



Venezuelan Historical Archaeology

*Current Perspectives on
Contact, Colonialism,
and Independence*



edited by
Konrad A. Antczak



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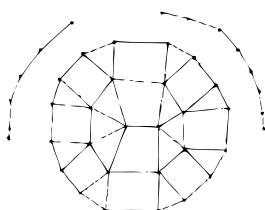
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“Indios buenos”, “Indios malos”

Historical Archaeology of Early Colonial Indigenous Identities Processes in the Southeastern Caribbean

Andrzej T. Antczak, Maria M. Antczak, and Oliver Antczak

Abstract

The Indigenous Peoples of the Caribbean coast and islands in present-day Venezuela experienced drastic transformations and demographic decline after Columbus’s third voyage in 1498. Often employed framings of clear-cut opposition between “victims” and “aggressors” have overlooked the everyday life of deprived and marginalized peoples which, in our opinion, distorts history and hampers equitable management of the “remains” of this painful and complicated past. To address this, we cross back and forth over the threshold of 1498 and critically confront historical, contemporary, and archaeological data. We argue that while the period brought significant transformations to Indigenous societies, the circumstances allowed Indigenous Peoples to play a substantial role in guiding these transformations. Spanish conquerors, drawing from their European preconceptions and encountering local social realities, established distinct categories for Indigenous Peoples: “*indios buenos*” (good Indians) and “*indios malos*” (bad Indians), roughly corresponding to the “Arawak”/“Carib” differentiation. This division served the purpose of segregating amicable and therefore useful autochthons from bellicose and consequently enslaved autochthons. This created room on both sides for agents to move in new ways: the Spanish could arbitrarily designate these labels with little questioning while native peoples could take advantage of Spanish ignorance to suit their goals. Historically known groups like the Guaiquerí and Caquetío in the eastern and western coastal stretches were perceived as “good Indians,” while the central coast housed “bad Indians” who opposed the Iberians and were overtly subjugated by the late sixteenth century. These categorizations had wide-ranging impacts and the space they afforded, influenced the negotiation and creation of new identities among the Indigenous Peoples themselves which had no direct counterparts in the precolonial past but are inseparably related to the advent of a new category: “Americans”. The deliberate marginalization of feelings and memories of the

past associated to early colonial creations of “good” and “bad” Indigenous categories may remain traceable in present local identities.

Keywords: Indigeneity in Venezuela, historical archaeology in Venezuela, transformation of indigenous identity, early colonial transformations.

With regard to the Indians there is much disorder; Your Majesty's commands are not being kept in the gobernaciones; those that are in peace are branded as warlike and those that are, are conveniently rejected. This business is quite widespread and common, the way is open for them to sell Indians in large numbers at public auctions. Sued Badillo 1985:66 [original in Spanish in AGI, Audiencia de Santo Domingo, legajo 49, 1536].

Introductory Remarks

Venezuelan historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and other social scientists have profusely documented European arrival to the present-day country's territory and extolled its impacts in provoking dramatic demographic decline and unleashing severe transformations among local Indigenous Peoples, including the ever-pervasive myth of Indigenous Extinction.¹ These considerations apply to the flow of time that – from a *longue durée* perspective *sensu* Braudel (1958) – begins with the late precolonial and early contact period, continues through centuries of colonialism, moves on in postcolonial trajectories, and disembogues into present-day postcolonial thought and action.² The second phase of this flow refers to interconnected brief oscillations of historical events that occurred in “critical situations” when established routines of Indigenous Peoples' daily lives were violently impacted and drastically transformed (Giddens 1984). Notwithstanding, the above conclusions rely mainly on documentary sources, with rare evidence from archaeology which at times may confirm or complement those sources and at others contest them. Such data with the potential to challenge predominantly male and elite-based written colonial sources (Deagan and Cruxent 2002:4; Keegan and Hofman 2017:243; Weik 2014:296) is not furnished by archaeology alone but also by social and cultural anthropology, biogenetics, historical linguistics, historical ecology, cultural/humanities analytics, heritage and museum studies, and oral traditions, among other providers. In contrast, unilaterally based or single-sourced narratives often use the direct historical approach and consequently do not ‘trouble’ to provide adequate supporting interdisciplinary evidence dating to before and after the period of so-called European Conquest. Such readings of history severely hamper the spread of more

1 Many authors have written about these topics, *e.g.*, Acosta Saignes 1946; Amodio 1999, 1991; Antczak 2019a, b; Antczak *et al.* 2018; Arcila Fariás 1946; Arellano Moreno 1961; Arvelo-Jiménez and Biord Castillo 1994; Biord Castillo 2016; Brito Figueroa 1966; Coronil 1992; Molina 2001; Morón 1954; Rivas 2001; López and Rodríguez 1992; Sanoja and Vargas 1999; Scaramelli and Scaramelli 2014, 2005; Tiapa 2016, 2008, 2004; Vargas 1995, 1990; Vila M. 1980; Vila P. 1991; and Zent 2009. Also, about the present-day impacts of such narratives refer to Forte (2006).

2 The term *postcolonialism* is not used here as a temporal concept but as an active reassessment of discourses that originated in colonialism, in its power structures and social hierarchies and in a wide range of other colonial biases.

nuanced messages that more closely align with the long-overlooked lived experiences of present-day Indigenous Peoples in the region and that have a potential to prevent re-traumatization and the recurrence of dark historical episodes. As argued by Smith and Waterton (2009:63-64) limited perspectives on these critical historical moments serve to mask and sanitize the everyday “legacies of discrimination, racism and uneven power relations” making them quite “distant” from everyday life in “elite” dominated contexts. Further, they leave unresolved tensions or conflicts between different categories of social actors that permeate present day politics and daily life.

From an interdisciplinary perspective grounded in archaeology, many grand narratives dominant in today’s Venezuela appear to tacitly mislead or even overtly confuse the public. Yet, they often dominate and shape historiography, films, literature, art, news, popular lore, and sociopolitical thinking, existing – often uncontested – in schools, university teaching, and heritage management (Antczak *et al.* 2019; Sanoja and Vargas 1999, 2002; Vargas 1990, 1995). Even though these narratives are not events *per se* but stories about events ([hi]stories, to coin a term), they are often taken to be reality itself rather than a subjective representation of the same (Sluyter 2001; Voss 2015b:353). The way narratives shape the perception of the world is ponderous because by “describing what is [or what has been] happening,” every “description itself is an intervention” in a social world (Strathern 2014:24). This is certainly not only a Venezuelan phenomenon. Grand narratives privileging written documents while ostracizing archaeology and other sources of data have also been, and remain, popular in other parts of the Americas;³ a particularly pervasive legacy of colonialism. Crucially, many of these dominant narratives have been constructed by communities of experts enmeshed in specific political trends and time/space contingent contexts of exclusion/inclusion.⁴ Therefore, they leave in intentional oblivion peoples who created and participated in certain past events. Such expert-backed narratives were conveniently applied by national authorities and spread “down” to local communities that have purportedly “passively” assimilated and naturalized them while in reality they have been often contested (as in the case of the *Guaiquerí* and the national re-casting of Francisco Fajardo). It bears repeating that local communities are not inert bodies but rather constantly engage with, reject, and negotiate dominant narratives with their own narratives which are often entirely dissonant (Smith and Waterton 2009:75-76). It is precisely because narratives and stories relate “all human affairs” (Rankin 2002:2) and give the appearance of unity in life events (MacIntyre 1984) that it is imperative to examine them critically.

Critically and interdisciplinarily challenging dominant narratives is therefore the overarching goal of this research, which contributes to a growing diversity of voices in the past and present who are involved in these discussions, ever more presently highlighting the importance for participatory parity of historically disfranchised peoples in building together decolonial futures. However, before turning to our research hypothesis, some conceptual and definitional clarification is necessary. Instead of “ethnic identity,” we will hereafter use the term “collective identity” or simply “identity.” This is due to the

3 See *e.g.*, Cipolla and Howlett Hayes 2015; Deagan 2003, 1983; Hofman *et al.* 2019, 2014; Hu 2013; Kulstad-González 2019; Senatore and Funari 2015; Silliman 2014; Stojanowski 2013; Voss 2016, 2015a, 2010; and Weik 2014.

4 This statement urges the communities of experts to engage with local communities bearing in mind that “experts do not always have to ‘win’” (Smith and Waterton 2009:76).

rigid and over-objectivized differences “ethnic identity” can convey in the precolonial period. We find the phrase ineffectual when describing the complex identity processes of the region and, especially, the time (Antczak O. 2018, 2016; Hill 1996; Hornborg and Hill 2011; Shennan 1989; Voss 2016). It is important to leave behind preconceptions of “ethnicity” and the conceits associated with it, including the borders and differences we often assume existed between different groups given documentary sources. This is imperative especially when crossing the date of European colonization. The early actions of the colonizers brought about specific Indigenous responses. These, in turn, created historical and environmental circumstances in which group took part in acts of resistance, persistence, and continuity in addition to rupture and transformation in identity processes (Voss 2015a:666), all together co-existing within the term *survivance* (Vizenor 2009). Both colonized and colonizers (and those in between) were embedded in a torrent of ongoing interactions that affected the most quotidian relations including those between humans and other-than humans, as per Ingold’s (2017:20, 2018) arguments. Also, our approach does not oscillate between binary oppositions such as war and peace but incorporates a range of liminal situations and halftones revealing local postures and improvisations. This allows us to acknowledge multiscalar, intersectional, and diachronic factors in identity formation and opens the door to their interdisciplinary assessment (Weik 2014:301).

We argue that understanding to what extent Europeans shaped the trajectories of early sixteenth-century interactions, co-constructed specific perceptions of Indigenous Peoples, and triggered transformations in identity practices, is fundamental to knowing if and how these processes could have been influenced by structurally ordered sociocultural characteristics inherent to the preceding late precolonial past (Lightfoot 1995). How would the Europeans have induced, fostered, or interrupted the conglomeration of assemblages reflected in the names given to Indigenous groupings in early colonial documents (Weik 2014:296)?⁵ Was the “friendliness” of a segment of the Indigenous Peoples on the northeastern and northwestern coasts and islands a result of early interactions driven by the European zeal for exploration, resource extraction, and enforced barter? Can we assume that the epithet “bellicose” was conferred on the Caribans of northcentral Venezuela as a function of mid- to late sixteenth-century European incursions characterized by combat, slavery, forced barter, land colonization, and coercive missionization? How did precolonial Indigenous societies and their categories change or become retooled in sociocultural terms after 1498 (Clifford 2004:20; Keegan and Hofman 2017)?

The working hypothesis of this chapter is that the epithets “*bueno/good*” and “*malo/bad*” given to the Indigenous Peoples inhabiting the Southeastern Caribbean, at the time referred to erroneously as “*Indios/Indians*,” were new sociocultural categories. Europeans sketched out the borders of these categories based on Indigenous responses to the imposition of early colonial power structures and the circulation of materials whose values were shifting in those turbulent times (Breukel 2019; Keehnen *et al.* 2019; Gassón, this volume; Van Dommelen and Rowlands 2012). However, the categories were filled in and manipulated by actors and groups in context-specific ways across the region. The emergence of new colonial collective identities that did not directly map to precolonial ones might have resulted from a drastic break with – or transformation of – late precolonial Indigenous interactions based on previously existing local and supralocal

5 In our understanding “ethnic” relates to collective identity.

exchange circuits, many of which entailed sociability. To substantiate this hypothesis, we critically juxtapose the available archaeological and documentary evidence covering the crucial span of late precolonial and early colonial times in the Southeastern Caribbean. European intrusions into these indigenous territories began almost simultaneously in the eastern and western regions of today's Venezuela including the islands of Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire (hereafter referred to as the ABC islands). Such intrusions were delayed for decades on the northcentral mainland. These processes were inherent in two stages of early colonialism: exploration (contact time) and conquest (post-contact time).⁶ The events composing these processes were separated not only in time but also space. Different colonial measures and strategies were applied to autochthons inhabiting areas differing in topography, climate, and bioecology; the semiarid coasts and islands versus the fertile and climatically benign (for Europeans) central mainland. Although these early colonial developments impacted identity processes throughout later centuries, we leave the deeper discussion of later colonial and postcolonial developments (from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries) to further interdisciplinary studies in historical archaeology and identity research, some of which are noted in this volume. Nevertheless, being aware that these topics are pertinent to the current lives of Indigenous descendants – to the heirs of all those arbitrarily considered “good Indians” and “bad Indians” in early colonial times (Antczak O. 2018; Ayala Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2011; Silliman 2005:69) – we add our voices to an increasingly diverse torrent of scholars discussing these topics and urge further voices to contribute to this area.⁷

The Archaeology of Social Vibrancy in the Late Precolonial Southeastern Caribbean

The land-, sea-, and islands of the Southeastern Caribbean constituted an integral part of the existential and perceptive scapes of native Indigenous Peoples by AD 1498 (see Knapp and Ashmore 1999). On the eve of European invasion, these scapes were material palimpsests for Indigenous peoples layered with memory and experience over several thousand years (Antczak *et al.* 2018; Gassón, this volume).

To the east, Margarita Island was inhabited by purportedly Cariban-speaking peoples whose close relatives lived on the nearby coast of northeastern Venezuela and, probably, on the island of Trinidad (Antczak *et al.* 2018; Boomert 2016, 2000; Rouse and Cruxent 1963). The islands of Coche and Cubagua, adjacent to Margarita, were visited by linguistically – and kin-related – peoples but remained permanently uninhabited (Antczak *et al.* 2019a; Carballo 2017, 2014; Cruxent and Rouse 1958).

The western Venezuelan coast was inhabited by Arawakan-speaking bearers of the Dabajuroid culture from *c.* AD 800 (Oliver 1989; Zavala Reyes *et al.* 2018). By AD 1200-1350, the ABC islands had also been settled by the Dabajuroid (Haviser 1991, 1987; Oliver 1997, 1989; Versteeg 1993; Versteeg and Rostain 1997; Versteeg and Ruiz 1995). Dabajuroid peoples also traveled eastwards and visited the Las Aves archipelagoes, launching voyages even further east closer to the time of European Conquest (Antczak and Antczak 2015).

6 Conquest is considered here as the “final” stage of violent European incursion into northcentral Venezuela with the aim of settling there. We recognize, however, the complexities of on-the-ground ongoing realities on both sides (see Silliman 2005:63).

7 This is directly related to what Rubertone (2000) considered as historical archaeology of Indigenous Peoples.



Figure 2.1. Map of Venezuelan coast and adjacent islands of the Southeastern Caribbean denoting three cultural areas of influence, in blue the Dabajuroid or Pre-Caquetío, in red the Valencioid, and in green the Post-Saladoid or Pre-Guaikerí. The map also is marked by several routes, in gold the Guanín route from the west, in pink the Pearl route from the east, and two regional movements, in red the Valencioid seasonal voyages to the Los Roques archipelago, and in blue Dabajuroid travels eastwards to the Las Aves Archipelagos (by authors, map data from JAXA 2018).

Flanked by these two groups in late precolonial times, northcentral Venezuela became gradually monopolized by Valencioid Caribbean speakers who, between AD 800 and 1000, were spatially confined to the inland Lake Valencia Basin (refer to Figure 2.1). After AD 1000, Valencioid dispersion towards the coast has been theorized through the concept of the *Valencioid Sphere of Interaction* that endured until the time of European conquest (Antczak and Antczak 1999). The success of Valencioid insular travels after AD 1200 depended on their associations – through sociocultural amalgamation – with the Ocumaroid people, the Arawakan-speaking inhabitants of north-central continental coastal bays (Antczak and Antczak 2006). The mainland coast towards the east was inhabited by kin-related Caribbean-speakers (Antczak *et al.* 2018).

Archaeology indicates that the precolonial Southeastern Caribbean was vibrantly interconnected by Indigenous canoes moving peoples, goods, and ideas (Antczak *et al.* 2018; Hofman 2019; Hofman *et al.* 2007; Kelly and Hofman 2019). An important entrepôt in this region seems to have existed in northcentral Venezuela connecting not only the Andean west to the lowlands in the east but also the insular Caribbean to Orinoquia and Amazonia to the south (Antczak and Antczak 1999; Biord Castillo and Arvelo 2007; Hofman *et al.* 2014). Moreover, if Valencioid peoples were in fact Caribbean-speakers as suggested by Antczak *et al.* (2017), then such an entrepôt could have potentiated an important Caribbean role in mediating among the Chibchan-, Arawakan-, and Caribbean-speaking inhabitants in northern South America – a role that was filled by the Valencioids.

These glimpses into the vibrancy of late precolonial times are promising but cannot disguise the fact that many questions related to early colonial times remain unanswered. Perhaps, some of the answers can be found in recognizing the misguided application of rigid ethnocentric definitions (originating in the West) of Indigenous groups and polities to posit borders and inter-group relations in precolonial America. Importantly, the material culture employed by these groups did not necessarily define their collective

identities which we use to frame our interpretations today, except, to give an example, in the case of non-alienable personal objects such as ceramic figurines crafted in northcentral Venezuela which have been found in Margarita and Bonaire. Understanding how the likely permeable “borders” between peoples existed and functioned during late precolonial times can also provide a basis for understanding the creation of early colonial categories such as “Guaiquerí” and “Caquetío.” Evidence we discuss below suggests that these terms subsumed the nuanced identities of different Indigenous groups and continue constraining our approaches to understanding the precolonial world, a point developed later in this chapter.

The Coast of Pearls and the Formation of the *Guaiquerí* “Good Indians”

Columbus observed a diversity of Indigenous portable items on Trinidad and on the coasts of the Paria Peninsula (in northeastern Venezuela) during his third voyage. But what particularly aroused interest among the Spaniards was the sight of women wearing arm bracelets and necklaces of beads including perforated pearls. Columbus named the area the *Golfo de las Perlas* [Gulf of Pearls] and upon his return to Hispaniola sent the Spanish monarchs a sealed wrapping containing a letter-report, a map, and 160 or 170 pearls, among other items (de Las Casas 1997:166). This news spread like wildfire on Hispaniola and across Europe (del Verde 1989[1499]; Cantino 1989[1501]). Pearls soon entered “the courtly world of European royalty and nobility as the ultimate fashion accessories” (Saunders 1999:253). They fired up the keen desire of “the entrepreneurial spirit – and the unparalleled greed – of the Age of Discoveries” (Donkin 1998:333).

Critical evaluation of information on the Indigenous pearl trade along the coast of today’s Venezuela, reported by Spanish sailors immediately after 1498, is crucial for the arguments advanced in this chapter (Cunill Grau 1993:23-25; Perera 2000, Tables 8 and 10). Following the indications on the map sent by Columbus to the Spanish monarchs, the fleet of Alonso de Ojeda and Juan de la Cosa sailed to the Gulf of Pearls in 1499 (de Las Casas 1997:146). Peralonso Niño’s and Cristóbal Guerra’s ship followed close on Ojeda’s heels, arriving at the Paria Peninsula only 15 days after Ojeda’s own departure from this region (de Las Casas 1997:178-179; Sauer 1966:108). The Spanish sailors bartered for many pearls in the eponymous Gulf and observed on the adjacent mainland coast of Cumaná that the Indigenous Peoples used perforated pearls in necklaces and armbands. Individual pearls were inserted in ears and noses (de Las Casas 1997:179). The caravels of Rodrigo de Bastidas and Juan de La Cosa were already on their way towards Tierra Firme by October 1500, this time to investigate the western origin of the gold remembered by de la Cosa from his voyage with Ojeda in 1499. Gaining Coquibacoa-Cabo de La Vela (Península de la Goajira on the present-day Colombian-Venezuelan border), they navigated still farther west along the present-day Colombian coast bartering for worked gold, especially at Sinú and the Gulf of Urabá (Sarcina 2019; Sauer 1966:118-119). This voyage confirmed the western, *i.e.*, Isthmo-Colombian, origin of the fine gold and *guanín* (gold, silver, and copper alloy) artifacts that Indigenous Peoples themselves bartered for on the Venezuelan coast and used as bodily ornaments (refer to Figure 2.1).

Documents suggest that some pearls were obtained by Indigenous Peoples from oyster beds adjacent to the island of Cubagua. The majority of these were probably not purposefully extracted but were instead by-products of oyster gathering for food. Such

incidental exploitation of pearls was sustainable for the beds (Perera 2000:179). However, the exponential rise in European demand (Willis 1980:29) quickly exhausted Indigenous pearl ornament stocks. The pearl oyster beds succumbed to overexploitation soon after 1528, the date of the formal establishment of the town of Nueva Cádiz on the island of Cubagua (Romero 2003; Romero *et al.* 1999).

The “colonial labels” affixed to the Indigenous Peoples inhabiting Margarita Island, adjacent to Cubagua, switched several times during the first decades of the sixteenth century. They were declared “non-Caribs” in 1519 (we note that this was despite the fact they were Cariban-language speakers). Nonetheless and in contrast to other non-Caribs, they suffered violent enslavement.⁸ They were declared “Caribs” again in 1525. The Spanish Court in 1531 lamented the violent treatment afflicting Indigenous Peoples across modern Venezuela’s mainland coast (Britto García 2001:39). Regardless, in 1534, land on Margarita “attractive” for European agriculture and husbandry was distributed among Spanish colonizers (Ayala Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2011:30). To counteract the harmful effects of these actions, the Spanish Queen in 1536 prohibited her colonizers from buying land from Margarita’s Indigenes (Ayala Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2011:32). However, this royal decree not only came late but was ignored in its time, although it was to have a positive impact on Indigenes’ rights to their communal lands centuries later (Ayala Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2011:33). Margarita’s Natives had been reduced by 1537 to *encomiendas*, systems of tributary labor and evangelization providing a cheap supply of labor. Runaway slaves were violently persecuted (Jiménez 1986; Magallanes 1982; Otte 1977:357-359).

Following decades of dramatic disentanglements and transformations of Indigenous materials, ideologies, kin relationships, exchange circuits, craft technologies, systems of value, and alliance- and identity-building strategies, the ethnonym *Guaiquerí* surfaced for the first time in documentary sources in 1545 (Otte 1977:359). The Spanish applied it to the insular branch of a large group of Cariban-speaking peoples inhabiting the northeastern coastal region of Venezuela. Was the supposed ethnic distinctiveness of the *Guaiquerí* triggered and consolidated by the colonial power’s realignment and amalgamation of regional Cariban speakers and, possibly, other linguistic groups as well? If so, the ethnonym probably subsumed local distinctions among identities, merging various groups into a colonial amalgamation which guaranteed a certain treatment from the colonizer. The necessity of reliance on Indigenous labor, knowledge, foodstuffs, and soldiery (Whitehead 1995 1990, 1988) induced the Spanish Crown to accept the *Guaiquerí* as “indios de la Real Corona” (Da Prato Perelli 1990:97) as well as “knights and nobles [...]” (Ayala Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2011:36); or as *guatiao*s or *guaitiao*s (Otte 1977:357; see Valcárcel Rojas and Ulloa Hung 2018).⁹

Therefore, the first case-study of this research shows that the colonial “creation” of *guatiao*s – that is, “indios buenos/Good Indians” – equates with the conformation of the *Guaiquerí* in our study area. In consequence, kin relatives and allies of the Margarita

8 About 200 Indigenous people were taken in 1521 by Antonio Flores from Margarita to Hispaniola, and at least half of them died without the possibility of returning to Margarita. See also Otte (1977:356, 357) and Britto García (2001:39) for information about violent slavery practiced by the Spanish on the present-day Venezuelan coast.

9 See also an interesting map of geographic distribution of Caribes and *guatiao*s, *guaitiao*s, or *guatrao*s based on Rodrigo Figueroa’s account from 1520 (Whitehead 2011, 116). See also Altez 2016 for the discussion on the “role” of *guatiao*s in the Spanish conquest.

Island peoples who inhabited the mainland coast (largely though not exclusively Cariban speakers too) might have agglutinated to shelter themselves under the *Guaiquerí* label, chosen to actively break away from the label, or even selectively moved in and out of the label depending on context. These processes were intimately related to the dramatic transformation of the value of pearls, from Indigenous body ornaments in the late precolonial barter system, to European trade objects ingrained into the mercantile capitalist system.¹⁰ Pearls switched from availability through barter based on socialization during early colonial times to objects of violent seizure amid rapacious spatial expansion. Temporary campsites (*rancherías*) sprang up wherever new pearl banks were discovered (Antczak *et al.* 2019a). The treatment of the Indigenous inhabitants changed: slave raiders and *armadas de rescate*¹¹ avoided the islands of Margarita, Coche, and Cubagua because Europeans maintained increasingly nonviolent/amicable interactions with the local Indigenes there. As colonial settlement on Margarita began in earnest, many Spanish men intermingled with Indigenous women in the area contributing to the beginning of the identity built on the term *Guaiquerí* that today is found across the island (Antczak O. 2016; Ayala Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2011).

The Frenetic Search for Gold and the Emergence of the *Caquetío* “Good Indians”

Europeans invaded the northwestern coast of present-day Venezuela and the ABC islands at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Here they encountered the *Caquetío* Arawakan-speaking peoples purportedly descended from the precolonial Dabajuroid (Arcaya 1921; Arvelo and Oliver 1999; Cruxent and Rouse 1958; Haviser 1991, 1989, 1987; Lippincott 1970; Morón 2011; Oliver 1997, 1989).¹² By 1513, the Spanish had captured the majority of the population of the ABC islands, some 2,000 Indigenous people, and sold them as slaves in Santo Domingo.¹³ This was a direct effect of the Spanish declaration that these islands were useless (*islas inútiles*) (Felice Cardot 1982:11). By 1515, the islands, violently raided by *indieros* (slavers), had been nearly depopulated and links to surrounding land and populations, seriously disrupted (Goslinga 1971; Arellano Moreno 1961:119-122).

Juan Martínez de Ampíes, a Spanish factor and treasurer in Santo Domingo since 1511, had direct interaction with some of the Indigenous people enslaved on the ABC islands; “dealing with them in his own house [in Santo Domingo], they seemed to him to be more reasonable and capable people than other Indians of the area” (Felice Cardot 1982:12). To kick start a “useful” economy on the islands and to start repopulating them, Ampíes

10 Silliman (2005) considers the ubiquitous presence of violence during the so-called Culture Contact and Colonial periods; also, we consider that “Contact” relates to short-duration and specific historical events while “Colonialism” is a long-term entanglement.

11 Early sixteenth-century, formally authorized armed parties sent principally from Cubagua, Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico that practiced enforced bartering aimed at obtaining food, gold, and pearls from the Indigenous Peoples.

12 We limit the discussion here to the so-called coastal and insular *Caquetío* that inhabited the Venezuelan Falcón State and the ABC islands and not to their inland-located southern counterparts (see *e.g.*, Gassón 2001).

13 At that time the Pearl Coast was under the authority of the *Real Audiencia* of Santo Domingo. Depending on the historical context of the sentence, we use the names Hispaniola, La Española, and Santo Domingo to describe the second largest island in the Greater Antilles currently divided between two nations: the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

appealed to the authorities in Santo Domingo¹⁴ to require any Spaniards going there to have received prior permission thus protecting the islands from future *indiero* incursions. Furthermore, he returned some of the enslaved to the ABC islands and to the adjacent mainland, gaining in this way a reputation as a protector of Indigenous Peoples (Felice Cardot 1982:12-13). Consequently, the Spanish Crown granted Ampíes jurisdiction over the ABC islands on November 15, 1526. Two days later, the Crown, influenced by Ampíes and the ABC islands events, issued a general provision stipulating a series of strict regulations regarding the treatment of Indigenes in the entirety of Spanish America (Felice Cardot 1982:17-25).¹⁵ Although documents depict Ampíes as exhibiting relatively friendly treatment of Indigenous Peoples, part of his plan to return the enslaved Indigenes was to exchange them with Manaure, the paramount *Caquetío* cacique on the mainland, for his Indigenous prisoners of war whom Ampíes planned on enslaving.¹⁶ Ampíes's actions were also harmful in another respect: those not accepting the Christian faith continued to be threatened with enslavement (Goslinga 1979; Hartog 1975:11). Nonetheless, Ampíes's behavior appears moderate alongside the harsh interactions between Europeans and Indigenes on the mainland where the congeners of the island *Caquetío* lived.

The Spanish conceded the adjacent mainland region to the Germans in 1528 (who would hold it until 1556) although the ABC islands remained under Spanish jurisdiction (Arciniegas 1943; Humbert 1983; Ribas 2005:16-32; Willis 1980:29). Upon their arrival, the Germans began several months-long expeditions west and south of Santa Ana de Coro, which had been founded by Juan de Ampíes in 1527 (Humbert 1983:25; see also López *et al.*, this volume),¹⁷ and west and south into the interior to Lake Maracaibo and the Venezuelan-Colombian plains beyond (Federmann 1988; von Hutten 1988).¹⁸ These areas greatly interested the German Welsers as they seemed to offer the chance of sources of gold and alternative access to the *Mar del Sur* or *del Mediodía*, *i.e.*, the Pacific Ocean (Federmann 1988:169, 178; see also Cey 1994; Ramos Pérez 1978). The grant given to the Germans, although allowing enslavement of rebellious Indigenous Peoples (*indios rebeldes*), was clear about the “good” treatment to be afforded to all other Indigenes. The document clearly states that “the Indigenous Peoples should be treated as freemen and not as slaves, and that they should be well-maintained [provisioned] and governed and that not too much work should be given to them” (Humbert 1983:32). In 1531, the Crown

14 Hieronymites were the monks at that time on Hispaniola in charge of handling accusations of atrocities perpetrated by the Spanish colonists against the Indigenous Peoples (MacDonald 2010).

15 These *Ordenanzas de Grenada* from 1526 form an integral part of all further *capitulaciones* or capitulations made in the region and are the core of the New Laws of the Indies proclaimed in 1542 (Felice Cardot 1982:25; Jiménez 1986).

16 As Oliver (1989:281) and Ramos Pérez (1978) noted, ethnohistoric sources show that Manaure was married to “daughters of the Caribs” in order to gain prestige and influence beyond his own ethnic and political boundaries, as well as to procure allies to support him when war threatened (Rivas 1989, II:398-400).

17 Santa Ana de Coro was the seat of the bishopric of the Province of Venezuela from 1532 until 1606 when it was moved to Caracas (Humbert 1983:66).

18 Humbert (1983:45, 47), basing himself on German historians, presents two versions of the directions that might have been taken by Federmann in his first expedition (1530-1531). Accordingly, he could have traveled south from Coro then turned northeast and reached Lake Valencia, finally appearing on the Caribbean coast some 80 miles east of Coro. In the context of this version, it is interesting to consider what the finding of the *Caquetío* in the Lake Valencia area could mean for the late precolonial and early colonial ethnohistory of this region. However, today's largely accepted version considers that Federmann first went south (again reaching today's Barquisimeto) and later southwest, finally turning north towards Lake Maracaibo and reaching the Caribbean shore some 80 miles west of Coro.

further prohibited its employees in the Province of Venezuela (including those under German rule) from using Indigenous Peoples in mining or to give them any kind of work “against their own will” (Humbert 1983:32). However, the designation of “rebellious” Indigenous groups was arbitrary and decided by the Germans; a system easily abused. These procedures influenced how the colonizers separated different Indigenous Peoples, and how that categorization mapped onto real identities among them.¹⁹

It is important here to return to the Spanish-reported Indigenous pearl exchange. Documents mention that in northwestern regions, exchange was dominated by gold and *guanín*, marine shells, *quiripa* shell beads, and salt. Pearls are not mentioned (Cey 1994; Federmann 1988; Martin 1988; Neukomm 1988; von Hutten 1988). By the early 1530s, when the pearl fishery on Cubagua began to dwindle, pearls were feverishly sought across most Venezuelan islands (Arellano Moreno 1961:180; Otte 1977:32-33). Nicolás Federmann, the German Governor of the Province of Venezuela, communicated to the Spanish in 1533 that pearls were being sought off the coast of the Paraguaná Peninsula by means of Spanish and Indigenous “experts” brought in from Cubagua. These explorers “never took [found] anything” and concluded that the surrounding seas were not “propitious for pearl growth” (Vázquez de Acuña and de Naveros 1988:282).²⁰ Still, the Germans remained watchful: Spanish pearl-seeking explorations were confirmed by Philipp von Hutten (1988) in 1540.²¹ This historical record is confirmed by ecological data that asserts the unique conditions under which pearl oysters were only thriving in eastern Venezuela (Villamizar and Cervigón 2017). In fact, the westernmost limit of the *Costa de las Perlas* is the port of Puerto Cabello as was depicted on the map Juan de La Cosa created in 1500 (Antczak *et al.* 2018: Figure 1; Martín-Merás 2000:79; see also Donkin 1998:314, Endnote 167; Cunill Grau 1993:23-25; Perera 2000:178, Figure 21).

Archaeological data partly corroborates the documentary sources. Some pearls were recovered but identified as produced by *Aliger gigas* in the Los Roques Archipelago in

19 The convoluted first four decades of the sixteenth century when the Caquetío interacted with the Europeans can be consulted in more depth in several primary and secondary sources including Arcaya (1921) and Magallanes (1982:31-53) who heavily depend on Spanish chroniclers Pedro de Aguado (1963[1581]), de Oviedo y Baños (1982[1723]) and German writers (*e.g.*, Federmann 1988; von Hutten 1988); see also Arciniegas (1943).

20 Already in the 1520s, Pedro Mártir de Anglería (1988[1530]:62) stated that “some say that [Peralonso] Niño was not made with pearls in Curiana [western Venezuela], which is more than one hundred and twenty leagues from the Dragon’s Mouth, but in the small regions of Cumaná and Maracapaná, near the [Dragon’s] Mouth and Margarita Island, and they say that Curiana [in the west] doesn’t give pearls. It is still unclear [...]” Note that Mártir refers to the region of *Curiana* located in the vicinity of the city of Coro (like de Las Casas), but he was cognizant of the availability of pearls restricted naturally to the area of Margarita and Cumaná where the Coast of Pearls was located. This eastern coast of Venezuela was also called *Curiana* in early documents (Cunill Grau 1993:23-25; Trevisan 1989[1504]:153). Sauer (1966) distinguished between Arawakan *Curiana* (west) and Cariban *Curiana* (east).

21 In a letter sent to the King by Spanish functionaries in 1533, it is clearly stated that “the search for the pearls that the governor ordered to do on the coast of Paraguaná”, in which participated some Spanish and experienced Indigenous Peoples from Cubagua, “[...] [they] never found anything [which was confirmed by the governor of that time Nicolás Federmann] [...] [they encountered] twelve or fifteen grains of *aljófara menudo* [small pearls] and said that there were no [pearls] nor had that sea there to have them” (Vázquez de Acuña and de Naveros 1988[1533]:282). Hutten stated in 1540 that “[...] the only thing is that, in Santa Marta, Venezuela and Cabo de la Vela, which also belong to our governance, great wealth of pearls has recently been discovered; from these three places great wealth is expected” (von Hutten 1988:379). In 1884 van Koolwijk (1884:601-602) stated that by the 1860s, a union was formed in Aruba to establish a pearl fishery, but for unknown reasons it did not come about.

late precolonial contexts (Antczak and Antczak 2006). A few perforated pearls were also found on Curaçao and Bonaire suggesting late precolonial exchange with the mainland, but neither their provenance nor origin is known (Haviser 1990:89, 91). Archaeology does not, however, support the reference suggesting that the only Indigenous people to visit the Las Aves archipelagos during the sixteenth century were likely the *Caraca* from the Venezuelan central coast (de Pimentel 1578 in Nectario María 1979:331-351). On the contrary, the peoples who participated in the 1550s rescue of a Spanish shipwreck in Las Aves de Sotavento were probably historically known *Caquetío* (Antczak and Antczak 2015). This incorrect colonial statement further demonstrates the ineffectual categorizations Europeans employed to differentiate Indigenous Peoples at the time. The *Caquetío*, though suffering harsh mistreatment during the first decades of the sixteenth century, experienced largely amicable interactions with the invaders after the 1530s (Arellano Moreno 1961:87). They never mounted resistances like those of northcentral mainland inhabitants (Hartog 1968:2-4). We assume that because of their special status, the *Caquetío* were navigating the waters of the northcentral Venezuelan coast more freely than neighboring vilified Indigenous Peoples (*indios malos*), even if the colonizers could not easily identify them.

This second narrative of Indigenous experience in the Southern Caribbean foregrounds the social impacts early colonial European maritime traffic had on kin-related ties existing between Indigenous groups on the mainland and their relatives on the ABC islands. German conquerors needed Indigenous guides, haulers, translators, and their foodstuffs for *entradas* (expeditions) into the interior. Ethnohistory and archaeology seem to agree that Europeans left Indigenous subsistence-oriented strategies (*i.e.*, the fishery and the *conuco/kunuku* or plot horticulture) relatively undisturbed around Coro, provided Indigenous Peoples satisfied European necessities (López *et al.*, this volume). Therefore, we assume the *Caquetío* near Coro received “better” treatment inasmuch as the Spanish ordinances bound the Germans to “populate [the Province of Venezuela] with love and the willingness of the Natives” (Humbert 1983:33). Groups encountered in the interior were nevertheless slaughtered or enslaved and obliged to work under harsh conditions (Cey 1994; Federmann 1988) regardless of their kinship with the *guatiaos*. It is likely that under such dualistic treatment, traditionally porous borders between Indigenous groups (Rodríguez Velásquez 2019) collapsed altogether, facilitating both the merging of different Arawakan groups under the amicably treated “*Caquetío*”, as well as the creation of multisocietal bands opposed to this new order. Thus, the *Caquetío* were evolving into a category of European allies, becoming *guatiaos* – “good Indians.” Today the *Caquetío* identity remains strong on the ABC islands (Antczak O. 2018; Haviser 1991).

The Conquest of the Rebellious “Bad” Caribs in the Center

In comparison to the eastern and western coastal regions characterized by rather flat topography and semi-arid environments, northcentral Venezuela features varied topography combined with rich bioecological zones. To the north, a belt of oceanic coral archipelagoes lies in the open sea off the rugged coastal mountains. A series of small bays on this mountainous coast have long sheltered fishermen’s settlements. To the south, mountain slopes open into the lacustrine plains surrounding Lake Valencia, the largest endorheic freshwater reservoir north of the Amazon River (Leyden 1985; Schubert 1978). This area offered a series of natural barriers and shelters (high

mountains, dense forests, ravines, caves, and lake islands) that might have served as protection against undesirable contacts with Europeans. Once “news” of their arrival reached the region, Indigenous Peoples could have retreated to these remote areas in the face of life-threatening slavers and “conquerors.”²² Such migrations would have been capable of provoking large groupal realignments. Amalgamation of sociocultural groups would have been intensified or reworked substantially in comparison to the dispersed settlement pattern and forms of interregional intersocietal contacts that existed in precolonial times. The conquerors could have been met either by migration to remote areas (where intersocietal amalgamation could have occurred) or by defensive centralization of Indigenous social organization (Bjord Castillo 2016, 1992; Rivas 2001). New local groups could have been created where the distinction between kin-related insiders and culturally similar outsiders became blurred (e.g., Schwerin 1983-1984; Zent 2009). Though specific events that might have prompted identity agglutination across the entire region are still known only fragmentarily (Bjord Castillo 2007, 2005, 2001), it is necessary to ask: can we consider a temporary alliance for reasons of survival to constitute an identity-transforming process with long-lasting effects? Rather than resulting in a measurable change of identity or, more drastically, a shift of ethnic identity, alliance in this situation can be conceived, alternatively, as a temporary “disguise” to hide from the colonizers. Briefly replacing Indigenous identity in early sixteenth-century Venezuela with dissenting ideology behind the twentieth-century Iron Curtain and Czesław Miłosz’s *Ketman* (1953) could be a useful way of approaching how identity may have been protected and maintained at this crucial time.²³

The events described here also concern the later stage of European colonization, as opposed to the early phase depicted in the above-described regions to the east and west. In both those regions, initial European-Indigenous interactions began immediately after Columbus’s third voyage in 1498. In contrast, the Venezuelan central coast was known to the Europeans for decades only as it was seen from their caravels. The first Spanish reconnaissance of the port of Borburata was made in 1541 and the establishment of Villa de Borburata dates from as late as 1548 (Antczak *et al.* 2020). Further inland, Lake Valencia became known to the Europeans no earlier than 1542 (Cey 1994) under its Indigenous name of *lake of Tacarigua*.²⁴ News about the devastating impacts of European incursions into Indigenous territories to the east and west had had enough time to warn northcentral Venezuelan autochthons. Some would have escaped to the highlands, some into the Tuy and Caracas valleys, and others north and northeast toward the coast. Having experienced some early cruel raids by Spanish slavers (de Castellanos 1962[1589]:61), the peoples of the Lake Valencia Basin took refuge on the islands of the lake, leaving their ancestral settlements behind (Castillo Lara 1977; Barbudo 1964[1570-1575]:91; de Herrera y Tordesillas 1962[1601-1616]; de Castellanos 1962[1589]).

22 Spanish sources indicate that the natives of the Lake Valencia Basin took refuge on the lake’s islands (de Herrera y Tordesillas 1962[1601-1616]; Barbudo 1964[1570-1575]:91; de Castellanos 1962[1589]).

23 *Ketman* was used by the Polish poet and author Miłosz to explain the doublethink of ideologies inside an individual during the Soviet occupation of Poland in the twentieth century. *Ketman* describes the process of displaying one ideology to the outside world while maintaining a secret other in private.

24 It should be strongly emphasised that the Spanish military conquest of northcentral Venezuela begins when the New Laws of Indies were proclaimed and imposed in 1542 in the Spanish “dominions” in the Americas (Mira-Caballós 2007:186; Rogoziński 2000:31).

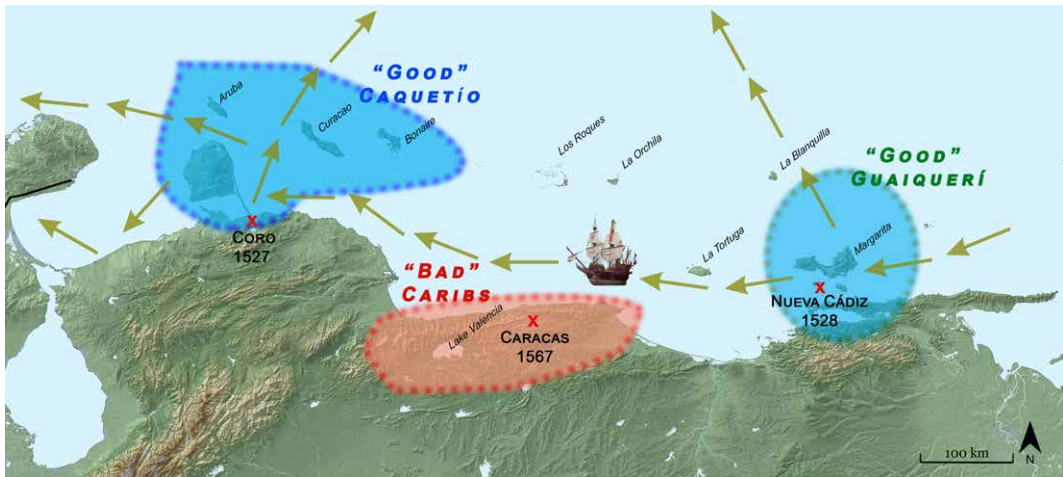


Figure 2.2. Map of Venezuelan coast and adjacent islands of the Southeastern Caribbean denoting three new categories and cultural areas that formed during the early colonial period. The leftmost in blue are the “Good” Caquetío, in the center in red are the “Bad” Caribs, and the rightmost in blue are the “Good” Guaiquerí. Important cities that were founded in these three areas are marked by an X with their dates of foundation noted. The map shows arrows indicating Spanish routes that now crisscrossed the region, interrupting or taking over precolonial routes (by authors, map data from JAXA 2018).

Attempts at the conquest of the northcentral region came first from the east. Francisco Fajardo, the son of Doña Isabel, chief of the *Guaiquerí* Indians of Margarita Island and Francisco Fajardo, a Spanish soldier, attempted to invade the Province of Caracas between 1555 and 1564 (Antczak 1999; Ayala Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2011; McCorkle 1965; de Oviedo y Baños 1982[1723]). The final blow from the Spanish conquistadores came from the west. With one leg firmly planted in the east (Nueva Cádiz 1528, Cumaná 1555), the other in the west (Coro 1527, El Tocuyo 1555), and crucially confident of “amicable” Indigenous populations in both areas (see Figure 2.2), the Spanish began conquering the still-unsubjugated Indigenous Peoples of the northcentral region. They defeated the confederated *Caraca* peoples under Chief Guaicaipuro and founded the city of Caracas in 1567 (de Oviedo y Baños 1982[1723], II:397). Diego de Losada reached Lake Valencia and “pacified” the entire Valley of Caracas in the same year (Nectario María 1979; de Oviedo y Baños 1982[1723] II). These processes flowed from the Spanish colonial priorities of that time: invasion and land appropriation, settlement, control of Indigenous labor, and missionization. As has been described with these three examples, operationalizing these priorities met with various Indigenous responses leading to differing outcomes.²⁵

The archaeological record is unevenly distributed across northcentral Venezuela. The Lake Valencia Basin, especially its eastern shores, features copious Valencioid cultural

25 Entering northcentral Venezuela, the conqueror Diego de Losada purportedly found “evidence” of cannibalistic practices in local villages (de Oviedo y Baños 1982[1723] II:446). Such evidence does not appear in the sources dealing with the early colonial territories of the *Guaiquerí* and *Caquetío*, suggesting it was fabricated to justify the violence perpetrated on the Cariban “cannibals” and used to differentiate between amicable and rebellious Indigenous Peoples.

remains produced between AD 800 and 1500 (Bennett 1937; del Valle and Salazar 2009; Kidder 1944; Osgood 1943; Requena 1932), while northern marine bays are sprinkled mainly with late precolonial evidence of barely known, possibly mixed fishing ventures by Valencioid, Ocumaroid, and Dabajuroid peoples (Álvarez and Casella 1983; Antczak and Antczak 2006; Herrera Malatesta 2011; Morales 1984; Sýkora 2006). The Caracas valley and central coast feature an even sparser archaeological record (Antczak *et al.* 2017; Cruxent and Rouse 1958; Rivas 2001, 1994, 1989; Rouse and Cruxent 1963).

The socionatural interactions on the shoreline of the Valencioid Sphere of Interaction were sharply disturbed by the appearance of the Spanish caravels (refer to Figure 2.2). The maritime traffic which developed parallel to the steep northcentral coast disrupted the centuries-old Indigenous voyages that were going perpendicularly to the Los Roques and La Orchila islands (Antczak and Antczak 2006). This was a severe blow to the core economic, political, and ideological foundations of the Sphere. Archaeological data readily supports the strength of the blow. By the early sixteenth century, in economic terms only, Indigenous Peoples on the mainland suffered the cutoff of between 3,000 and 5,000 kilograms of highly proteic queen conch meat which had been procured annually on the oceanic islands for three centuries (Schapira 2009). The crumbling of the interregional entrepôt prompted Indigenous displacements and existential struggles in the new and profoundly adverse situation. Remarkably, several late sixteenth-century to nineteenth-century historical documents consulted by the authors reveal the near-absence of northcentral Indigenous Peoples traveling from the coast to the formerly providential islands (Antczak and Antczak 2015).

This third narrative unfolds in the northcentral region of present-day Venezuela, a mountainous area Europeans penetrated late, as mentioned, in comparison to the adjacent regions. The first Spanish establishments in this region materialized when the pearl oyster beds to the east gave out and the town of Nueva Cádiz fell into ruin. German governorship to the west was ending. Yet European maritime traffic along the northern coast of South America flowed on, as it had from the very beginning of the sixteenth century, and it clashed frontally with Indigenous canoes heading west to east carrying goods from modern Colombia to the northcentral coast of today's Venezuela. European ships also disrupted seasonal south-north-south seafaring between the central coast and the offshore islands, as discussed above. Once these two backbones of the precolonial entrepôt collapsed, the very "being in the world" of northcentral Venezuela's Indigenous Peoples was profoundly and violently changed. "Noises" about starkly negative Indigenous-European intruder experiences filtered in; slave raids undertaken by the Spanish from Cubagua frightened Indigenes into isolated mountain refuges. In those places, often ephemeral and barely known to archaeologists, Indigenous groups interacted in a way likely unprecedented in the precolonial context. The fertile shores of Lake Valencia below and, farther east, the Aragua and Caracas Valleys, proved powerful attractors to European colonists in search of reproducing their traditional lifestyles, cultivars and animal husbandry included. The mountainous areas had been finally taken by 1578, the last land still to be pried away from Cariban speakers. The notions of "warlike Caribs," "bellicose" and "bad Indians," even "cannibals," derive from these same northcentral Indigenes resisting violent colonial procedures, their category being a European construct of a different kind to the "good" and "peaceful" *guatiaos* (see Whitehead 2011). Despite no archaeological evidence yet supporting the "cannibal" epithet, such ideas are still considered valid by many and,

alongside other epithets like “bad” and “bellicose,” figure in many narratives in popular culture today.

Conclusions and Future Research

Mainstream narratives persistently dominating present-day Venezuela are based on written documents with heavy colonial bias. By juxtaposing the reassessed documentary data with available archaeological evidence, we have showed that early colonial Indigenous-European interactions occurred on multiple intersecting levels with ever-changing dynamics, frequency, and intensity. Consequently, we have constructed three historically-archaeologically grounded narratives that – we argue – lead up to the conformation of two Indigenous identities today, namely the *Caquetío* (in the ABC islands) and the *Guaikerí* (on Margarita Island). Resulting from the quick and forceful process of transculturation that led to the losses of language, ancestral land, phenotype, and other markers of identity, these identities persist today, enduring through a variety of different transformed and/or new markers and largely transmitting as a “feeling” among those identifying as *Caquetío* or *Guaikerí* (Antczak O. 2018, 2016; refer to Figure 2.3). Indigenous Peoples are not represented (at least numerically), in current populations of northcentral Venezuela to the extent of the other two because – it is maintained by the narratives – they were largely wiped out by violent confrontations and epidemics, and survivors were not able to maintain markers of identity through new colonial institutions like the church, or *encomienda* to the same degree as the *Caquetío* or *Guaikerí* – their colonial categories

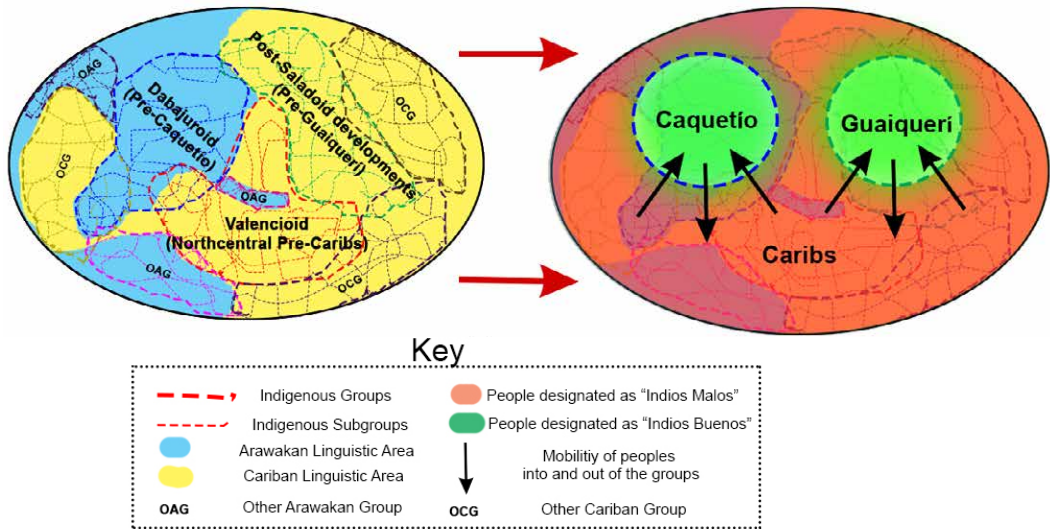


Figure 2.3. Abstract representation of how new categories negotiated during the early colonial period impacted precolonial social organization in the Southeastern Caribbean. On the left a rough representation of precolonial Indigenous socio-cultural groups and subgroups that inhabited the region precolonially and their areas of influence. Blue indicates Arawakan language speakers, and yellow indicates Cariban language speakers. On the right, a generalization of how early colonial imposition of new categories of “Good” and “Bad” Indigenous Peoples overlaid previous organization and formed new dynamics of movement across the region as people shifted in and out of these new categories (by authors).

implied enslavement or extinction, not co-existence (but see Rivas, this volume, 2001, 1994, 1989). We consider that colonial events in all three of these scenarios have influenced how these Indigenous groups self-identified themselves across colonial and republican times and how they continue identifying themselves today. These colonial events and the narratives of extinction often resulting from them, hinder postcolonial thought, seriously obstruct decolonial efforts (e.g., Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Hamilakis 2018) and continue denying participatory parity and control over heritage to Indigenous descendants. Bluntly, they severely hamper local “self-representation, self-determination, cultural continuity and pride” (Smith and Waterton 2009:86). But still, our historical-archaeological narratives depend on fragmentary and biased documents – and the limitations of the archaeological record also constrain such accounts. We cannot assume existing knowledge about what transpired in our study areas is sufficient to draw the narrative-building task to a close. Future interdisciplinary research in the Southeastern Caribbean may reduce current deficiencies, but it requires action on five fronts.

First, archaeology has revealed thriving Indigenous precolonial worlds erased, transformed, or replaced by the crude mechanisms of mercantilist trade and the arriving European power’s worldview. Yet the sometimes-marginal remarks of certain authors provide an intriguing point of entry into the last precolonial decades, and these require critical analysis. For example, José Oliver (1989) noted that before the Spanish Conquest in the west, mainland Dabajuroid ceramics underwent declines in design, execution, and variety. Currently, we cannot explain why this should have been the case. Also, we do not have archaeological evidence that may support the hereditary character of Manaure, the supreme cacique of the *Caquetío*, observed in colonial times (Gassón 2001:186). In adjacent northcentral Venezuela, abundant archaeological remains indicate that Indigenous populations should have been considerable in late precolonial times (Bennett 1937; del Valle and Salazar 2009; Kidder 1944; Requena 1932; Osgood 1943). Moreover, correlation between the archaeological deposits and the terraces left by Lake Valencia’s fluctuating water level suggest that sites there must have been inhabited until immediately before the Spanish arrival (Berry 1939; Cruxent and Rouse 1958 II:318). Yet Spanish documents provide surprisingly scant information about early encounters with the presumably numerous Indigenous Peoples (Castillo Lara 1977:2002). Additionally, on Trinidad the Guayabita ceramic style (most likely representing the Arauquinoid people who also inhabited Margarita) underwent significant changes just before the arrival of Europeans to the area (Boomert 2016:45).

What accounts for this? This chapter suggests earlier that in order to escape from the European threat, the Indigenes retreated to mountainous areas. Perhaps some of these processes happened even before the Spanish arrival in 1498? Alfredo Jahn (1932:4-7) suggested that shortly before the European Conquest, resident Arawakan-speaking Valencioid societies were overrun by Cariban-speakers.²⁶ Although Jahn did not provide convincing arguments for his categorical statements, the assertion that “some” strong external sociocultural influence reached the region just before the European Conquest was to reappear in later writings (e.g., Bennett 1937:89; Peñalver 1976; Requena 1932:259).

26 Note that Jahn is suggesting here that the Valencioid were Arawakan speakers, although in the scholarly literature the contrary categorization prevails that the Valencioid were Cariban speakers (Antczak *et al.* 2020, 2017).

A third conundrum: were the precolonial Valencioid culture bearers producing Valencia-style pottery, which was confined to the Lake Valencia Basin, or instead producing Valencioid-series pottery which spread across northcentral Venezuela and beyond (Antczak 1999; Antczak and Antczak 2006; Herrera Malatesta 2011)? How can we explain the presence of Valencioid-series pottery figurines on the islands of Margarita and Bonaire? Regarding dispersal, how are we to understand the apparent diffusion of lineally painted, presumably Dabajuroid pottery all the way east to Margarita? In this context, do we consider the possible existence of alienable and inalienable materials, the cosmological authentication of some of them, and the influence of their exchange on the temporarily fluctuant grade of cohesiveness and hierarchy of social organization (e.g., Gregory 1982; Maurice Godelier 1999; Mills 2004; Weiner 1992)?

We aim to take up all these open questions through interdisciplinary scrutiny, as well as to distinguish traditionally operating sociocultural processes necessary to the maintenance and reproduction of Indigenous systems from those drastically altered processes triggered by the precolonial processes and by the Europeans. Such scrutiny may illuminate the relationships within and among late precolonial and early colonial Indigenous groups.

Second, in our study areas archaeological data from the early sixteenth century is quite scant except for the Nueva Cádiz de Cubagua urban site (Rodríguez Velásquez 2020). In addition, what evidence exists is poorly integrated with the ethnohistoric data extracted from early historical documents. More emphasis, consequently, should be placed on early colonial settings where archaeological excavation can still be conducted. Questions of interest include: where are the human remains of *Guaiquerí* ancestors situated? What can we say, in archaeological terms, about early colonial transformation of their mortuary practices from precolonial to Catholic forms?²⁷ In order to support the historic narrative, where are the graves of the hundreds of Indigenous Peoples killed in the battles we read about in historical documents (e.g., battle between Guaicaipuro allies and the European conquerors)? Fresh archaeological data from new fieldwork is pivotal. Time is of the essence; many precolonial and early colonial sites are succumbing daily to the vicissitudes of modernity.

Third, historical-archaeological research continues to be pending on the role Indigenes have played in regional scenarios stretching from the early sixteenth century through colonial and republican times to the present (although see Scaramelli and Scaramelli, this volume and Navas *et al.*, this volume). Archaeological data informing the fully established colony as well as the independence and post-independence periods, including the conformation of the modern nation, accumulates but remains sparse. Augmenting those data will illuminate how precolonial and early colonial trends persisted or transformed, as well as limned what new trends came into being and what older ones passed entirely from the scene (see e.g., Ulloa Hung and Valcárcel Rojas 2016; Valcárcel Rojas *et al.* 2013). Current claims of Indigeneity in the Southern Caribbean should go neither unattended nor processed in a strictly political manner; rather, they ought to be understood from a deep-time interdisciplinary perspective and benefit from cooperative scholarly work in the region (Antczak O. 2018, 2016). Archaeological evidence supporting the ancestry of the modern-day *Guaiquerí* and *Caquetío*, as well as other Indigenous groups, should

27 See Valcárcel Rojas (2012) for an example from early colonial Cuba.

be earnestly examined together with these communities, using interdisciplinary methods of their choice (history, ethnography, historical linguistics, physical anthropology and genetics, interviews, heritage studies, and more). Remains still “under the ground” are likely those of Indigenous ancestors and can help restore their lives to our and their understanding, respecting the wishes of the descendants. This kind of recovery may also further our knowledge of what has maintained and formed – and is still forming – modern-day Indigenous identity in northcentral Venezuela and beyond. Critically evaluated anthropological data and oral traditions gathered from Venezuelan contemporary Indigenous populations should prove particularly useful. In sum, vigorous interdisciplinary research may help amend or transform the biased grand narratives currently in vogue by introducing novel, flexible, and more nuanced perspectives which consider non-Western ontologies in a socially sensitive manner (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017).

Fourth, it is necessary to breach the walls erected in the Southeastern Caribbean between nation-states as well as the language groups on the ABC islands (the Netherlands Antilles), in Venezuela, and on Trinidad and Tobago (Antczak *et al.* 2018; Hofman *et al.* 2014). These walls have lost most of the value attributed to them by their creators in the context of the archaeological (re)constructions undertaken today.²⁸ In fact, they continue to straitjacket academia, producing distorted interpretations of thousands of years of human life in the Southeastern Caribbean. The Southeastern Caribbean (or Southern Caribbean inclusive of the Colombian and Panamanian Coasts) should be reconceptualized as one macroregion in which human actions can be traced in a deep-time perspective. Breaching the walls here means permitting research to draw from the contributions of different schools of thought and from the trajectories of varying scientific traditions. It means being open to the possibility of finding compatibility in the entrenched and diverse sociopolitical orthodoxies of certain influential authors.²⁹ That Spanish-speaking scholars and students do not know and reflect on English, Dutch, and French documentary sources and interpretations – and vice versa – is profoundly divisive and socio-politically unsustainable (Pagán Jiménez and Rodríguez Ramos 2008). We can observe how, for example, the Hispanic Caribbean has often been excluded from the analysis of colonial Caribbean history (Meniketti 2009:52). Islands of the Venezuelan Caribbean are hardly ever named on the archaeological maps produced by English-speaking scholars (Antczak and Antczak 2006). The reverse practice is also marked. Clearly it is more than a question of language. Archaeologically disclosed issues related to identity, gender, and nationhood, among other social realities, are part of the contemporary culture and political dynamics in the Caribbean and elsewhere (*i.e.*, Díaz-Andreu and Champion 1996). Therefore, disclosing authors’ contexts of interpretation should be among the fundamental elements of archaeological practice. Moreover, this practice must reply to questions related to the substantiation of expert claims because mere invocation of archaeological authority “does not make the objection[s] go away” (González-Ruibal 2014; Lloyd 2014:97).

Fifth, uncritical acceptance of binary opposition between European colonists and the subaltern colonized, based on the asymmetry of power, can muddy the perception

28 We aim to breach the walls “not through the abolition of frontiers, but through their recognition,” where the notion of frontiers does “not necessarily signify compartmentalization and separation” in ideal globalizing processes (*sensu* Augé 2008:IX).

29 Consult *e.g.*, Cubero (2011:8) on how “fragmentation” is reproduced by Caribbean politics, academic institutions, and social research agendas.

of early Americans and their actions. Such essentializing opposition emerges in many of the writings mentioned in this chapter. It is true that Columbus's first voyage unchained a *serious* [colonial] *game* (sensu Ortner 2006) which included various violently enforced multidirectional processes of intermixing, transculturation, creolization, hybridization, and syncretism – among other terms (e.g., Dean and Leibson 2003; Ortiz 1995; Silliman 2015; Stockhammer 2012; VanValkenburgh 2013).³⁰ The trajectories of these macroscale phenomena derived from the imposition of new power structures and involved ubiquitous violence, implicit in inequality, in the contexts of race, gender, and labor (Voss 2008). At the same time, however, it was the specific responses of local peoples (Rubertone 2000:434; Silliman 2005:63-64) which also shaped these same trajectories. Such responses were the outcomes of “micropolitical practices undertaken by embedded social actors involved in the formation and transformation of social life” (Voss 2015a:657; Voss and Casella 2012). Present among such actors were, to name a few: Indigenous Peoples, enslaved and free Africans, European (or other) indentured servants, soldiers, colonial administrators, settlers, and colonists. Increasingly numerous among all of these figured the early *Americans*: a new category of social actors born in the colonial Americas. All these actors wielded agential power, a power weathering colonial and postcolonial storms. If we are right about this, then certain *Americans*, now living in our study regions may bear in themselves the far-echoing consequences of the early colonial creation of “good” and “bad Indians” (see e.g., Vargas Arenas 2001:94).³¹ Did the descendants of the “good” *Guaiquerí* and *Caquetío* survive the sixteenth century and enter the colonial forge in a different manner than descendants of the northcentral “bad” Caribs? While in the east and west Indigenous Peoples were (if often perforce) mostly cooperating and mixing with the Europeans, in the central region they were largely (but not all) killed by viruses or massacred in armed combat. Yet this entire historical panorama included (in varying measure through space and time) the exerted power of a growing category of agential *Americans* perhaps best epitomized by Francisco Fajardo, the appreciation of whose legacy may change due to political pressures of the present day. This category of social actors demonstrates consistent agency in historical contexts where it is easy to assume that no such agency existed. Clearly, the European conquest was not just a “clash” between (incompatible) Indigenous and European “modes of production”.³² Moreover, the agential roles of local populations cannot be confined only to conscious or semi-conscious combative or subversive exercises, or to subsistence activities. The *Americans* also acted in the (often taken for granted) unreflective reality of colonial life.³³ Recognizing these facts

30 Our intention is to emphasize topics related to intercultural interactions but not to dwell on them in this chapter (for example, for discussions on the concept of *criollo*, see Arrom 1951; Deagan and Cruxent 1993; Stewart 2016; for creole, see Allen 1998; Cubero 2011; Ewen 2000; and Kachua 2018; for *mestizo*, see Walsh 2018 and Zermelo-Padilla 2008, among many others).

31 This contribution aims to constructively discuss the broad repercussions of the colonial constructions of the terms/concepts “Arawak” and “Carib” (and other phonetic transcriptions of these names) throughout northern South America (Whitehead 2011:46) and, therefore, to contribute to scholarly debate on the possible effects of the past on the present.

32 Vargas Arenas (1990:304-305) considers that Indigenous egalitarian tribal formation was inevitably incompatible with the European classist one. The imposition of “more developed productive forces” on the less developed ones invokes, according to Tarble (2001:39), the perception of a unilineal line of progress.

33 For an example of an archaeological critique of Pierre Bourdieu's *doxa* (Bourdieu 1974:164) see e.g., Smith 2001; Pauketat 2001; and Silliman 2001.

by no means erases or lessens the atrocities committed in the Americas by external (and internal) powers during colonial times, nor the colonial impacts perceivable in the present (e.g., Insoll 2007). Nor does what agency was available to the Indigenous Peoples forfeit their enduring fundamental rights today, nor those of other-than-Indigenous *Americans*. All these peoples shaped, in varying conditions of justice and possibility, the sociohistorical events which disembody into the present.

Retaking the title of this chapter, we have documented how the lust of the “conquerors” – oscillating between categories of “good” and “bad” Indians – was, on the grounds of the “New World” contesting colonial orders that were coming from the other side of the ocean. In this way this chapter contributes to the stream of counter-discourses which oppose a unilinear, universalist, and politically motivated reading of history. The narratives in vogue rely on a stiff binary opposition between good and evil constraining the possible and likely wide array of paths past peoples were both forced into and cleared for themselves. Such a dichotomy removes past social life from its lived realities and aims to legitimize specific historical meaning, experiences, and knowledge, frequently with the purpose of accumulating political power, and controlling perceptions of the world (Lyotard 1984). Many traditional narratives distort, with enormous negative impact on some everyday lives in the twenty-first century, current understandings of early colonial societies and their actors (Senatore and Funari 2015). Counter-discourses serve to expose the biases – and judgements – of the dominant narratives. Critically constructed counter-discourses, historically and archaeologically grounded, amend, contest, transform, and finally may erode those grand narratives.³⁴ Seventeenth- through twenty-first-century trajectories have yet to be systematically approached by interdisciplinary research teams and embedded into deep historical contexts. The role of historical archaeologists, acting with local communities in jointly designed and ethically sound projects, is pivotal. Shannon Lee Dawdy (2018:121) rightly asks, “When can the Other become something *other* than the abject subject?” As part of the reply to this question we suggest that together, archaeologists, heritage managers, and communities (categories we hope will increasingly overlap) can contribute to a better understanding of contemporary identities and, therefore, construct more equitable futures for contemporary descendants of the Indigenous and other groupings of historically disenfranchised peoples.

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34 We critically rework the narratives in vogue, which “have occupied the political imagination and practice of archaeology [in Venezuela and beyond],” helping “archaeology as a public engaged practice to [be] a truly critical voice on the global stage” (González-Ruibal *et al.* 2017:514; see also Tiffin 1987:18; Stahl 2020) through community archaeology experiential practices (see Antczak *et al.* 2013) and their political, ethical and theoretical implications (Smith and Waterton 2009). All three narratives about a multicultural society that lived and interacted in a specific historical framework clearly defined by temporo/spatial variables are archaeologically theorized and grounded (see González-Ruibal *et al.* 2019). These are our narratives and, obviously, are situated in a specific contemporary context. Finally, it should also be underlined that this research is part of several projects that aim to bridge the past and the present by bringing the voices of present-day Indigenous Peoples into the conversation (Antczak O. 2016, 2018; Antczak *et al.* 2019a).

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