Chapter 7

Caciques and their Collectives: An Ethnohistoric View of Political Networks

[T]he Admiral found out that they called the king* cacique *in their tongue.[1]

> Excerpt from the diary of Columbus, as told by Bartolomé de las Casas (de Navarete 1922: 110)

In the final part of this work I will focus on two larger and interconnected forces behind the patterns of homogeneity and diversity in the late pre-colonial Caribbean: the political economy and the material cultural repertoires and practices referred to as "Taíno". The latter was also discussed in the previous chapter as the one group that held the network of 14th century Kelbey's Ridge 2 together, perhaps as the result of the growing influence of Greater Antillean peoples over the region. This chapter will take a more top-down view and discuss the structure of the late pre-colonial socio-political system known as the *cacicazgo*. I will contrast a network exploration based on ethnohistorical information on socio-political relations to a standard model that suggests *cacicazgos* were strong, institutional hierarches based around the figure of the *cacique*. The corresponding model is one in which we see a strong hierarchy in political networks that are controlled by one political actor (see Figure 7.1).

Although the *cacicazgo* is a term often applied to refer to the political systems in the Caribbean and beyond, the Greater Antilles and specifically Hispaniola and Puerto Rico are the only islands for which the multi-tiered, regional polities headed by an actual *cacique*, can directly be substantiated from the available historic sources (Curet 1992, 2003; Rouse 1992; Siegel 1992). All other "*cacicazgos*" are extrapolations of either early colonial Spanish colonial administrations or present-day scholars seeking to find one model for the socio-political systems of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Consequently it has often been equalled to the chiefdom model from socio-political evolutionary theory (Curet 2003). As I will discuss here, on some level the structure of the *cacicazgo* can be compared to

1 "[…] y allí supo el Almirante que al Rey llamaban en su lengua *Cacique*" (de Navarete 1922: 110).

other types of political systems, but it also has some features that make it uniquely Antillean.[2]

In the Greater Antilles, the estimates on the number and size of the existing *cacicazgos* at the end of the 15th century vary: some scholars claim there were only five regional *cacicazgos* on the island of Hispaniola, others identify up to twelve smaller polities (Wilson 1990). The number and extent of Puerto Rican *cacicazgos* at the time of contact is less clear, but there were at least a few powerful *caciques* (Oliver 2009). As discussed in Chapter 2, the initial development of these polities and their leaders, taking place around AD 700, also coincided with population growth and the contraction of long-distance exchange networks. As a result of the political solidification, increasing population pressure and decreasing long-distance contacts it could be expected that communities would have become much more territorially entrenched. This could have resulted in more competition and conflict between groups and a cultural and social landscape that had more and more, strongly demarcated boundaries, like it did in many other parts of the world.

Generally speaking, historic sources seem to indicate that *cacicazgos* were more likely to ally than compete with each other. We know that their leaders were mutually connected through several types of elite relations, e.g. exchanges of gifts, marital partners and even the exchange of personal names known as *guaítiao* (Mol 2007; Oliver 2009). It is for instance well-documented that the eastern Hispaniolan *caciques* had strong alliances with several Puerto Rican *caciques* (Oliver 2009; Samson 2010). These bonds may have even been the reason that the *cacicazgos* in the east of Hispaniola were among the longest enduring after the initial contact with Europeans in 1492. Only after the *Wars of Higuey* of 1504, in which a force of Puerto Rican and Hispaniolan peoples openly confronted the Spanish, did the Spanish manage to break the indigenous power in this region (Churampi Ramírez 2007; Oliver 2009). So, although competition was a natural part of inter-*cacical* interactions – even including mock battles –, this rivalry does not seem to have easily spilled over into inter-group violence or cultural segregation.

This solidarity could have been the result of political unification against the greater threat of the Spanish *conquistadores*. Nevertheless, the post-contact archaeological record shows a similar picture of interaction instead of conflict in the region of the Mona Passage – the sea strait dividing Puerto Rico and Hispaniola. Albeit extreme long-distance networks between regions had declined, the last centuries before contact showed a range of frequent and stable connections across the region (e.g. Hofman, Isendoorn, *et al.* 2008; Keegan 2007; Morsink 2012; Oliver 2009; Ulloa Hung 2013). In addition, as was discussed in the previous chapter, material cultural practices and repertoires from the Mona Passage region seem to have diffused to the surrounding island regions (Atkinson 2006; Crock 2000; Hofman, Bright, *et al.* 2008; Hoogland and Hofman 1999; McGinnis 1997; Mol 2007; Oliver 2009; Valcárcel Rojas 2002).

---

2 This chapter is an extension of part of a book chapter I co-authored with Jimmy Mans (Mol and Mans 2013). Here we contrasted the politics of exchange networks of the Trio community of Amötopo (Surinam; see also Mans 2011) to those of proto-contact Hispaniola.

This diffusion includes such examples of "Classic Taíno" culture as (variants of) the Ostionoid ceramic series (Rouse 1992; Veloz Maggiolo 1972), stone belts, elbow stones, (zoo-)anthropomorphic three-pointed stones (Walker 1993), *guaíza* shell faces (Mol 2007), (zoo-)anthropomorphic pestles, and high-backed *duho* seats (Ostapkowicz 1997). Aside from having a large area of distribution these items seemed to also have formed a specific subset of highly valued material culture (McGinnis 1997; Hofman, Bright, *et al.* 2008). It has also been suggested that the diffusion of these objects was the result of their circulation within elite exchange networks (Oliver 2009). It is also noteworthy that archaeological evidence for any larger scale inter-polity conflict is lacking. In the Northeastern Caribbean there is only scant evidence for interpersonal violence to begin with (e.g. Calderon 1975; Siegel 2004; Weston 2010), but the available evidence is certainly not reflective of endemic (group) conflicts. In other words, the observed patterns of connectivity between regions and its relative peacefulness seem to defy the projected evolution of a culturally and politically "balkanized" Northeastern Caribbean.

There does not seem to be any easily identifiable cause for this unity. Although it has been suggested that this was the result of a shared pan-Antillean cultural identity (cf. Rodríguez Ramos 2010: 10, see also pp. 210-212; Oliver 2009: 27-30), there are, for instance, no archaeological indications of widely shared political or religious ideologies (e.g. Anderson 1991). In fact, any form of top-down identity formation seems to be completely lacking. Rather, this and the following Chapter investigates the idea that this was not the result of top-down ideological or identity processes, but due to the pressures of indigenous political economies. I will specifically discuss why, even in the context of potentially increasing political hierarchies and territoriality, those in power could never afford to look too much inward or outward, always needing to connect to various types of political economies. Subsequently, Chapter 8 will follow up on this with the idea that this pressure partly found an outlet and was mediated by inspirited objects (see also Curet 1996; Mol 2007; Oliver 2009; Siegel 2010).

Cacical networks: a fragmentary archaeological view

Archaeological indicators of economic relations between sites can potentially serve to connect nodes and reconstruct flows of past political networks. This can be applied alongside other archaeological indicators of power differentiation between and within sites. The value of such a network is highly dependent on the size and variability of the data sets. Unfortunately, such data are hard to come by in the case of the heartland of the *cacicazgo* or as Oliver (2009: 45) has recently explained in his publication on *cacical* networks or "webs" in the late pre-contact and early contact Mona Passage region: "[T]he patterns of pathways connecting different sites between and within islands cannot be specified, and thus the configuration of the web (nodes and pathways or vectors) remains vague. At best what can be observed is the sphere or area of interaction."

On the other hand investigations in this region provide more and more information on pathways flowing from and to sites, either based in GIS or archaeometrical analysis. Torres, for example, has shown that a GIS-database of site locations and periodization can greatly augment our current understanding of the influence of Euclidean distance on indigenous networks of power (Torres 2012). This study was, however, based on a large database of regional surveys and excavations carried out in southwest Puerto Rico, one of the regions with the best archaeological coverage of the Caribbean.

In Hispaniola most regions simply have not received that kind of substantive attention. One of the zones with the best archaeological coverage to date is the province of Higuey, in the east of the Dominican Republic. It has been extensively surveyed by Dominican and foreign archaeologists since the 1960s. Numerous sites discovered through these surveys have been subject to additional research in the form of both small and large scale excavations, especially in the east and south (Samson 2010: 26-36, 97-105). The resulting image is one of a relatively dense population living in small hamlets and larger villages with some of the larger sites probably fulfilling the role of regional socio-political centres. However, research on the exact direction and nature of interactions between these archaeological sites and their possible political integration is still in its early stages.

Higuey is one of the few regions and sites for which this may be possible. In this region the settlement of Punta Macao, a 1 km^2 large site facing the Mona Passage in the East of the province, holds a special position (Samson 2010: 87; Veloz Maggiolo and Ortega 1972). Ethnohistoric sources concerning the region mention that a large village named Macao was located in a *cacicazgo* with the same name, suggesting it was the centre of this *cacicazgo* (de las Casas 1909: Vol. 1, Chapter 9). Due to its size, which had no parallel in the direct vicinity, archaeologists have suggested that Punta Macao was the location of the historic Macao. Unfortunately, the site itself was destroyed in 2006/2007 due to a golf-course development. Although rescue archaeology was carried out and in spite of the fact that several excavations have taken place in the past, few accessible publications on the site exist.

Punta Macao had a long history of habitation, the chronology of the ceramics found at the site point to a continuous use since AD 200/400 (Samson 2010: 33).[3] Additionally, the ceramic assemblage shows a transition from a local variant of the Ostionoid-series into the Chicoid-series, which suggests that it might have been one of the key sites for the development of the Chicoid international style (Veloz Maggiolo and Ortega 1972; Rouse 1992). The Macao collection of the Fundación Garcia-Arévalo includes Early Colonial ceramics reputedly found at the site (Samson, personal communication 2010). This suggests a continued usage during Early Colonial times.

3 Over the years eight C-14 samples were taken at the site. They were dated between AD 825 and 1200 (Olsen Bogaert 2008: 26).

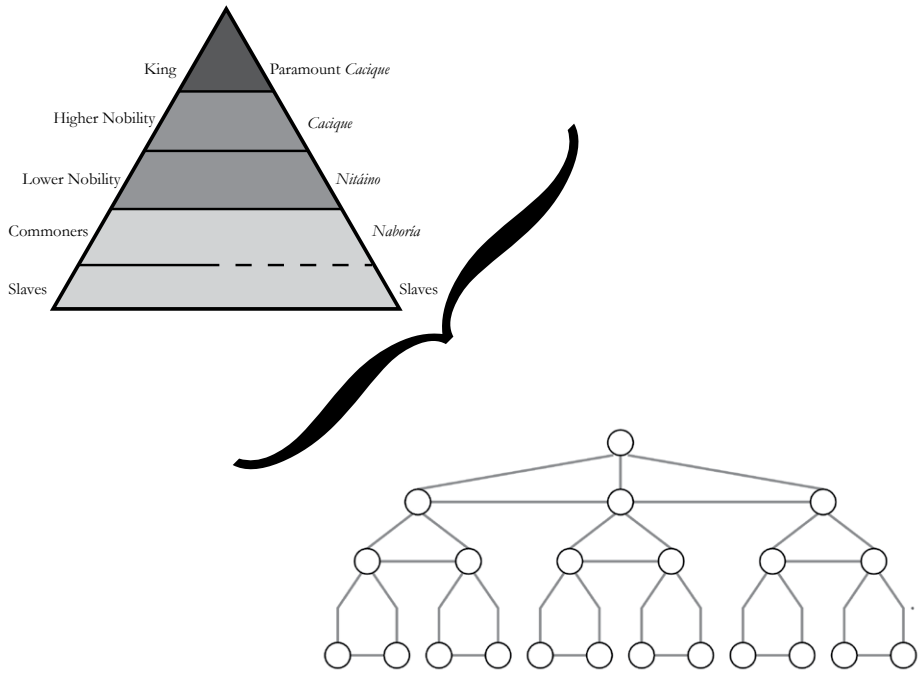

Figure 7.1: A political pyramid as a network.

Pollen analysis, a formal study of part of the ceramic assemblage, and a geological survey of the site imply that, although inhabitants of Macao were exploiting coastal and marine resources, crops such as manioc, sweet potatoes, zamia and chilli peppers as well as non-edible crops (tobacco, cotton) were cultivated on a moderately large-scale (Nadal 2004; Ulloa Hung 2008). A total of twenty-six burials have been recovered in 2006 and are currently being examined at the Museo del Hombre Dominicano in Santo Domingo (Tavárez María and Calderón 2005). A dental study of the remains reveals wear and pathology consistent with a mixed agricultural and marine diet (Mickleburgh and Pagán-Jiménez 2012). Although enlightening, these findings do not point to an extra-ordinary role in terms of subsistence or other economic networks for a site of this period. Punta Macao was just one of many more or less economically autarkic site systems in Higuey (Samson 2010; Veloz Maggiolo and Ortega 1972).

Quite a few personal adornments made of shell, fishbone and stone were reportedly found during the rescue excavations. Objects found at this site and now kept at the Museo del Hombre Dominicano (Santo Domingo) include a large stone axe, fragments of stone belts, ceramic body stamps, a ceramic three pointer, shell and bone beads (including one perforated dog tooth and a shell frog pendant), a badly weathered shell face, and a small sceptre-like object with a big-beaked bird at its head (Ulloa Hung, personal communication 2010). Before its destruction, parts of this site were subject to heavy looting. Therefore it has to be expected that numerous objects from Macao are currently included in unknown local and

international private collections. Compared to contemporaneous sites within this region, such as El Cabo (Samson 2010), items recovered from the archaeological record of Macao do not necessarily suggest a central position in local political networks.

Recent studies of clay composition from other contemporaneous, habitation sites in Higuey have pinpointed Macao as the possible source of ceramic clay or completed ceramic vessels (Conrad, *et al.* 2008; van As, *et al.* 2008). Results of a neutron activation analysis of ceramics collected (*n*= 175) at the Mananantíal de Aleta, nearby Aleta Plaza sites, La Cangrejera in the Parque Nacional del Este and Punta Macao show that one hundred and forty-six sherds could be assigned to five compositional groups (Conrad, *et al.* 2008). Although a majority of the clays of the ceramics (*n*= *122*) were collected within the regional of the site, several non-local ceramics show a strong correlation with the composition of the ceramic sherds from Punta Macao (*n*= 24). Additionally (van As, *et al.* 2008), specimens were collected in the eastern and south-eastern coastal region in order to gain insight into the provenance of the clay of the ceramics at the site of El Cabo. Further archaeometrical analysis of this material is pending, but a preliminary clay-suitability study indicates that a majority of the clays or ceramics presumably originated from the immediate vicinity of the Punta Macao site.[4]

Using this information it is in theory possible to build a network based on probable clay provenance of the ceramics from several sites in the region. For this purpose the results from the La Aleta and El Cabo study were combined (Conrad, *et al.* 2008; van As, *et al.* 2008). The resulting 2-mode graph is shown in Figure 7.2 (affiliation of absolute quantity of sherds to the various compositional groups). The analysis of the fragmentary ceramic network data based on absence and presence of network connections shows that the group of ceramics related to the Macao region seems to take a somewhat central position within the network. Nevertheless, it is clear that Macao was in no way the most important source for clay with regard to the more southerly located community inhabiting the La Aleta region. Even if it was, the network has too few data points and is too fragmentary to allow for a wider interpretation of political networks in the region. Even based on this relatively large data set it is impossible to conclude anything in detail on whether the political networks of the region were interdependent with Punta Macao's ceramic distribution network. In this sense, Oliver (2009: 45) is correct: even the best available archaeological database from the Hispaniolan heartland of the *cacicazgo* does not present a ready handle that can help us to understand the socio-political structures and strategies that were at play in the region, let alone *cacical* networks in general.

4 Another alternative for clays with similar suitability are the areas surrounding the modern city of Higuey in the centre of the province and Boca de Yuma in the Southeast, but Van As and colleagues deem Macao to be the most likely provenance (Van As 2008: 72).

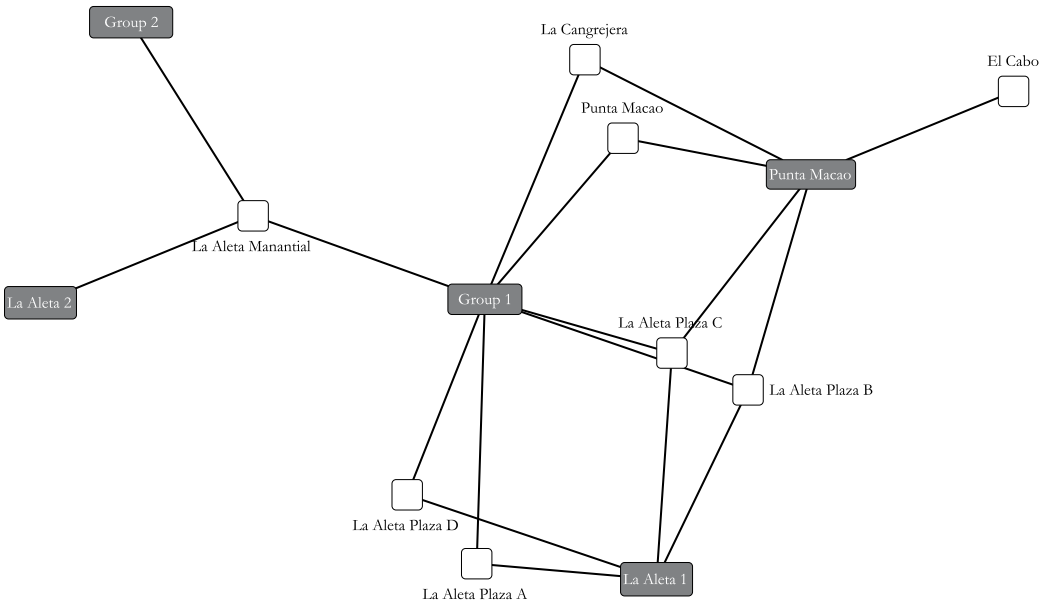

Figure 7.2: Fragmented 2-mode network of an incomplete view of Higuey's ceramic distribution, based on the provenance studies by Conrad and colleagues (2008) and van As and colleagues (2008). White nodes represent the ceramic assemblages of sites or site loci, while dark grey nodes correspond to clay compositional groups.

Cacical networks: a view from ethnohistory

In Caribbean archaeology, ethnohistorical documents have played an important role in the reconstruction of pre-colonial political structures and social practices ever since the beginning of the discipline (e.g. Lovén 1935). The majority of these sources have stressed the *cacique* as being the political office where most if not all political power was held. It is revealing that by and large chroniclers referred to *caciques* as "*reyes*" or "kings" and that even their personal adornments were synonymized with regalia: e.g. feather headdresses became crowns in the citation from Columbus's diary describing his interaction with Guacanagarí (Chapter 4). This seems to place the type of relations *caciques* had with non-*caciques* firmly within the realm of the Authority Ranking models of relations. As I will argue here, this view misconstrues the complex and heterarchical nature of *cacical* political economies. To Spanish chroniclers the role of *caciques* may have seemed comparable to that of late medieval European royalty, but in fact the political networks of which the *cacique* was a part were very dissimilar to those of an absolute, divinely ordained monarch.

Indeed, in more recent scholarly literature the *cacique* is often referred to as a type of chief, rather than king. However, partly because the *cacicazgo* is considered a Caribbean synonymic-type of chiefdom from the viewpoint of socio-political evolutionary theory (Curet 2003; Redmond 1998; Steward 1948), the political system in the Antilles has been characterized through the authority of the *cacique*

as an (increasingly) absolute leader (Keegan 2007; Moscoso 1977, 1999; Roe 1997). This has resulted in a "pyramidal" view of the late pre- and early colonial Greater Antillean society, with the *cacique* at the pinnacle (Figure 7.1). This top-down view of indigenous socio-politics can also be found in Caribbean society today: versions of indigenous resistance stories often focus on the personal exploits of *caciques* in their struggle against the Spanish conqueror and in the Dominican Republic the term *cacique* is even today utilized when referring to petty bosses who behave as despots.

This pyramidal model of power was dominated by a set of nested Authority Ranking relations. Regional *cacicazgos*, such as in Higuey, were headed by a paramount *cacique*, who had influence over a number of less powerful *caciques.* According to some sources this class of elites is called the *nitaínos,* "the good ones". The class of the *naborías* (literally meaning, "the rest") is considered to have been the commoner's class (Keegan 1997; Keegan, *et al.* 1998; Moscoso 1977, 1999). It has even been suggested that this pyramidal power structure was already firmly in place by the beginning of the contact period to a degree that the *caciques* were perceived as divine kings, akin to those in Polynesia (Sahlins 1963, 1975), who were venerated with great decorum (Keegan, *et al.* 1998; Oliver 1997, 2000). In this view the only politically relevant network interactions supposedly take place in hierarchical "old boy networks" between a few paramount *caciques* and, from the top down, between paramount *caciques* and their subordinate *caciques*, who in turn ruled their communities (Mol and Mans 2013).

This view of *cacical* authority has received considerable critique. Part of this criticism focuses on the disparate levels of detail between archaeology and ethnohistory. However, the problem is not that this view is largely based on ethnohistorical rather than on archaeological studies (cf. Machlachlan and Keegan 1990; Keegan and Rodríguez 2004). Where the view of the pre-colonial Antillean political structure is most fraught with difficulties is that it is largely based on socio-political evolutionary models. In this model there is one chief, reigning supreme over a certain territory, who is hard at work in turning his chiefdom into an incipient state (Chapman 2003; Pauketat 2008). Aside from the fact that such quasi-evolutionary thinking is based on a teleological fallacy, there is as yet no undisputed ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence indicating that the male *cacique* was in fact an absolute leader. On the contrary, a socio-political network investigation of the ethnohistoric sources will show that the *cacique* is only one of several powerful figures in indigenous political economies.

Cacical nodes and ties

A close reading of the prominent historic sources referring to the early contact period of Hispaniola presents us with a variety of important network actors in pre- and early Colonial Greater Antillean political networks.[5] Based on this information the interrelations between political actors can be modelled. These various nodes in the network fulfilled different but important roles in diplomacy, brokering, and

5 Drawn from the standard historic sources, discussed at length in Wilson (1990: 7-13).

competition in the political arena. As such several types of actors can be identified that would have been relevant for the political process from an *emic* perspective: spirits, ancestors, and other superhuman beings, *behiques* or magico-religious specialists, *caciques*, *cacical* communities, and *cacical* kin such as the preferred heir and his wife or *cacica*. [6]

It is clear that the *cacique* was the one individual who was first and foremost responsible for the everyday management of his or her community and extended network of kin. Indeed, it may be presumed that the term *cacique* originally referred to the head of an extended family, a Greater Antillean form of the "*pater familias*" so to speak (Oliver, personal communication 2007). However, at the time of contact there were evidently definite hierarchies dividing *caciques* and *cacical* communities. Larger *cacicazgos* were headed by a paramount *cacique* who supervised a number of less powerful *caciques.* Nevertheless, even if we would accept that they were semi-divine beings, an individual *cacique* was not the only demi-god on earth.

Various readings of the early documents suggest anywhere between five and twelve paramount *caciques* on the island of Hispaniola around the time of contact (Wilson 1990). These regional *cacicazgos* all consisted of numerous smaller political entities. Ethnohistoric sources suggest that at least three *cacical* ranks were distinguished: (1) *matunherí* for the highest ranking *cacique*, (2) *baharí* for a *cacique* of the second rank and (3) *waherí* for the lowest *cacical* rank (Oliver 2009: 25). This essentially added several other layers to the *cacical* network in which the most powerful *caciques* were exchanging and competing in a higher, yet permeable political sphere, while attempting to retain the support of their followers consisting of subordinate *cacical* collectives. Following up on the idea of *caciques* as heads of family-based collectives, there were probably as many minor *caciques* as there were kin collectives (Oliver 2009). These minor *caciques* jockeyed amongst themselves for wider popular support and favourable political alliances, the more powerful among them sometimes even challenging paramount *caciques*. This could have been the intention of Guacanagarí when he attempted to forge an alliance with Columbus (Wilson 1990: 79; Mol 2007).

Other members of the *cacique*'s community were responsible for the creation and maintenance of network relations as well. For instance, it is a recurrent theme in interactions between groups of Spaniards and indigenous peoples that before the leader of the Spanish group meets the *cacique* they first interact with another, less authoritative member of the *cacique*'s community, who perhaps determines the dispositions of the strangers (e.g. de Navarete 1922: 105-108, 154). These trustees, likely family members or other close allies, would also assist the *cacique* during the large communal exchanges in which he was the main acting party. In such exchanges other high-ranking individuals had subsidiary roles to fulfil (such as presenting smaller gifts, partaking in the feast, socializing with the guests, forwarding advice to the *cacique etc.*). This seems to be the power relations

6 It is undeniably true that male political leaders seem to be the most prominent in the historic descriptions. However, we should not discount the fact that the historic sources are *de facto* male focused and that the colonizers applied the structure of the *cacical* office as the basis for the later *encomienda*-system, which closely mimicked similar Iberian, male dominated, feudal institutions.

that inform the actions and behaviours of the five unnamed "kings" that were subject to Guacanagarí (Chapter 4). Moreover, gifts were seemingly sent through intermediaries, the proxy was probably a member of the *caciques*' lineage (Keegan 2007; Mol 2007).

The late Puerto Rican scholar Ricardo Alegría found a shipping list from the second voyage to the Caribbean, the so-called "Columbus Shipping List", in the *Colección de Documentos Inéditos* of the Seville *Archivo General de Indias*. It catalogues a string of exchanges between Columbus and Guacanagarí, at the newly founded colony of Isabela between the first quarter of 1495 and the second quarter of 1496 (Alegría 1980; Mol 2007, 2008). The author of the list mentions on several occasions that Guacanagarí sent Columbus various items. It is notable that at least two of them are brought by one of the nephews of Guacanagarí; a similar gift had also been sent with one of his family members, presumably a nephew (de Navarete 1922: 133 and 229).

This particular strategy of involving the *cacique*'s extended kin in exchanges with outsiders is especially relevant with regards to *cacical* succession. It seems that, after his death, the vast majority of the *cacique*'s wealth was returned into circulation during a funerary feast in which his extended kin gave away his possessions to 'foreign' *caciques* (de Oviedo y Valdés 1851: Vol. 5, Chapter 4, p. 134).[7] It is not known which member of the *cacique*'s extended kin supervised this feast. The debate on the rules of descent and inheritance for the *cacical* title has not yet been settled. It has been suggested that this title passed to the sister's son of the *cacique* (Keegan 2006), which would comply with the reference to the nephews of Guacanagarí acting as an emissary.

However, I agree with Curet (Curet 2002, 2006) that, although there probably was an established practice of succession of the *cacique* by his sister's first son, the rules of succession were flexible. This allowed some room for political manoeuvring of the various actors and factions vying for the *cacical* office. Having the right type of network skills and relations offered a decisive advantage in such a competitive environment. Once the old *cacique* had passed away the new *cacique* would inherit the former's title and a set of reciprocal obligations resulting from the funerary exchanges after his death. However, the new *cacique* would not directly inherit material wealth that could serve as capital for existing and new political alliances. For prospective *caciques* it would therefore have been even more important to accumulate social and material capital by means of a strong network of one's own. This would have been strengthened by his duties as a semi-official *cacical* emissary.

Some confusion exists concerning the political status of the wife of the *cacique* or *cacica*.[8] We know that in at least one case (concerning the *cacica* Anacaona, wife to the prominent *cacique* Caonabo) the wife of a *cacique* fulfilled his political duties after his death. It has been claimed that this was the result of stress in the indigenous political system due to some particularly disruptive Spanish actions, including the

7 See Curet (2002, 2006), Keegan (2006) Oliver (2009: 104) for an extended discussion hereof.

8 In fact, *caciques* were probably polygamous and their wives perhaps even ranked (Oviedo y Valdes 1851: Book 5, Chapter 3, p. 134).

abduction and later death of Caonabo, held to be responsible for the destruction of La Navidad (Wilson 1990: 119; see Chapter 1). Nevertheless, there seems to have been an important role for the *cacica* and other women in indigenous networks of the proto-contact period. In pre-contact times this position was probably rooted in the matrilineal systems of descent, which made it impossible to hold on to and build a material base of wealth through the male line (Ensor 2013; Keegan 2007). Rather, material wealth and, for that matter, titles and obligations were owned and passed on through the maternal line.[9] In the case of the *cacica* Anacaona it is presumed that, even after the death of Caonabo, she had several houses at her disposal. They stored valuable items that were released into circulation at strategic moments (Martyr D'Anghera 1912: 124-125; Mol 2007: 86-88).

Additionally, the sources are unequivocal about the fact that she was a master at dancing and conducting *areítos* (e.g. de las Casas 1875: Vol. 1, Chapter 114, p. 138-139; de Oviedo y Valdes 1851: Book 5, Chapter 1, p. 127). These *areítos* were ritual, communal dances, which were performed on special occasions serving as mnemonic devices with which history could be recorded and re-enacted. They functioned as highly prestigious intellectual capital (de las Casas 1875: Vol. 1, Chapter 121, p. 171). The records also indicate that the *cacica* and other women of her community were responsible for the redistribution of food when receiving visitors (Wilson 1990: 57).Thus, although *cacicas* such as Anacaona did not have a network role that led directly to the establishment of many new network connections, she and other women of the community were in charge of maintaining existing networks.[10] This network role and strategy is in line with general discussions on the "conservative" role of women in social networks and particularly gift exchange.[11] It is assumed that she and other females of the *cacique*'s community remembered details of past network interactions, exerted control over network relations through the distribution of their lineage's material wealth and were of vital importance to the local infrastructure behind political networks. As is clear in the case of case of Caonabo and Anacaona, a *cacica* was more than capable of taking control of *cacical* collectives and their network relations to other collectives in the absence of a (strong) *cacique*.

It is important to understand the larger social universe in which political contracts and conflicts were created and mediated. Chapter 2 and 4 discussed how, within the broader perspectivist model of Lowland South American and the Caribbean, political economies were driven by acquisition and control of the "life-forces" of social others. This life-force shapes a being's subjective state and therefore the larger ebb and flow structures communal and inter-communal networks. It

9 See Strathern (1996) for a cross-cultural perspective hereon.

10 Deagan (2004) argues that the high measure of cultural continuity in Early Colonial Hispaniola (as attested at the contact period site of En Bas Saline) is based on the enduring social influence of indigenous women.

11 See also Mol and Mans (2013) for a perspective on this issue from the viewpoint of the Guianas; see Godelier (1999), Strathern (1986, 1996) and Weiner (1992) for a discussion on this matter with reference to Melanesia and beyond. In addition, psychologists like Komter (2005) and Cheal (1996) have found similar strategic positions for women in Western gift bonanzas such as Christmas and *Sinterklaas*.

cannot, however, be indefinitely or efficiently produced internally – within the person or group –, but needs to be externally acquired through interaction with social others In Lowland South America and the Caribbean the direct objective is to literally acquire life-forces of other subjects and "make them work" for oneself and one's social group (Santos-Granero 2009b).[12]

In a perspectivist worldview where a range of subjects could potentially possess *cemí* or life force, the political economy of life would also have been extended to incorporate non-humans (Oliver 2009). Pané (1999 [1571]: 25-26)'s account on the creation of a *cemí* statue for example, shows that trees, rocks and material culture objects could make their wishes known and thereby enter into contracts with human beings. If these contracts were not honoured by their human counterparts these materialized spirit beings could retaliate by inflicting diseases on them or by simply leaving the community, as in the case of Opiyelguobirán. It was reported to Pané that this partly canine, partly humanoid spirit-statue regularly left its house at night after which it had to be recollected from the forest in the morning (see Figure 8.1.i). At a certain point it was tied down in order to prevent it from leaving but it managed to escape nonetheless and disappeared into a lagoon forever (*pp.* 28-29). It should be noted that this type of politicized residential mobility was probably also open to human members of the community (Laffoon 2012; compare Rivière 1984).

Behiques, trans-specific, shaman-like specialists, were capable of communicating with beings that were outside of the range of normal human interaction. They did this by entering a state of trance during rituals in which they purged themselves and sniffed the pulverized seeds of the *Anadenanthera peregrina* mixed with chalk up the nose. Through this mediation with the spirits the *behique* was also able to cure diseases (Roe 1997). The *behique* seems to have been important as a spiritual advisor to the *cacique* and local communities, too, for example as a medium through which other members of the community could interact with deceased relatives (Pané 1999 [1571]: 23-24). *Behiques* were thus necessary intermediaries for the interaction with other than human subjects.

In addition, the *behiques* themselves were interacting and competing in networks of their own. An example hereof would have been the sharing and exchanging of magical, ceremonial and ritual knowledge (Allaire 1990). Aside from such sociable interactions, *behiques* would also have been locked in perpetual cosmic combat with malevolent superhuman forces that sought to harm the *behique* and the community of which he was a part. Especially in Lowland South America the influence of such malefactors is that significant they are thought to be the major or

12 This can be contrasted with other political economies, such as those of capitalist societies in which more metaphorical "life-forces" (i.e. a person's time and energy) are circulated (Graeber 2011).

sole cause behind any misfortune that could befall a person or village. Often these beings are believed to be under the control of hostile shaman-like specialists.[13]

Despite their considerable power, *behiques* would not have dominated everyday politics. First of all, the sources indicate that they were probably very much subordinate to *caciques*. The latter also encroached upon the specialism of the *behique* by being a centrepiece of various socio-religious rituals and ceremonies (Roe 1997). Indeed, *behiques* were not always treated with the same respect that other (elite) people were. Pané (1999 [1571]: 24-25) recounts the incidence of an unfortunate *behique* who is clubbed to death by a mob (only to return back to life later) having caused the death of a family member. As befits his status as a liminal figure, it seems that the *behique* was to some extent a social other within his own community.

Cacical network structure and strategy

The roles and strategies mentioned in the historic sources for the Greater Antilles can serve to construct an idealized political network model (Figure 7.3).[14] Rather than being a direct Authority Ranking, pyramidal model with a clear nested, hub-like structure, this network shows a set of diverse relations, which could be characterized as Equality Matching (sets of interdependent dyads) or even Communal Sharing (cyclical sets of node ties). This is in contrast to previous "hidden" suppositions about political network structure and strategy (Figure 7.1). It also directly contradicts the notion that the *cacique* was the dominant force in political networks. Indeed, based on a Katz status centrality analysis (see Chapter 2), it becomes clear that, even if he was the most powerful actor, the *cacique* was far from the only player of importance in Late Ceramic Age power structures. Instead power was distributed throughout his *cacical* collective – a 2-clique subgraph in the network. In this model various network economies are entwined and jointly provide the political status of the collective as a whole: intercommunal, ritual and communal economies. Within this collective we see certain other key figures. The relative centralities of these actors are listed in Table 7.1.

The positions of the various actors result from the network strategies they represent. *Cacicas* are important network brokers, having access to mnemonic devices in the form of corporate valuables such as *areítos*. Lower-ranked elites such as potential heirs would have acted as go-betweens during interactions with

13 This was definitely the case with the historic Kalinago of the Lesser Antilles, who greatly feared the Maboya, a cannibalistic deity who devoured the moon, *opouyem*, and other malicious spirits that were sometimes sent directly by ritual specialists within the own community or shamans from enemy villages. Albeit that the evidence for the Greater Antilles is coloured by the Spanish belief that all Amerindians were devil-worshippers, it is assumed that the group of "devils", where feared above all others, such as certain *zemis* and the *opía* spirit. The latter is probably a cognate form of the Kalinago *opouyem*. *Behiques* would have been able to exert a measure of control over them and direct them to bring harm to individuals and even entire villages (Mol 2009).

14 The fact that this is an "idealized" model has two reasons: (1) it is a reflection of the socio-political system through the eyes of Spanish chroniclers; and (2) the socio-political system is likely to have been much more fluid in practice. For example, some collectives may perhaps have had access to two *behiques* or a number of categorically different spirits (e.g. ancestors and spirits that were not kin).

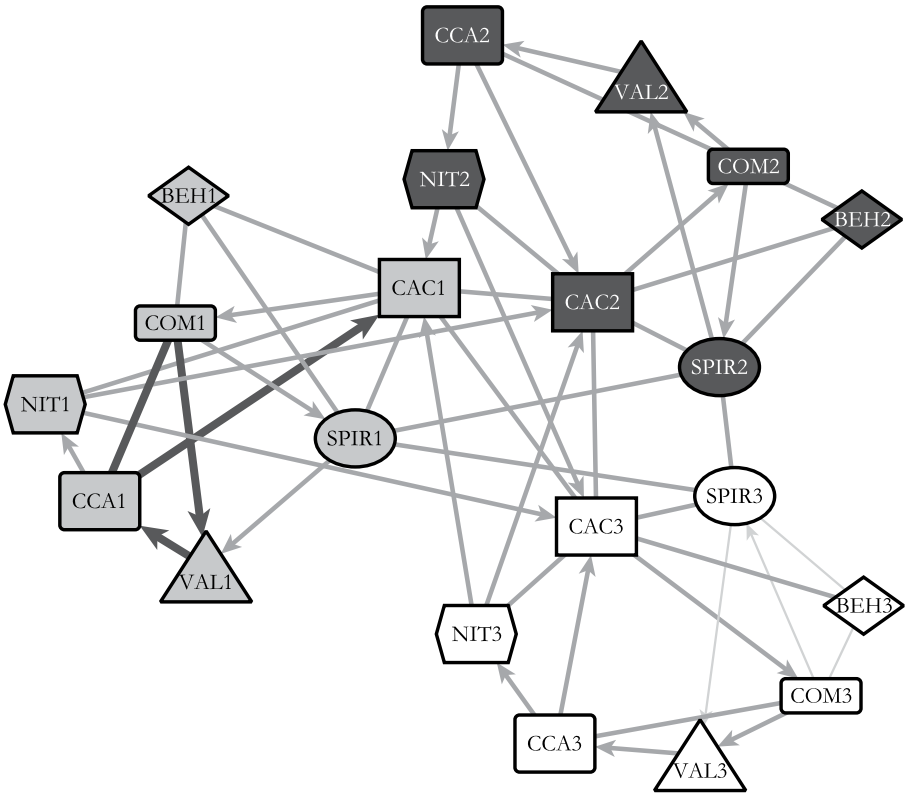

Figure 7.3: Model of political organization of three cacical *collectives. Tie colour and size are indicative of tie strength (darker and wider = stronger ties) in the network.*

outsiders. *Behiques* were other types of go-betweens and of huge importance for sustaining network relations with the spirit world. Thus, although they have specialized roles, depending on which subgraph and type of power one looks at, the network power of *cacicas*, *behiques* and *cacical* heirs rivals that of the *cacique*. Most notably, interaction with superhuman spirits carried out by *behiques* and *caciques* takes a central role in the network. This confirms that mediation with, and manipulation of, these beings was a highly significant political strategy (Oliver 1997).

It may now appear that there was no need in the network for the *cacique* himself. However, it has to be understood that although important network roles and strategies were also executed by other types of actors the *cacique* was a "jack of all trades and master of none" in network terms. Although operating with go-betweens, he was ultimately the face of the community in elite interactions, supervised ceremonial communal redistributions, served as a wartime leader, and was able to enter into network relations with superhuman beings as well. It is exactly this versatile character that would have made *caciques* central players in pre- and early historic political networks. Nonetheless, the concept of the *cacique* as standing alone at the top of a rigid, political pyramid should be adjusted.

Indeed, due to the variety of roles in the network, a political actor required strong relations in order to reach her or his full power potential in the network. Furthermore, the success of one type of network actor was not only based on his or her own tie quantity and strength, but directly related to the degree of success of the other actors in the network. This can be illustrated by changing the strength of the ties between nodes in the various subgraphs to mimic fluctuations in power relations between actors and subgraphs in the network, which will result in a strikingly different status centrality (compare the "status" and "valued status" rows in Table 7.1).

Subgraph 1 illustrates a situation in which the communal economy is extra strong (the ties are valued at two, rather than one). One can call this the "Anacaona-effect": a capable cacica (CCA1) is able to strengthen communal ties (with COM1), the benefits of which are invested in communal valuables (VAL1). Because the *cacique* (CAC1)'s status among other *caciques* is partly dependent on the valuables he brings to the table in political exchanges, this has an impact on his own centrality. In fact, this boost in the communal political economy can be felt among all nodes in subgraph 1: the *behique* (BEH1) and the group of *nitaíno* (NIT1) also have an increased status centrality.

Node ID	Status %	Valued status %
BEH1	4.6	4.9
BEH2	4.6	4.4
BEH3	4.6	2.9
CAC1	10.2	11.4
CAC2	10.2	9.9
CAC3	10.2	9.6
CCA1	2.0	4.7
CCA2	2.0	1.8
CCA3	2.0	1.6
COM1	3.9	5.6
COM2	3.9	3.7
COM3	3.9	3.0
NIT1	2.8	3.3
NIT2	2.8	2.6
NIT3	2.8	2.6
SPIR1	7.3	7.3
SPIR2	7.3	6.8
SPIR3	7.3	5.7
VAL1	2.6	4.1
VAL2	2.6	2.5
VAL3	2.6	1.6

Subgraph 2 depicts a situation that is unchanged relative to the non-valued network, but subgraph 3 presents a situation analogous to the "Opiyelguobirán-crisis" (cf. Pané 1999 [1571]: 25-26). In it the ritual economy is somehow distorted (tie-strength is halved). This leads to limited tie-strength between the *cacical* community at large (COM3), superhuman beings (SPIR3) and *behique* (BEH3). Like the increased tie-strength had a beneficial effect for all of the subgraph members in subgraph 1, this ritual crisis spreads throughout the network affecting the network power of other members such as the *cacique*. Even though he himself has equally strong relations with the spirit world as his *cacical* competitors in subgraph 1 and 2, he suffers a 0.3% point

Table 7.1 Shifts in status centrality in cacical *collectives showing the status centralities of the* cacical *collectives without ("Status") and with ("Valued status") valued ties. The valuation of ties refers to a strong communal economic ties (collective 1) or weak ritual economic ties (collective 3). Note how weakness in a particular part of the network can affect the centralities of nodes that do not directly participate in these economies.*

drop relative to the "normal *cacique*" (CAC2) and a gap of 1.8% with the *cacique* from subgraph 1 (CAC1). This is due to the fact that his status suffers from the combined effect of his own interactions with the less communally-sustained spirit realm, the less-powerful *behique*, and communal valuables that do not benefit as much from the incorporation of the *cemí* of the angered superhuman beings.

The subgraph aggregate of status centralities illustrates these power fluctuations with even more clarity. In a non-valued link centrality measure the collectives would all hold a third of the total status in the network. However, in the valued measure the normal *cacical* collective (subgraph 2) holds 31.8% of the total network's status, while subgraph 1, boosted by the "Anacaona-effect" has a combined status centrality of 41.2%. With this they easily out-compete the *cacical* collective that is suffering from the "Opiyelguobirán-crisis", which has an aggregate status centrality of only 27%. In other words, the strength and weaknesses of actors in this network are not contained to their direct network position and the political position of one actor is based on his or her subgraph neighbours. Therefore even if the differences between categorically similar network actors (e.g. all the *caciques*) seem relatively minimal, these small differences would have signified great collective power differences. A *cacique* did not rule by setting himself apart from others (Authority Ranking), but by interacting and being involved with them (Communal Sharing and Equality Matching).

Triadic roots of the *cacical* collective

From a network point of view, this interdependence between actors entails that at some point the *cacicazgo* became stable as a political system – knocking out one node or even more does not automatically lead to disintegration of the network. The *cacical* network did not extend this stability to the individual actor or collective, however. Political fortunes would be affected by ripples in both the lower and higher strata of the network. On top of this, node power would have been curbed by the interdependent structure of the network: every node is at least connected to two other nodes, which means that there are always at least two pathways to consider when wanting to control a network. As such it is possible to characterize the *cacicazgo* as a triadic political system. This is in contrast to a dyadic political system: i.e. any system with vertical hierarchies with a chain of command in which any misbalance in power can only be adjusted by destroying the system as a whole. The reason for this is that all nodes are critical for the coherence of the network – e.g. absolute political systems; a *cacical* pyramid of power. It seems that this triadic political system of the late pre-colonial and early colonial period was rooted in the first regional social networks of the Antilles.

Based on archaeological evidence, correspondences with more recent mainland indigenous political systems and analogous contexts in other parts of the world, especially Melanesia, the political systems of this period have been characterized in various related ways: complex tribes, big men systems, great men systems, cycling chiefdoms. The main underlying idea connecting these characterizations is that leadership positions were achieved and that, even when in power, the grip of a

leader on his or her community was tenuous and political fortunes could easily sway. The reason being that the power of a leader in these political systems is based on the strengths of their networks which are, in contrast to leaders with ascribed statuses, dependent on how good "network leaders" are at fulfilling their social obligations.

Boomert (2001), for example, based on an overview of several archaeological correlates of big men collectives, likens the political system of the early first millennium AD to those of the so-called Melanesian big men societies. In this political system one must be a charismatic networker if one is to gain and hold power (Godelier and Strathern 1991; Sahlins 1963). In other words, early leaders in the Antilles needed to be capable networkers, mastering various types of social strategies in order to come to and remain in power (Curet 1996; Siegel 1996b). In such an achieved status political network, in general, strategy leaders employ when interacting with their community or collective are delayed redistribution as part of a wider pattern of reciprocal altruism.[15]

Within such a redistributive system all exchanges take the form of indirect or direct, delayed reciprocal exchanges. This implies that, rather than a Communal Sharing-model in which we see a free flow of unaccounted exchanges, all goods and services that such a network leader demands from his collective need to be reciprocated with a commensurable gift at some time in the future. In other words, the politically important exchanges in a "big men system" are based on Equality Matching models of relations. In order to meet his reciprocal obligations the network leader can attempt to entice more persons into joining his collective to draw on their support as well, but in order to do that he needs to give them more gifts, putting him into even larger debt. Delaying a return-gift provides a network leader with some leeway in his debt repayments. However, because persons in his local cluster also exchange goods and share information with each other, it is quickly discovered if the network leader tries to "freeride" on one of his exchange partners, i.e. cheats by refusing to reciprocate (Roscoe 2009).

From a network perspective this implies that a leader is caught in a mesh of triadic, Simmelian ties. These ties, named after the sociologist Georg Simmel, occur when network ties directly and reciprocally connect three or more nodes with each other in triads, or n-cliques for larger groups (Kosub 2005; Krackhardt 1999). The characteristics of such Simmelian ties differ greatly from dyadic network relations. The fundamental distinction between a dyad and a triad (or larger clique) is that in triads nodes are less individual, have less power, but command a better chance at resolving conflicts (Simmel 1950: 139-141). The latter increases the stability of the collective and suits the goals of a network leader in theory. However considering it is his or her aim to stand out from the collective as a powerful individual, the first and second aspect of the triad work directly against prospective network leaders.

15 Sahlins (1963: 293) states on the workings of the big men system of Melanesia: "For his help they give their help, and for goods going out through his hands other goods flow back to his followers by the same path."

One way to break out of the constricting mesh of Simmelian ties is to gain access to nodes outside the local network cluster. This strategy of drawing on exotic, out-group relations in order to increase one's in-group power is one of the most documented features of big men collectives (e.g Godelier and Strathern 1991; Sahlins 1963; Sillitoe 1979; Strathern 1971). In Melanesia when men are successful at entering into relations with others and thereby generate a flow of exotic valuables, alliances or esoteric knowledge that they can siphon into their local collectives, they become regionally famous as "men of renown" (Munn 1986; Sahlins 1963; Strathern 1971).

This is a classic example of the way in which power resulting from the in-group distribution of exotic valuables, alliances or knowledge is directly related to the control over such out-group sources of power (Helms 1988). Out-group power is difficult to achieve. Increased distance means an increase in time and energy investment in acquiring exotics valuables for in-group redistribution. In addition, network leaders have to extend their relations beyond the local scale to people with which they are not linked by means of longstanding social contracts. These out-clique exchange partners are thus largely outside the direct sphere of generalized and redistributive reciprocity of a network leader. "Do it yourself. I'm not your fool!" is the typical response from an outsider to a direct request of a big man (Sahlins 1963: 290). This implies that potential leaders will have to establish ties with others outside their collective that are based on a more direct type of reciprocity, giving even less leeway for reciprocal delay or manipulations. Therefore, in order to enter into outside relations, network leaders need to draw on the material wealth of their collective presenting outsiders with gifts, honours and other things of value.

This is the true problem for the big man and other types of triadic, network-based leaders: in order to become a central node within the cluster of nodes and Simmelian ties they are pressed to reciprocate. To be able to do so they need to draw upon the local cluster to demand wealth that can serve to create ties with outsider nodes. This is a network theoretical phrasing of the fundamental instability of big men and other similar networked collectives: a network leader can remain in control of his cluster only so long as he is successfully able to balance both the demands of his collective and his exchange partners. In an attempt to counter this, a successful network leader will stimulate collective production of exchange goods and actively seek to acquire and distribute exotic valuables in the name of his lineage, moiety or community (Boomert 2001a; see also Spielmann 2002).

Nonetheless, network leaders and their collectives play a high-stake game that in the end they cannot hope to win by themselves (Sahlins 1963; Weiner 1992: 143). Because it is based on personal reputation and social wealth rather than an inheritable office or material wealth, the leader's account is settled after his demise. Since everything the network leader is, he owes to others, his wealth will be distributed amongst his social partners, often in large and prolonged give and take between his lineage and those of his exchange partners. Subsequently, any offspring of the "self-made big man" needs to acquire a position without the aid of a "trust fund" of social or material credit.

Despite these challenges, at a certain point Antillean indigenous communities managed to overcome the inherent instability of the self-made network leader. Through time the indigenous political system now took on the more fixed and temporally durable structure of the *cacicazgo*. In some locations this system was so successful that multi-tiered and regionally integrated *cacicazgos* arose. Why this two-stepped transition occurred is one of the most debated issues in Caribbean archaeology. Needless to say, a simple answer cannot be given. Across the globe and in the Caribbean, emergences of such political structures would have followed a myriad of locally variable pathways. As such it is too large an issue to tackle here in its entirety. A comparison with the more purely triadic structure does, however, provide us with a new view on the way in which *cacical* networks differ from the presumably short-lived and more purely triadic form(s) of leadership in earlier times.

Some have suggested that the evolution of open places in villages into the communal plaza systems of the late pre-colonial period was an important aspect in this development (Siegel 1992; Torres 2012). Indeed, it could be the case that this development is correlated with potentially more political competition that was mediated by a communal drive towards larger and more durable collectives (Siegel 2004). Others have pinpointed to a similar shift in material culture repertoires from objects that gave individual prestige to corporately owned valuables (Curet 1996; Walker 1993). The idea that the communal leaders of the first centuries AD, who needed to achieve their status by balancing group and inter-group politics, had transformed into a collective of political network specialists by early contact times fits well with these developments.

Diversification of network roles allowed some power but also some obligations of leaders to be shifted to other specialists. Evolutionarily speaking, a reliance on kin-based mutualism presents a relatively failsafe and profitable way of giving away some power and obligations that came with a leadership position. Thus, any direct kin of a leader would have been likely candidates to be the first to profit from this diversification (the NIT nodes in the network). Tightening relations with affinal kin would have also been important in this regard, as they would have provided a socially and evolutionary more convoluted but still relatively straightforward way of increasing one's material and social capital. This is presumably also the reason that, as has been suggested (Keegan 2007; Oliver 2009), elites in late pre- and early contact Hispaniola would have been polygamous.

Such in-group benefits would have been useful in out-group politics. Looking at the valued status centralities (table 7.1) of the network in Figure 6.2, it is clear that the *cacical* collective represented by subgraph 1 would make the most powerful ally for a *cacique* from another political region, i.e. a *cacique* that is not otherwise connected to the local network. These exclusive relations with an outside collective would only increase the local network power of sub-graph 1: a rise in aggregate status of *c.*24%.[16] Obviously, such a connection beyond the local cluster would have

16 This is relative towards the average collective network power in an undifferentiated situation (from three to four collectives implies a 33% to 25% aggregate status) and based on the assumption that the new collective entering the network is a "normal" one, like subgraph 2.

similar effects with regard to the political status of the newly allied *cacique* in his segment of the network. As a reaction other locally strong collectives would either join this alliance or start forming their own in order to compete. Gradually, this would cause a shift in power that would create a new tier of the political network: a multi-tiered *cacicazgo* has come into being. In short, the success of Caribbean indigenous leaders and their collectives was probably based on the attraction of extra-local social others into the own sphere of influence (see also Santos-Granero 2009b). Once a *cacical* collective had become part of the interregional core of the political network, it members cannot afford to sit back and enjoy the fruits of their labour. This level of the network provides even more competition than before. Not only did one continue to be subject to events at home – there was always the threat of upstarts such as Guacanagarí who challenged the authority of vested *caciques* such as Caonabo – , but also to the waxing and waning of the political fortunes of one's political allies in other collectives.[17]

Even if power was interdependent with and vested in the attraction of social others, the chances to influence them were contingent with the possibility to showcase one's social strength effectively. Realizing that by and large a *cacical* collective's status was based on the strength of their internal and external relations, *caciques* and other political actors needed a way to signal the collective's strength. This was often found in the materialization of communal systems of value. As was discussed in chapter 2, such a communal, material identity became more and more important towards the final 500 years of the pre-colonial period. Where there once had been focus on ancestor cults during the earlier periods, in this phase other, more communally accessible superhuman beings became important (Hofman and Hoogland 2004; Siegel 1997; Stevens-Arroyo 2006). In other words communal identity became less about the essence of one's lineage and more about communally shared values and practices that could and needed to be materially expressed.

Other examples of such a formation of communal identities through connected practices are the *areítos* dances and the plazas on which they took place. Such corporate valuables would have served to underline communal identity while making that identity more conspicuous to non-group members at the same time. The techniques for incorporating extra-social others became increasingly sophisticated (Hofman, Bright, *et al.* 2007; Mol 2007; Oliver 2009), leading to evermore complex network ties and strategies. This process is also prominently reflected in the incorporation of other than human beings in the sphere of politics. Here, an increasingly larger emphasis was laid on interactions with non-humans such as spirits and ancestors.[18]

---

17 As illustrated by an early event in the Spanish struggle for dominion of Hispaniola that took place after Caonabo was captured. During the so-called "Night of the fourteen *caciques*" a pact was made to rescue Caonabo and start a joint war against the Spaniards. Rather than utilise his absence to improve their own positions, these fourteen *caciques* risked life and limb to restore their political ally to power: a clear sign that political authorities were entwined beyond the local level. Unfortunately for them, their ploy was discovered and all were killed or incarcerated. (Wilson 1990: 97-102).

18 Archaeologists and ethnographers have witnessed a similar form of socio-cosmic network intensification in other regions around the Caribbean (Heckenberger 2005; Helms 1995; Oyuela-Caycedo 2001).

The complexity of the *cacicazgo*

Complexity is an awkward term within socio-political theory, because it is often conflated with hierarchy (Chapman 2003). From an alternative point of view true hierarchies are actually less complex than other social constellations. In the Caribbean, too, it has often been assumed that as local, regional and interregional networks of people and things became more complex they became more strictly hierarchical. As I have tried to show by means of the *cacical* network model, this is not necessarily the case. The complexity of the *cacicazgo* arises from an increased diffusion of power, rather than a concentration hereof.

This opinion goes against more traditional ideas on socio-political evolution in the Caribbean. Rather than a transition from tribe to chiefdom, I hypothesize that socio-political networks developed from a prototypical network leader in which network economies were condensed into one political actor. The *cacique* is the continuation of this form of leadership, but he has transferred the management of certain network economies to specialists. This does not imply that there were no Authority Ranking relations, such as would have been the case in multi-tiered political networks. Here too, the creation of inter-collective hierarchies may be considered as just another example of political network diversification. It is important to understand that where and when network hierarchies arose they did not spring from the increased power of the *cacique* himself, but from the political strength of his collective that connected various network(ed) economies: ritual, communal and intercommunal.

Ethnohistory provides less firm ground than the "absolute" layouts of webs of relations elucidated by archaeometrical provenance studies. However, even if such data are present as in the case of the Punta Macao site, the collected evidence rarely affords an in-depth view on intercommunal networks of power. Unfortunately, it will often not be possible to carry out a network analysis of power based on archaeological relational data. Nevertheless, as I hope to have shown here, there are alternative lines of information on people and things with power that can be explored with a network approach. Although this model does not have a one-to-one correlation with historically real socio-political networks it does express the complexity of the systems and the underlying social strategies that would have been in place.

As the opening quote of this chapter makes clear, Columbus and other Europeans identified the *cacique* and other political notaries based on the political system they knew from home. It should be obvious from the analysis in this chapter that the *cacique* was not a king. The *cacicazgo* can in fact not easily be equated to any other type of political structure, not even to other supposed analogues like Polynesian, Sub-Saharan African, Migration Period, or even other Amerindian "chiefdoms". One could say that it would even be a stretch to call the *cacique* a type of chief. The reason for this is that, even if it was built on "classical" triadic conundrums of group power, by late pre-colonial times the *cacicazgo* had evolved into its own specifically Greater Antillean system, typified by the engagement of a larger collective of specialists with different economies of power.

All in all, the dependencies the *cacique* had with other political actors does not seem to justify his characterization as a politically or even metaphysically different type of being. Even if Caribbean *caciques* were set apart from others, as seems to be indicated in some ethnohistoric descriptions, their authority ultimately rested in an expansive political network economy in which the smallest power fluctuations could make or break individual *cacical* collectives. The success of the Antillean *cacique* was thus for a large part interdependent with the success and failure of others to efficiently harness and direct relations in communal, intercommunal and spiritual economies. Unlike the class-based society of the divine kings of Polynesia or, indeed, the divinely ordained monarchs of late medieval Europe with which the Spaniards were familiar, the power of the *cacique* ultimately rested in the careful management of a complex set of typically Antillean relations.

It is also notable that, in contrast to the courts of Europe, hierarchies were not based on amassment of material wealth as a form of economic power (Graeber 2011). Instead ethnohistoric sources indicate that political power stemmed from the responsibility brought about by engaging with social others. This is still the case in many of Lowland South America's indigenous societies (Carlin 2012, personal communication; see also Mol and Mans 2013; Rivière 1984; Santos-Granero 2009b). For the *cacique* material wealth rather seemed to be something that needed to be distributed to others. Indeed, corporate possessions were probablly held through the maternal (i.e. the *cacica's*) line to begin with (Keegan 2007). This is also why the knowledge and personal qualities of *cacicas* and other members of the *caciques*' direct community had a high impact on the intercommunal political process.

Authority Ranking models did not dominate in the ritual economy either, such as may have been the case if the will of divine or superhuman spirits was communicated to sacred kings or priests. Even if the *behique* and, to a lesser extent, the *cacique* were ritual specialists, they did not have a monopoly on interactions with ancestors, *cemís* and other superhuman beings. This was partly due to the fact that these superhuman beings seemed to possess quite some subjectivity themselves in their materialization as statuettes, amulets, and other forms of valuables. Indeed, these spirits were embedded within communal and inter-communal life-force networks that were tangible aspects of the larger societal cosmos. Often these ties were explicitly acknowledged and engaged with in a public setting (Oliver 1997, 2009).

In these flexible and complex political economies, Equality Matching relations with other than human subjects were highly important. Other than human beings like spirits and ancestors represented valuable life-forces that were perceived of as being more potent than those of normal beings. In contrast to the ultimately limited supply of humans, these superhuman reservoirs were essentially infinite: all deceased individuals, animals, trees, rocks, caves, *etc.*, potentially represented another social partner whose life-force could be connected or incorporated with one's own. Although there were still hierarchical differences between these beings these could be influenced through various, relatively efficacious means. First of all, one could try to "trade up" by exchanging one's spirit partner for another. If no

options for transactions were available, theft was always an option: it is in general much easier to steal an object than a human being. Esteemed spirit members of the community could even be pitted in ritual battle against each other. This would have resulted in a win-win situation for both victor and loser: transfer of life-force without the actual loss of human life-forces (Oliver 2009: Part III and IV).

It seems counterintuitive, but materialized spirit beings were in reality more controllable and reliable than human exchange partners. This seems to be at odds with our as well as with Amerindian concepts that consider spirit beings to be powerful and sometimes whimsical entities. However, the writings of Pané and other chroniclers show how materialized spirit beings were more or less controlled through the actions of *caciques*, *behiques* and other members of the community. *Cemís* were placated by means of houses of their own and gifts of fruits, drinks and tobacco. It may be that they were even forcefully restrained at some times, although this was ultimately unsuccessful in the case of the dog-headed Opiyelguobirán. So, although this did not happen without a struggle, the material counterparts of other than human partners of the *cacical* collective were controlled and in turn were used as tools to control the larger community or impress other polities.[19] In the next chapter I will discuss how powerful *guaíza* spirits that could not be physically matched were nonetheless materialized and exchanged in the form of shell ornaments.

To sum up the main conclusions of this chapter, the *cacicazgo* can be distinguished from a more purely triadic political institution by: (1) a tiered, but distributive system of collective power roles and relations through which success and obligations were shared across the network cluster, (2) a focus on the active incorporation of other subjects within one's sphere of influence, and (3) a set of (inter)communally shared values, beliefs and practices geared towards mediation with and incorporation of other subjects, including other than human beings. Although these were not the only factors that shaped political networks during the late pre- and early colonial period, they were three highly important ones. It is no coincidence that these specific socio-political strategies co-evolved with the formation of the typically Antillean network of things, which was also present in the site assemblage of Kelbey's Ridge 2 (Chapter 6). The case-study in Chapter 8 will further explore these material counterparts of *cacical* networks.

19 Dr. Chanca (1992 [1493]), who accompanied Columbus on his second journey to the Caribbean, reports how a revered deity turned out to literally be the voice of political authority: an assistant of the leader communicated his will to his followers through a reed concealed in the back of the deity. Such charades were probably not common practice, but indicate how far leaders could go in order to ensnare spiritual politics within human politics.


±40%
±60%
A.
±20%
B.
±20%
C.
±30%
±70%
D.
±25%
±75%
E.
F.
G.
H.
±25%
±75%
I.
J.
K.
L.
M.