see Niño Vargas (2017).

5. For a review of the multiples epistemological issues related with the use of personal memories as the only source for "reconstructing" the past of something, see e.g. Di Pasquale 2018.

6. During the last thirty years, other efforts and works aimed to give a “re-presentation” of the *ka'ulayawaa* festival, particularly focused on the restaging of its choreographic components, have been made on impulse of several sectors of Wayùu people – scholars, indigenous leaders and organizations, students’ associations, theatre companies – and of supporting State and NGO’s institutions (Barboza, Esis 2017; Mächler Tobar 2022). I cannot deal here with the very complex issues related with these interesting recent experiences of recovery and re-creation (Guerra Curvelo 2019: 139-140) of this and other forms of Wayùu cultural expression.

7. As pointed out by Kapferer (2004), these debates were in many ways set in motion by the work of Victor Turner (e.g. 1982). In his recent work on several collective rituals among the indigenous peoples of Amazonia, Fausto remarks that the borders between ritual and play, seriousness and joke, figurative and literal imitation, can often be uncertain and shifting. He argues for the necessity to explore better «the common thread that traverses games, fantasy, fiction, art, and ritual. This thread implies two things: first, that the truth regime is of a different order to the kind prevailing in ordinary contexts; second, that the actors are normally capable of distinguishing between situations inside and outside [their] frame. [...] The seriousness of games – especially certain rituals – resides in the fact that they produce more than an “as if” state. The latter is just a frame-setting message, which establishes a state of uncertainty, in which the fusion of image and prototype can be set off, even if only for a fleeting instant» (Fausto 2020: 19). Fausto also highlights the need to investigate the connections between “truth regimes” and notions of irony and deceptions, in different cosmologies (2020: 26). See also Handelman’s (e.g. 2006) attempt to rethink the notions of “metacommunicative frame” and “keying”, developed by Bateson and Goffmann, in order to underline the dynamic relationships between “ritual” and “play”.

8. Here I use the term “playful” in Sutton-Smith’s (1997) sense, as resumed by Handelman: «the playful plays with the very framing of play itself, one can add that the playful is a mood, an attitude, that may permeate both serious reality and play, or that suddenly may surge into presence within the mundane» (Handelman 2001: 11504).

9. Perrin (1983) argued, maybe in a too static way, that for the Wayùu the rain, both as an atmospheric phenomenon and as a cosmological personal being, would be conceived as a sort of principle associated with the generation of life and well-being. Nonetheless, he admitted that, in some customary tales, this preponderant image is replaced with one in which “Rain” collects lives in order to compensate an offence committed against other superhuman beings.

10. The Wayùu calls *e'mira* any form of collective ceremony during which food and beverages are offered. The term is very probably related with *emi'ja*, “to play”, “game”. For suggesting the interest of further comparative and ethnohistorical exploration, suffice to say that, as noted by Gasson (2003), most early colonial sources about the indigenous peoples of the Llanos region (some of which, like the Caquetío and the Achagua were at the time of the arrival of Europeans neighbors of the ancestors of contemporary Wayùu) report that *mirray* was the name they gave to all ceremonial feasting. In Wayùu language, *e'mira* is probably related with *emetushi*, which means “sweet”, “savory”, which in turn is clearly related with the Lokono Arawak (one of the Northern Arawakan languages which presents more lexical affinity with the Wayùu language”) root *seme/i* which is found in words relating to sweetness and that, according to Oliver (2009: 59), will also connote the proper meaning of the term *cemi*, given by ancient Taino to a large class of carved figures which, like the *wala* of the Wayùu (see below), were deemed endowed with great power that they transmitted to the caciques who held them. According to Gasson, the proper meaning of *mirray* among the indigenous peoples of the Llanos in the 16-17th Centuries derived instead from the Achagua verb *numerraidary*, to “talk”, and referred first of all to «a long ceremonial speech that was sung or recited in a low, fast and continuous tone» (2003: 183). He adds that «during the *mirray*, [guests] were addressed with kinship terms and abundantly provided with food and alcoholic beverages. All kinds of important matters, including

community problems, news, myths, and historical information were discussed. [...] *Mirray* feasts were critical to the constitution of the society. Missionaries, well aware of this, devoted special attention to eradicate them, accusing the Indians of alcoholism and sexual excesses. Another important function of *mirray* was the display of power and prestige, including the honoring of the dead and diachronic exchange with the ancestors» (ivi: 183-185). Indeed, among the Caquetíos, once close neighbors of the Wayùu, *mirray* were associated with the funerary rituals of people of high status, during which the body of the dead person was burned and, as today it is the case with Yanomami people, the ashes consumed mixing them with beverages.

11. He opposes the character of the dances performed during the *ka'ulayawaa* to the “chastity” of the more known *yonna* dances. In these dances, accompanied only by drumming, the woman, imitating with her steps the movements of an animal, gaits toward the male dancer, who have to retrocede without falling and being touched by her; if he falls or gets tired another male dancer substitutes him. *Yonna* dances can differ for the kind of dance steps and moves, each one imitating the steps of a particular species, especially birds or insects (see Paz Ipuana 2016b: 294-320). These dances are still today performed when a new shaman (*outshi*) is publicly acknowledged to have finished his/her training; at the end of a shamanic cure or of a female puberty ritual of reclusion or of the building of a new house (and, today, in a simplified and standardized form, for tourists).

12. Not only De Brettes but also Mackenzie and Pineda Giraldo rarely report Wayùu terms. When these authors do not mention them, I added them, using as main references Cano, Van der Hammen, Arbeláez (2010), my own fieldnotes, and Barboza, Esis (2017). The latter is a study based on a research work of the authors with a group of Wayùu students at the University of Zulia (Maracaibo) belonging to the dance group *Ka'ulayawaa*. As its name shows, the revival of the choreographic aspects of the festival occupies a central place in the group's performances. This revival is part of the group's research and reflection on the relationship between the cultural heritage and today's ethnic identity of the Wayùu. In their article, Barboza and Esis, on the basis of the interviews with some members of the group and, presumably, of the observation of their performances, provide a lot of useful information on the terms that in the Wayùu language are given to each of the staged actions.

13. As its name, of Spanish derivation, seem to suggest, the drum was possibly introduced with the arrival of early European colons and African slaves, but the point deserves further investigation. Among the Wayùu, we find other musical instruments, among which the *taliray* (a string instrument), various wind instruments (as the *sawawa*, the *maasi*, the *wootoroy*, the *wawai*), idiophones (the *maraca*, *eisira*, and the jew's harp, *trompa*). No one of these is today played in the occasion of *yonna* dances (Paz Ipuana 2016b), and no reference to them is found in the reports of the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals. Nevertheless, at least in a mythical story collected by Paz Ipuana (1972), a Wayùu scholar, in which one narrative sequence is devoted to the celebration of a *ka'ulayawaa*, the attendants are said to listen also to the sounds of *taliray* and wind instruments (in Wilbert, Simoneau, Perrin 1986: 270). See Vílchez Faría (2003) for a description of these musical instruments and their contexts of use.

14. Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez (2010: 108-109) report that during the recent restaging (2006-2007) of the *ka'ulayawaa* in Siapana, people agreed that alcoholic beverages should be consumed only in the day of closing of the festival, in order to avoid accidents and insurgence of disputes, especially those deriving from drunkenness, that, according to one elder, could make male dancers behave “inappropriately” with girls. This decision was presented as respecting the “old customs” of the feast, what partially appears in contrast with what is told in previous sources.

15. Today, funeral ceremonies are the most important collective rituals for the Wayùu. A first burial is carried out immediately after the death of a person. A second and definitive burial is carried out some years later, when the bones are exhumed and again buried in the cemetery of

the uterine kinship group. In these occasions, a lot of people are invited to mourn the dead person, and the latter's close relatives offer them beverages and large amounts of meat. In fact, most of the livestock of the dead and of his/her close family is slaughtered, and it was customarily believed that it would follow the dead in the afterworld. These funerary rituals, which can last for several days in the case of a dead of high social status, are the occasion to summon not only his/her kin group but also allies and friends, thus consolidating bonds of reciprocity as well hierarchy (see Goulet 1981). At the same time, the gatherings of a lot of people during funerary rituals, joining with consumption of alcoholic drinks which take place during them, can be the occasion for relighting animosities which can sometimes in turn burst in violence and hurting; if the hosts or, more frequently, some of the guests are involved in a feud, they can fear an assault carried by the enemy group. For this reason, it is common that several men attend burial ceremonies bringing and displaying their weapons. It is interesting to underline that the end of a burial ceremony, especially in the case of a dead belonging to a family of high status, is marked by a target shooting to which several men take part. This target shooting is considered aiming to keep off the cemetery the harmful spirits of the dead (*yolujá*) (Goulet 1981: 326-327). The array of emotional states and expected behavior displayed at burial ceremonies is then varied, depending both on the relationship of the participant with the dead and the phase of the ceremony. All people are expected to mourn the dead, especially when the corpse is to be buried or, in second funerals, where the bones are dug up and buried again. The person who carries out these acts must follow a series of ritual precautions during all the phases of the ceremony, to avoid sickness; closer relatives are expected not to eat the meat of the slaughtered animals. But, especially concerning the guests, out of the phase in which the material operations of burial/de-burial are carried out, people maintain relaxed and even playful attitudes and behaviors.

16. De Brettes notation.

17. On the puberty ritual of seclusion of Wayùu girls, see Mazzoldi (2004). As said, a feast is held when the girl finishes the period of reclusion in a hut during which she can be seen and visited only by her older close female relatives. People coming from different settlements are often invited to assist to this event, and *yonna* dances are performed. Sometimes, marriage proposals are made in this circumstance; at other times, they are advanced later, not long after.

18. Some years before de Brettes, another French voyager, Candelier made a brief reference to what he called the "goat dance", distinguishing it from the *yonna* dance: «It is a fictitious love declaration. By expressive gestures, the man shows to the woman how he is entirely caught by her. I do not want to describe anymore its realism. The dancers are graceful and gentle» (Candelier 1893: 263).

19. Among the Wayùu, "stylized dialogicality and interpretability" (Urban 1991) are features which characterize dialogues that occur in the context of the initial exchange of greetings between a visitor and the host, as well a proposal of marriage, the latter generally presented by an intermediary (*maunai*) between the people who make the proposal and those who receive it. In the imitation of such dialogues in the *ka'ulayawaa* festival, both their sung form and the extralinguistic context acts as a metacommunicative signal that point out their inclusion in a different "framing" of meaning.

20. Pineda argues that the songs were intended as jokes in which some supposed defects of other groups were underlined, and for supporting his argument, reports the verses of some of them: «I don't like riohacheros [the non-indigenous inhabitants of the town of Riohacha, at the Colombian border of the Wayùu's territory] because they like smoking tobacco. I don't like the inhabitants of Nazareth [indigenous settlement of Upper Guajira which developed in the neighborhood of the Capuchin Mission, founded at the start of the twentieth century], because they are very gluttonous»; «they see my sister. They see my wife. I am macho. Don't look at him, at this youngster. Walk straight and right. I am here. I am the macho. I bring with me the rifle. You are

very handsome, my love. Wish I take a Wayùu woman as wife! I can pay her because I am rich» (1950: 124). It could in fact be hypothesized that this kind of texts, in which the constant is an opposition between oneself and some other, was functional to the introduction of scenic acts and games in which a situation of potential antagonism was imitated in a “playful” way by the subdivision of the dancers and players in two or more groups.

21. Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez (2010: 114) describe with some detail only one type of dance, called *jayulawa* (“hugged”), where two rows of dancers hugged each other by putting arms on the shoulders of the closest two; in each row a man alternated with a woman, being that on the man’s right his “true” partner (*juluwa*). During the dance, the “leaders”, singing *jayeechi* whose main subjects were the praise of the loved woman, made each dancer change of partner until coming back to the initial arrangement of the couples.

22. Maybe, this performance – in which not even the “ludic” or “playful” aspects are evident – corresponds to what Mackenzie, without giving other details, calls “the flying snake” (1991: 161); it also recalls the “imitation of the centipede”, mentioned by Barboza and Esis (2017: 19) as one of the starting plays of the *ka'ulayawaa*.

23. This description of the game of the “imitation of the goat” presents some similarities with the description of the *tura* festival, which was still celebrated in early twentieth century among the then few surviving Ayomanes of Western Venezuela when corn grains ripened. Among the acts performed in such circumstance, Jahn (1927: 242-245) mentions a dance, called itself *tura*, from the name of the flutes played for the occasion, in which men and women hugged each other by positing the hand on the shoulders of the next dancers, forming a circle. Two flute’s players placed inside the circle together with a man which imitated a deer, blowing inside the foramen magnum of a skull of deer, and jumped on the dancers, imitating a deer which tries to escape to the hunters by attempting to hurt them with the horns. At the rhythm and music of the flutes, the dancers sung and huddled, as if they wanted to prevent the escape of the animal. Jahn underlines that the environment in which the Ayomanes lived was poor of water and that the aim of the feast and of the dance was to propitiate the ripening of crops.

24. Even in “the sea turtle”, the singer spoke of the going in heat and the mating of these animals during the rainy season; one row of players, holding each one by the belly, simulated the turtles’ sexual act whereas the players of the other row had to separate them; the “turtle” that was detached passed to the other row and, on the contrary, if it was not detached, the player who had tried to do it, was “caught” by the other row. The play ended when one of the two rows absorbed all the members of the other one, so winning the game (Pineda 1950: 125).

25. Among the Wayùu, when a serious conflict raises, for example in the case of a murder, there are two options to deal with it. One option is to deliver compensation payments to the group of the victim. If this compensation is not accepted, a war bursts out between the matrilineal group of the victim and the matrilineal group of the murderer, each of one can have other allies (see Guerra Curvelo 2002). These wars could last many years and are still today relatively frequent. Looking at the strong implication that they have for the life of the members of the groups in fight, Saler (1988: 116), referring to Turner, assimilated their development to intense “social dramas”.

26. Most Wayùu often use in interchangeable way the terms *yoluja*, “shadow, specter of a dead” and *wanülü*, which refers to a class of specters which hunt people but at the same time to the spirits which help the shaman in curing a sick person. In other occasions, they distinguish them as two distinct classes of nonhuman and nonanimal beings. See Perrin (1983, 2001).

27. In both cases, these plays presumably correspond to those that Mackenzie (1991) called “the rainfall” and “the cold weather”.

28. Perrin, who carried out most of his fieldwork between 1969 and 1975, devotes to the *ka'ulayawaa* less than a page, after having spoken of a «rain ritual» connected with conjuring rainfall, during which people filled the holes dug out by the *ayalamuna* iguanids (Perrin 1983:

120). As Mackenzie (1991: 116) reported too, these animals, whose skin's reflections produce a kind of lightning during nights, are considered to detain rain from falling; filling the holes where they refuge with earth or stones is deemed to neutralize their "power". Festivals with distribution of food and dances were held when this action was carried out. For an exhaustive review of rituals and ceremonies for conjuring or, on the contrary, keeping far rain and wind in Lowland Indigenous South America, see Wilbert (1996).

29. The conflict between opposed principles or personified beings, as *Juya* and *Pulowi*, or also between *Maleiwa*, a sort of cultural hero, and the sea woman (*Palaa*), is abundantly represented in Wayùu customary tales and cosmogonic myths. See Perrin (1983); Guerra Curvelo (2015); Mancuso (2010, 2011); Simon (2020).

30. This game was mentioned also by Mackenzie (1991: 161).

31. These games can be compared with Mackenzie's (1991: 161) "fight between the peccary and the watchdogs", even if in the latter the hunt was staged as if it happened because the wild pig had broken into a garden.

32. Perrin (*ibidem*) argues that the sickness described in the story could be *encephalitis equina*.

33. As said before, the research of these scholars, which included the collecting of new information on these festivals, brought to an "experiment" of restaging, following the request of the Wayùu people with whom they worked. The restaging was carried out according to the instructions given by some elders who had took part, more than fifty years before, to some of these festivals before their complete decline. The festival took place in the settlement of Siapana, in the Makuira hills, and lasted a month (from the December 9th of 2006 to January 9th of 2007). In their report, Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez are careful to point out the differences in context and form between the re-enacted *ka'ulayawaa* festival and those performed before their decline. They make clear, for example, that the participants to the restaging did not devote the daytime to collective work in the gardens, even though they joined to work together for cleaning from weeds the field (significantly an abandoned garden) in which the re-enacted festival had to be carried out, in order to avoid accidents which could be cause of, in the words of an elder, «bloodshed and death» (*ivi*: 98). Furthermore, the elderly people who took care of the organization of the feast explained to the scholars that, not having unmarried daughters and nieces, adaptations had to be made in the re-enactment. They also decided that the consumption of alcohol would be allowed to the participants only on the final night, mainly to avoid unpleasant situations, in which young women in particular could get involved. Finally, Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez admit that it was not easy to motivate young people to participate in the re-enactment of the festival and that this participation remained limited during all the time of the restaging. They also mention the worriedness of old people for the detached attitude, sometimes of «mockery» (*ivi*: 105), which some of the attendants showed towards the performances. All this make clear that in this restaging, the character of partial break-up of the ordinary norms regulating gender relationships, marriage and sexual behavior was absent.

34. The term *jaajutka*, who take seat, is also used to qualify helper spirits (*aseyuu*) of the Wayùu in so far as they, when invoked, are considered to descend from above and "take seat" into the shaman's body (Perrin 2001 [1992]). This condition and moment are considered risky both for the shaman and, also for the sick person who is cured, especially if the "requests" of the spirits are not satisfied. Even in the *ka'ulayawaa* festival which was restaged, no shaman seemed to be present; nevertheless, the presence of the *yoluja*, the spirits of dead, who, appearing in dreams, advanced requests apparently aimed to guarantee the respect of the "customary ways" of the festival, was continuously perceived with some anxiety by the people (Cano *et al.*: 105-106).

35. In this shift from a dialogue between "host" and "guest" into another in which the first of the two interlocutors "takes the place" of the "spirit" in position of guest, and the "guest" become the "host of the spirit", it is possible a mode of what Severi (2015) has called the construction of a "complex locutor", which the same scholar associates with the «process of "ritual condensation"

that alters the speakers' identities [endowing] the communicational context with particular contours that sets it apart from everyday interactions» (Severi 2020: 130). For a refinement of Severi's theory, which is employed in the analysis of "verbal duels" in some rituals in Indigenous Amazonia, see Fausto (2020: ch. 4).

36. See Fausto's (2020) remarks on the parallels between ritual objects' seclusion and girls and killers' confinement, respectively during menarche and after a homicide, found among many South American indigenous peoples.

37. The documentation about the songs, the dances, the plays and the games performed during the restaged festival agrees in many respects with previous sources, though in their report the authors generally speak of "games" and do not make clear if all the performances were accompanied by dances. Most of the choreographic actions and games that they mention (Cano *et al.*: 113-118) are of the same kind of those already reported by other authors (e. g.: "the maiden", "watermelon and foxes", "dogs against peccaries", "the hunt of little owls", "the horserace", "hills against clouds" and "sea against stream waters"), or can be considered variations of them (e. g.: the imitations of a row of ants, of the movements of a snail, of the selling of an oriole bird to an *alijuna*, that is a non-indigenous person, of the castration of a goat) of. Other forms of playful imitation of a situation reported by these researchers can be rather approached to guessing games in so far as their aim was to find something hidden, as if it had been lost, lacking or needed: they actually imitated the search and discovery of the eggs of a partridge (represented by little stones which someone holds in hand) and also "divination" of lost seeds and even lost amulets (*lania*) by part of a shaman. These guessing games recall what de Brettes had remarked: that is that the sung dialogues between the leaders of the dance rows ended with an answer like "go and find it!". See also the list of dances and games mentioned in Barboza, Esis (2017).

38. The public display of the wrapping in which the *jaajutka ka'ulayawaa* was enclosed during all the festival, and its final burial at the festival's end, strongly recalls what happened in the ceremony of display of the *wala*, imitated in one of the plays mentioned by Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez (2010: 119). Jahn (1927: 187-190) described this artefact as a little carved object of gold which presents a mix of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic traits. He argues that these artefacts showed strong resemblance with those fabricated by the pre-Columbian Tairona people, whose descendants, speaking chibcha languages, inhabit today in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, that is in a region near the Guajira peninsula. No ethnographer working has ever seen a *wala* (but Jahn reproduces a photo of a carved figure owned by a German friend who acquired it in Maracaibo, explaining that he was said by the seller that it was a *wala*). What all of them (including myself) were said is that these artefacts were owned only by the richer Wayüu families, which had acquired them by inheritance or "discovery", and that these objects were considered very "powerful" (*pulasü*) by the Wayüu, in so far as the well-being and richness of the owners depended on them. The owners of a *wala* had to "treat" well them, by satisfying any "request" they could advance. For this reason, these artefacts were never exchanged, except for compensating the killing of a very rich man, and were carefully conserved in hidden places, to avoid that they could be stolen. The *wala* was deemed so powerful that even the simple view of it could positively influence the luck and the wealth of the person who was permitted to look at it, on condition (s)he offered valuable goods as jewels; on the contrary the artefact took revenge by sending him (her) sickness and death. After having "discovered" it, the owner had to celebrate a great feast, slaughtering a lot of cattle and giving a banquet in which meat was offered to the guests. On the other side, the public "disinterring" and display of such artefact by the owner had to be carried out only after request of the same *wala*. This public display was the occasion for celebration of a feast with distribution of food and performance of games. Visitors made offers to the *wala* which was "buried" into the earth at the closing of the feast (my fieldnotes). This ceremony also resembles in some respects that, among the Taino people of the Great Antilles, was performed when "chiefs" did a public display of the so-called *cemi-idols* (see Oliver 2009). In

the game reported by Cano, Van der Hammen and Arbeláez, people imitated the ceremony in which a *wala* was displayed; the carved figure was represented by a child who was made pass over the shoulders of the players whereas other people danced. One can indeed guess that in the past this ceremony was sometimes performed during the same *ka'ulayawaa* festival.

ABSTRACTS

In this paper I review and compare the main sources of information about the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals among the Wayùu, an Amerindian people inhabiting in the semiarid Guajira peninsula (Northern Colombia and Venezuela). For their peculiar mix of songs, dances, imitative plays and competitive games, inserted into a same festive framework, these festivals are particularly interesting to be studied as expressive metacommentaries (in the sense of Turner) of Wayùu social structures, cultural values and worldview. Nevertheless, they have not so far been the subject of a specific anthropological analysis, also because they ceased to be celebrated around the middle of the twentieth century, that is, before the beginning of the first professional ethnographic studies on this population. Any attempt of “reconstruction” of the form, meaning and context the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals, and of their place in the Wayùu “socio-cosmology” must take in account not only the convergences and the divergences in the descriptions present in the ethnographic documentation available, but also, and above all, the continuous processes of change that have affected the Wayùu, at least in the last five centuries and, with an accelerated pace, in the last hundred years, and to which their sociocultural forms dynamically adapted. Most historical and ethnographic sources argued that in the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals “theatrical” expressiveness prevailed over symbolic efficacy, and “playfulness” over “rituality”. However, there are very strong and complex relationships between this “festive” and “playful” character of the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals and a series of fundamental cosmological oppositions of the Wayùu worldview, as described in the ethnographic literature. From the analysis that I have conducted, it can be said that the imitative and competitive games performed during the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals conformed and, at the same time, “played”, with these socio-cosmological oppositions and the order that they imply. This argument is reinforced by the most recent historical and ethnographical sources on these festivals, which highlight how their good outcome was perceived and considered among many Wayùu people as a “serious matter” and a source of concern and care on the part of all participants, especially the organizers, to the point of requiring prior intervention and approval of superhuman entities. It is therefore appropriate to take in account the coexistence of these traits in the *ka'ulayawaa* festivals in view of their possible analysis from the point of view of current theoretical reflections in anthropology on the relationship between rituality, playfulness and cosmology.

In questo contributo esamino e confronto le principali fonti di informazione sulle feste *ka'ulayawaa* tra i Wayùu, un popolo amerindiano che abita nella semiarida penisola della Guajira (Colombia e Venezuela). Per il loro peculiare mix di canti, danze, rappresentazioni sceniche e giochi competitivi, inseriti in una stessa cornice festiva, questi festival sono particolarmente interessanti da esaminare offrendo dei “meta-commenti” espressivi (nel senso di Turner) delle strutture sociali, dei valori culturali e della visione del mondo dei Wayùu. Tuttavia, questi festival non sono stati finora oggetto di una specifica analisi antropologica, anche perché si è smesso di celebrarli intorno alla metà del Novecento, cioè prima dell'inizio dei primi studi etnografici

professionali su questa popolazione. Qualsiasi tentativo di “ricostruzione” della forma, significato e contesto dei festival della *ka'ulayawaa*, e del loro posto nella “socio-cosmologia” Wayùu, deve tener conto non solo delle convergenze e delle divergenze nelle descrizioni presenti nella documentazione disponibile, ma anche, e soprattutto, dei continui processi di cambiamento che hanno interessato i Wayùu, almeno negli ultimi cinque secoli e, con ritmo accelerato, negli ultimi cento anni, e ai quali le loro forme socioculturali si sono dinamicamente adattate. La maggior parte delle fonti storiche ed etnografiche hanno sostenuto che nei festival *ka'ulayawaa* l'espressività “teatrale” prevalesse sull'efficacia simbolica, e che queste performances avessero un carattere più “ludico” che “rituale”. Tuttavia, è possibile identificare relazioni molto strette e complesse tra questo carattere “festivo” e “giocosso” dei festival *ka'ulayawaa* e una serie di opposizioni cosmologiche fondamentali della visione del mondo Wayùu, per come descritta nella letteratura etnografica. Dall'analisi che ho condotto, si può affermare che i giochi imitativi e competitivi eseguiti durante i festival *ka'ulayawaa* si accordavano e, allo stesso tempo, “giocavano” con queste opposizioni socio-cosmologiche e l'ordine che implicano. Questa argomentazione è rafforzata dalle più recenti fonti storiche ed etnografiche su questi festival, che mettono in evidenza come il loro successo fosse percepito e considerato da molti Wayùu come una “faccenda seria” e fonte di preoccupazione e cura da parte di tutti i partecipanti, in particolare gli organizzatori, al punto da richiedere l'intervento preventivo e l'approvazione di entità sovrumane. È quindi opportuno tenere conto della coesistenza di questi tratti nei festival *ka'ulayawaa* in vista di una loro possibile analisi dal punto di vista delle attuali riflessioni teoriche in antropologia sul rapporto tra ritualità, giocosità e cosmologia.

INDEX

Keywords: Wayùu ethnography, ceremonial feastings, ritual and play, ritual frames, choreographic performances

Parole chiave: etnografia Wayùu, cerimoniali festivi, rituale e gioco, cornici rituali, performances coreografiche

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