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PART II

CONTEMPORARY TRADITIONS
CHAPTER 6. Qualities of the landscape in daily life

The previous chapters guided the reader on a journey towards the understanding of how the current memory of the indigenous past has been constructed through institutional means of remembering such as written history. The memory of the indigenous past emerges from the colonial institutional domain but also from the public production of knowledge. The second part of this dissertation addresses the cultural memory of a wider public and provides some insights about how the past is reenacted in more or less conscious ways in the domain of ecological knowledge as applied in daily life, particularly in the case of an illness, when healing performances are necessary.

Chapter 6 concerns the ecological knowledge that has been transferred in foodways, crafts, house building, and agricultural activities, including a broader spectrum of associated cultural practices. After presenting the main character of healing landscapes in the Dominican Republic and Cuba, Chapter 7 will introduce us to the popular concepts of illness, the role of healers, their working settings and their ways of collecting and using medicinal plants. The subsequent Chapters 8 and 9 will elaborate on particular caverns and water sources as healing and ceremonial places. Various examples will be presented to illustrate connections between different landscape elements and to provide us with insights into the more or less conscious ways of remembering, creating a link between contemporary and previous generations.

All data presented in this part, if not referenced otherwise, come from my ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2016 in the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Those data that are not referenced directly as particular interviews originate from various interviews at different locations or fieldnotes. For the locations where the data have been collected see Figs. 7 and 10.

When approaching the healing landscape in a holistic manner, we find that individual wellbeing and health are connected to communal wellbeing, wherein daily activities transform flora into alimentation and natural resources into materials for living and crafts.\footnote{The rich botanical knowledge is a tenet of agricultural life and culture. The awareness of the intimate human/nature interdependency is expressed in people’s own spirituality, which is here illustrated by prayers for rainfall and offerings to earth.} The outcomes of this analysis will be further discussed in Chapter 10.

Flora as a source of alimentation
The knowledge of local flora is materialized in cultivation, preparation and consumption of crops. This knowledge, however, does not only develop from daily interaction with the local environment but also from other regions and time contexts. Local menus are testimonies of the cultural history of the region, marked by a long process of immigration to the islands. As a result, the Cuban (C) and Dominican (D) culinary tapestry includes dishes and crops of local and non-local origins. As Ortiz’s (1995) metaphor of ajiaco showed, typical Cuban dishes are often a combination of ingredients from different origins. Similarly, the Dominican traditional dish sancocho combines local and nonlocal ingredients. In both study areas, native crops like yucca, corn, boniato but also exotic crops like plantain, yams, and rice, become naturalized as an inherent part of the local diet. In the meantime, exotic crops like rice, first introduced during the second voyage of Columbus, were cultivated in rather small amounts until the end of the 19th century, when they

\footnotetext{219 For another work on the close of wellbeing, environment and heritage see the dissertation of Stancioff (2018).}
spread nation-wide. The rice is then combined with native beans into the popular dish moro (C: moro cristiano using rice and black beans, congri using red beans, local variants of beans first described by Fernández de Oviedo (2002 [1535]) or is seasoned with bija (Bixa Orellana) thereby obtaining a local flavor. Like rice also plantains (Musa paradisiaca), guineos (Musa sapientum), and yams, a common source of food on Portuguese ships, were introduced to the Caribbean during the early colonial period and are components of other popular dishes: Dominican mangú (also mofongo), and Cuban fufu (mashed green plantains with yuca).

Native plant species like yucca, corn, and guáyiga are used today for a wide range of recipes and traditional utensils with their own specific vocabularies. A variety of dishes is prepared from yucca. The sweet type is used to make chulitos, roketas, conconetas, bread, panecico, and hojaldra in the Dominican Republic, while the same crop is used to prepare buñuelo, masamora, matahambre, ñape, panocha, on the neighboring island. The starch from yucca mixed with milk (D: called natilla) was used also for alimentation of babies or mixed with eggs and milk into another dish called casubé in Cuba. Without any doubt, the most popular dish prepared from yucca (both sweet and bitter) is until now cassava bread. The recipe for cassava is as follows: after the yucca root is scraped (without removing the starch/sagú layer, which is vital in holding the dough together), the roots will be grated on a tin grater to be later stuffed into a special type of woven container (Dominican term: macuto, capacho; Cuban term: catauro/jukaro/sibucán), a guano, yute or henequen bag, which is placed into a press (lying in horizontal position) to extract the juice. The remaining dough (D: catibía, C: naiboa220) is later deposited in a vessel (D: canoa from yagua221) to be spread on a circular metal griddle (D: burén), which stands on U-form walls made of stones and clay (C: cocoa mixed with apartillo herb). The round shape of the bread is achieved by using a wooden circular frame (C: aríto), on which the dough is placed from a sifter (woven from guano). When the cassava bread is dry, it is flavored with peanuts, garlic, and other ingredients.

Another native plant widely used in a great variety of Dominican dishes is corn. From corn are prepared arepas, arepetes, boyos, buceperico, chaka, empanadas, guabara (corn milk), guanibos, guánimos, gofio, majaretes, tortas, chenchen, corn wine and corn is added to a chocolate beverage. Cuban corn dishes include boyo, corn flour with milk, frituras, pinol, pan de maíz revuelto, and tamales. The corn silk is used in Dominican for infections in general, and added to herb decoction called botellas, literally bottles. Corn, as well as fruits like chinola, tamarind, or herbs as mabí/prú (a naturally fermented beverage from behuco del indio) are used in some locations also to make wine.

Besides the vocabularies and skills related to the preparation of cassava bread, there are multiple references to crops also in metaphors, songs, poetry, riddles, and proverbs. One of the common Dominican expressions is “guayar la yucca”, meaning to work intensively and exhaustively. Such traditional expressions inform us about the importance of these crops. Another example is a song about the counterpoint between yucca and corn. These two crops had a dispute about who governs the country; both crops name different dishes having themselves as main ingredients. A fragment goes as follows: “Say the yucca I am the one who governs the country, and the corn responds I am the governor, says the grater ruku ruku I have not got so many teeth or tooth to grind the flour, and the parents of the family say where is the poor person?”222

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220 The word naiboa is also used in Dominican location Báñica.
221 Yagua is a fibrous tissue from the upper part of a specific palm.
222 The Spanish original is: “Dice la yuca yo soy la que gobierna el país y allí responde el maíz yo soy el gobernador, dice el guayo ruku ruku no tengo tantos dientes ni muela para moler la harina, y dicen los padres de la familia la prangana dónde está metida.” Some of the additional crops such as the yucca, or malanga have double meanings, which sometimes also figure in oral poetry.
Traditional ecological knowledge in Dominican housing areas
For a long period, the wellbeing in agricultural settings has relied upon ecological knowledge, which is
reflected in specific skills, including house construction, house furnishing, and the creation of equipment
for economic activities. Ironically, this type of material culture is nowadays associated with poverty.
Consequently, the loss of this knowledge is often associated with a change in lifestyle and upward social
mobility towards a higher social class.

Different tree species, for example, were used for building houses. Although the selection of wood
varied according to its availability, specific species were preferred because of their durability, water
resistance, and flexibility. For house poles roble is considered to be the best wood (different species, i.e.
*Catalpa longissima, Tabebuia spp.*).223 Depending on the type of the house, walls can be made of palm
boards (from palm trunk), yaguas (palms called after fibrous tissue from the before mentioned palm tree)
or *tejamaní*. The latter are woven from small tree branches, which are later filled out with a manure or clay
(C: cocoa) mixed with *pangola* (*Digitaria spp.*) or *jiribilla* herb (*Dichanthium caricosum* (L.)).224 The roofs
have been often thatched with *yagua/guano* (*Coccothrina spp./cana* (Sabal spp.), which would be spiked
to radial rafters and beams or tied with *bejuco vieja* (*Hiprocatea volubilis* L., but also different *lianas*) or
*yarey* (*Copernicia spp.*) to the palm stalk.225 The thatched roofs are said to be cooler in the summer and
safer during the storms compared to zinc roofs.226

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223 Fieldnotes taken in conversation with the González family and several other inhabitants of Loma Atravesada.
224 The identification of the flora was based on Acevedo-Rodríguez & Strong (2012). The information on the Cuban flora was crosschecked with
the publication of Roig y Mesa (1974).
225 Palma, one of the varieties most popular for walls, but other species of palm called guano, yarey, and cana are also popular.
226 For different traditional house structures see the appendix.
Currently, houses are often furnished with furniture from mahogany, robles, pino, caoba, often embellished with weavings from cana/guano. The hammocks, now rather used for the afternoon break are woven from cabuya (Furcraea hexapetala). In the Monte Plata region, some people were sleeping in the past on small carpets from cana, cabuya, banana leaves or huncos (Cyperus ligularis L.). At night, houses are lit by lamps decorated with cotton fiber and embellished with seeds of peonía (Abrus precatorius L.). When necessary, the mosquitos are repelled by burning copey resin (Clussia rosea). When leaving the main house, a visitor might pass under the blessed bread, palm leaves, or sábila (Aloe vera) hung with a red scarf at the main entrance for protection of the house.

The kitchen is typically a separate building so that the main house remains free of smoke from the fireplace/fogón (made of white clay and fine herb). On the baracoa228 (an additional table or repository made of branches and situated above the fireplace) may be found plates, spoons, made from the higüero (Crescentia cujete L.), sieves (jíbes), vessels for sorting grains (la yo), both woven from guano. In the Cuban settlement Los Zaldívares, next to the Cuban town Fray Benito, a visitor might encounter also achiote (sieves made of small calabash) and arítes, which are circular in form for preparing cassava and made of bejuco vieja or bejuco manteca.

Rice accompanying the dish might be somewhere peeled in a wooden mortar called pilón (of caoba) in Cuba, made of guyacan or cagueyran, using one, two or three pestles. Coffee beans ground in the pilón, have been sometimes served in small vessels made of higueritos (Crescentia lineariifolia). When drinking his coffee the visitor of a Dominican household might see in the kitchen a large ceramic jar for water that is kept clean by adding carbon; roots of bejuco caro (Vitis vitiginea L.) are also used to keep the water fresh. A thunderstone lying on the bottom of the jar to keep the water fresh and protect the house from lightening can also be found in some households. In Bánica and Boyá, water was extracted by a ladle made of higueritos. The earthen kitchen floor is kept clean with cocoa clay and a broom made from guano or swab made from cabuya.

Frequently, one of the living areas has an outdoor seating space covered with a roof made from guano/yarey or under a tree providing shade on a yard. Basketry, woven from guano, can be also easily found at house yards. Guano and cana are the main materials for the traditional weaving of baskets, bags, hats, or sandals. There are different types of baskets (D: macutos, cerónes) with more and less elaborate decoration depending on their function. For example, Dominican macutos are without much decoration because they are used for collection of coffee and cacao beans.229 Yarey is frequently used material in Cuban basketry. Another plant used for basketry is guaniquiqui (Trichostigma octandrum). There are different baskets of more and less elaborative designs. Furthermore, there are crafted: thread of cotton, saddles for donkeys, jibes, or ropes (henequén), majagua that is the inner part from jaguey, guacima tree. Grandfathers sometimes give children playing in the yard a woven toy (coge el dedo, C: jubo, called after a type of snake).230

Different plants are used for personal hygiene, like soap (made from cuaba, muñeco/musuy), Luffa sponges and toothbrushes (from limpia diente, caimito). In the past, before the introduction of running water in the villages, women carried clothes in bateas (vessels from almacigo, cedro, robles, jiga or caoba) to the river and washed them with magey, guayacán, palo amargo, palo piojo and quiebrahacha.231 The clothes

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227 As the commemoration of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, palm leaves are blessed and given to the faithful on Domingo de Ramos (Palm Sunday).
228 In Monte Plata baracoa is the name for a special type of table that functions as a structure for drying the meat.
229 For more on the Cuban basketry work see Moreno (1998).
230 This particular item is also produced among the Kalinagos of Dominica (see Appendix, Table 9).
231 Many Dominican households don’t have direct access to drinkable water and have to bring it from the rivers. The consumption of water in this ways carries obvious health risks.
were also stiffened with starch from yucca or corn. *Tuna de España* was used to give more shine to clothes.232

![Figure 15 A kitchen in Fray Benito, Cuba.](image)

232 Besides offering important construction material, wood may also be used as fuel for the kitchen (different preferences, for lightning for example cuaba), for tint (campeche, manglares, caoba), and of course for being ornamental, or to control erosion and deforestation.
Figure 16 A basket from Fray Benito, Cuba.

Figure 17 A hammock from Padre de las Casas, close to Bánica, Dominican Republic.
The collective botanical knowledge in agricultural setting

The wellbeing of the people depends on agriculture as a major source of economic activities: often entire communities cultivate individual *conucos* (fields) for self-consumption, while the production of cash crops such as tobacco is a main source of income.\(^{233}\) The cultural history and interviews in the visited regions yield that tobacco has been an important cash crop contributing to local economies in different locations in the Dominican Republic and Cuba (see the previous chapter). The example of tobacco illustrates how the traditional ecological knowledge is displayed in a whole set of cultural practices.

Some communities that have sold tobacco as an income source also appreciate tobacco’s medicinal properties and spiritual character. Tobacco juice has an emetic effect, used for indigestion, food poisoning, and stomach aches. Tobacco leaves are placed on the forehead to help overcome headaches. During the consultation with a healer, tobacco smoke is the medium for making divine entities descend onto the head of the healer. Tobacco smoke also induces transformations during which a *lwa* (spirit) incarnates into the body of a healer to provide advice and remedies for the patient. The same plant is also a favorite offering for different ‘divisions’ in Dominican 21 Division, including the water division of indigenous ancestors, Belies, Ogunes, or Petroses.\(^{234}\)

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\(^{233}\) At the small-scale fields different crops can be found: tubers (batata, ñame, papa, yuca, yautía), cereals (rice, corn), oleaginous (maní, coco), vegetables, fruits (plantain, guineo, piña, mango, citrics, avocado).

\(^{234}\) Indigenous ancestors are part of the Indian Division, which is one of other categories of *lwas* including belies, ogunes, petroses in Dominican Vudú. Belie Belcán/San Miguel is the master of the belies. Belie Belcán is the popular patron of the Dominican healers and is fighting against injustice and black magic. Petroses are earth *lwas*, controlling the world of deaths like the Barón del cementerio, or controlling men as Santa Marta la Dominadora. The master of the division of ogunes is Ogún Balendjo/San Santiago, who is a symbol of a fight. For more details on these characters in the Dominican 21 Division see the study of Tejeda Ortiz (2013), which also explains the differences between Haitian Vodou and Dominican 21 Division.
The cultivation of the tobacco is also indicative of the cultural diffusion of botanical knowledge and associated traditions, and of how communities are constructed through shared experiences and practices. One tradition, related to the cultivation of tobacco (and other crops), is known as a junta. The junta, or comité (gathering, from Spanish convite), was a form of voluntary cooperation between neighbors and family members to help each other with the work on the conuco (field), or with other types of collective work like building a house or road. One of the Dominican contributors, Mr. Álvarez from Loma Atravesada remembered how he was harvesting tobacco in a junta in the past: people were called together in the first agricultural phase for clearing the fields as well as in the last phase for the collection of the harvest. The collective activities included clearing a new patch of land in order to make a conuco, using the slash and burn tradition, felling trees, and sewing plants. The whole community (inhabitants of the village) participated in collecting tobacco: a group exceeding over one hundred people collectively worked on the field. The group sang, ate, and drank together; the refreshments were typically prepared by the family of the owner of the land. The person who received this help from the community would in return give support to the other community members when they needed it. Mr. Álvarez perceived this system as a way of increasing social solidarity.

According to testimonies of different contributors, the juntas varied in size. Sometimes people would not only receive a meal, but if the harvest was very successful, a feast would be organized or the invited workers would be rewarded with a small portion of the harvest. Dominican and Cuban juntas seem to be preserved now only in memory.

Junta was a matter of manual work. The cultivation of fields (of any type) was frequently accompanied by music. Tools such as axes, hoes, and pestles were used as musical instruments whose beats were integral parts of a song. A leading singer/worker at the head of the group was followed by the rest of the group, repeating only the refrain, which often consisted of improvised words. The rhythm of the music indicated the pace of work. The lyrics of the oral poetry were often improvised but common themes included labor, love and some of them were called after the tool used for the work (e.g. hoe or axe). Mr. Alvarez from Chacuey sang a song for an axe, with axe strikes incorporated into the melody as a technique to help the group of workers synchronize their work. Songs also accompanied other daily activities such as washing, weaving, grinding (e.g. coffee, cacao), or nightly gatherings. Topics of these songs include love, refusal, disaffection, social critiques, or counterpoints between the singers.

Another tradition related to the cultivation of tobacco (and other crops) was the regulation of plant cultivation according to the lunar calendar. The lunar cycle is not only important for the cultivation of tobacco, but also for other crops such as maní, beans, rice, and potatoes. The cultivation of plants was based on the lunar cycle, which was considered to be the natural cycle of growth. The synchronization of the lunar cycle with the agricultural cycle was a way of ensuring a successful harvest. The lunar calendar was also used to determine the best time for planting, harvesting, and other agricultural activities. The lunar calendar was an important tool for planning and organizing agricultural activities in the community. As a result, the lunar calendar played a significant role in the social and cultural life of the community.
tobacco but is also considered for planning different agricultural activities. Julián de La Rosa from Boca de Mana explained that the moon “is related to all living beings”. The new moon is associated with infertility and during this period it has to be respected and the harvest is not collected. Instead, weeding is planned. Similarly, during the new moon, wood is considered to be more fragile and more likely to be attacked by comején (termites) and therefore not used for the construction of houses or other structures. The full moon is a period favorable for sowing and for collecting some medicinal plants.

Present-day agricultural activities are guided by the lunar calendar, which is integrated in the European liturgical calendar that is used to organize Caribbean patronal celebrations and other ritual activities. The official Catholic liturgical calendar marks the time for celebrating Catholic Saints but also other associated divine beings and spiritual entities. The divine beings have powers to influence the wellbeing of communities by means of their influence on harvesting, and on the breeding of animals. Processions in time of droughts, insect plagues, hurricanes, as well as periodical celebrations of patronal Saints often aim at communal wellbeing. Boyá has one of the patronal celebrations that illustrate the divine influence on the harvest. This particular case demonstrates that sometimes the patronal celebrations are interwoven with the memory of the indigenous past.

**Prayers for rainfall in Boyá**

The Virgin of the Holy Waters is the patron of Boyá. Like other patronal Saints, this Virgin looks after the (spiritual) wellbeing of inhabitants of Boyá and her devotees from surrounding settlements. Among the miracles that this Virgin has performed is due to her power to regulate the rain. This happens periodically at the occasion of her patronal celebration on the 15th of August. Before describing this celebration and the meaning of the Virgin for inhabitants of Boyá, let me briefly summarize oral history about her appearance.

According to oral tradition, the Virgen de las Aguas Santas appeared in an orange tree to a group of hunters (of lost cattle) in the early 16th century. The miracle led to the establishment of the church, which is said to have been built by Spaniards and indigenous people. Some argue that the miraculous appearance of the Virgin was followed by another miracle, which made the church appear overnight.

During the nine days preceding the Saint’s day a mass is organized every evening. The celebration culminates on the last day with the arrival of devotees from nearby and from more remote areas, like the brotherhood of Jezus from Bayaguana. After Mass is celebrated and children are collectively baptized the respected members of the congregation carry the Virgin on their shoulders out of the church to conduct the procession through the whole village along with the rhythm of drums and güiras.

According to devotees, the procession is ended by the rain sent by the Virgin. The Virgen regulates rain: she sends rain as a blessing during droughts and protects devotees during hurricanes. When people from a neighboring settlement (now nearly abandoned) were troubled by severe rains, which caused floods and isolated them from the outside world, they prayed for the help of the Virgen de las Aguas Santas and made a vow, which resulted in the commitment to bring her a calf as an offering every year. The offerings were brought for many years until the settlement was depopulated.

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240 According to *Diccionario de la lengua española* (DLE): comején from the Arawakan *comixén*.

241 More oral poetry includes the theme of the moon. Mr. Alvarez from Loma Atravesada cited the poem: “El sol le dijo a la luna que se fuera recoger que sola de la noche no anda ninguna mujer, y la luna le contesta con toditos su primores que es mejor andar de noche y no al día con el sol.” The storyline of another narrative about the moon tells that one day Moon and Sun had a fight during which the moon took the eye from the sun and that is why no one of them has two eyes. There were more beliefs related to the moon. One of them is that Moon has cold, which is especially dangerous for pregnant women because it can hurt a baby or leave a “lunar”, birthmark on their skin.

242 The miraculous character of the Virgin’s shrine is perceived in various signs today. These include the beehive in the church, a part of the orange tree trunk, presumably from the orange tree in which the Virgin appeared, hidden behind the altar, and the watermarks left on the walls of the church after the rain, all together reinforcing the extraordinary powerful character of this place and its patron.
Figure 19 The Celebration of the Virgin of the Holy Waters in Boyá, Dominican Republic.

Figure 20 The Virgin of The Holy Waters in Boyá, Dominican Republic.
The link between the Virgin and water symbolism is also expressed in a song dedicated to her. During the procession, devotees sing: “The indigenous lady comes, the indigenous lady goes, the indigenous lady lives under the water.” As in the case of other liturgical hymns, this song is sung by the whole crowd of devotees walking in the procession, publicly displaying their faith. The lyrics of this plena (special musical genre) are similar to those of a text recited during the Saint John celebration in the cave in Mancha (see chapter 9). The same hymn is sung once more when the procession is completed. After singing the official hymn some of the Boyá devotees stay and sing the hymn addressing the Virgin as “indigenous lady”.

The explanation for this song was given by Mrs. María Mejía, the main singer during the procession. According to her, she and the other participants in the procession sing this song “because the Virgin is Indian,” and she adds: “as the church has appeared there, and was built by the Spaniards and the Indians, we have this song (repeats the lyrics), and because Indians live under the water”. Her sister, Dorotea Mejía, adds: “She (could be referring to either the Virgin or the Indian woman) lives under the water and when she submerges, she returns under the water. Because she was not on the earth, she was living under the water, when she is raised to sing she sang and returned and submerged again, because they had a house under the water. Because there was a mine that the old people were saying that could never be demolished and in the period of Trujillo they made a road there and they destroyed it.” To clarify, in Boyá the river and especially deep water-pools are considered dwellings of indigenous ancestors, and are potentially dangerous places, being symbolic for both life and afterlife. Indigenous ancestors are also sometimes observed at archaeological places or places related to their history. As the next chapter on healing as a subaquatic journey to ancestors will explain, the underwater world and afterlife are returning topics in the Dominican belief systems.

The celebration of the Virgin of Boyá is an event that reinforces the relationships between the Virgin and the community. The community publicly displays its devotion through attendance and through fulfilling its vows. The patronal celebration in Boyá fits into the broader acceptance of devotees in agricultural settings praying for a successful harvest and rain during mass. If problems affecting the harvest persist, petitionary processions are organized with patronal Saints, during which the Saints’ images are carried on the shoulders and hymns are sung. San Isidro, as the protector of the farmers, the Virgin Mary or the Holy Cross are often invoked in matters of agricultural wellbeing. San Isidro was celebrated also in Boyá. Celebrations for San Isidro were shorter, typically lasting for only four days. Until now, the life-size statue of San Isidro is found in the left corner of the Boyá church. His meaning for the community was further explained: “San Isidro is a Saint of farmers, those who work on the land and you say ‘San Isidro, the Farmer, remove the water, and bring the sun’. One day there were droughts and well we went to bring him to Arizao (river), (and we said) let’s wash him and see if it is going to rain, and, Oh Lord, it started to get cloudy, and it was huge, it was a long time that we did not see such a strong rain. And this San Isidro had in one hand a coa and in another a hoe.”

San Isidro as protector of the farmer is a popular saint in many other Dominican and Cuban locations as well. The Boyá image of San Isidro holding a coa, known in Boyá as an indigenous instrument for the cultivation of conucos. Similarly to the custom of Boyá, at other
locations (provinces Puerto Plata, Monte Christi) patronal saints and virgins have been taken in procession to the river during droughts. Also in Cuba, Virgins and Saints have been taken out of the church and carried around in processions in order to ask for rain, and generally it is said that it started to rain before the procession was completed.\textsuperscript{246} Besides being invoked in collective prayers, rains have been asked for or detained by individuals.\textsuperscript{247}

During a year of drought, rain was prayed for at various locations; many people remembered its destructive power from the preceding years. There are different ways how to protect a harvest from the rain. Spiritual protection can be secured by the prayer of a specialist. Such a specialist, called Water Binder (Amarrador del Agua), has a gift or knows a special secret prayer to stop or remove the threat of rain.\textsuperscript{248} Likewise, the fruits from trees can be protected from heavy rains by tying stones to their branches with white or red scarfs.\textsuperscript{249} Houses may be protected from thunder by blessed guano leaves or other herbs, which are collected on Good Friday. Different herbs (e.g. leaves of mango, guanábana, piñón) would be collected early in the morning, without speaking to anyone. These herbs are successively kept in the house in order to protect it or they are dried and burned to drive the storm away with smoke.\textsuperscript{250}

**Offerings to the Earth**

The wellbeing of the communities in rural areas is conditioned by a good harvest, which depends on nurturing the soil. Some contributors indicated that the care should be mutual. A conversation with Mr. Juan Pablo Rosario Araujó in Boca de Mana after the event of San Juan (see later) clarified with respect to food offerings to the earth that if a grain, yucca, batata or other crops accidentally fell on the ground it is wise to leave it there because the earth asked for it. Familiar with the Dominican 21 Division, he did not believe that earth is or has a lwa, but was certain that the earth has to eat and that by nurturing her we induce her to nurture us. In another location, in Jaiquí, Dominga Olivo too remembered how people “after the vela (informal mass) for a Saint obtained peanuts, and morro (a dish made of rice and beans). But people weren’t eating it, it was without salt, they were taking it and giving it to the field. They were spraying it (throw the offering) in order it would give a good harvest.” To whom exactly the offerings were dedicated was not clear to this contributor because offerings were made individually without discussing it with others.

In other Dominican locations, Bánica and Pedro Santana, the earth was considered to be the domain of indigenous ancestors. Mr. Juan Abraham Rosario Jiménez explained that people of Bánica and Pedro Santana were offering the first fruits of the harvest. Corn, bread, peanuts, and beans were offered to fields,

\textsuperscript{246} See for details for example interview with Mrs Hernandez from Jiguani or Mr. Mendoza from Guao next to Jiguani. The latter narrates about the Spiritist called Buteca: “Jiguani was an indigenous settlement and some Bayamo peoples came here and said that here Jiguani is the river of gold, and this river pass there, and it was gold river, and sometimes it gets angry (gets dangerous, se pone bravo) and it took many peoples away, this caused that in Jiguani many things happened and among them was this gentleman. This gentleman lived there in (inteligble) I forgot his name, his nickname was Buteca, and it was a extraordinary person, he believed in spirits, and in Spiritism, his custom was to organize a reunion of adherents of Spiritism and give blessings (santiguaban) and everything. When it was not raining in the whole region he got this character to organize processions passing through the village and when the procession was done it started to rain. It is not known what it was that he had.”

\textsuperscript{247} Mrs. Candida Dominga Olivo, an agriculturalist from Jaiquí (prov. Monte Cristi) narrated how she prayed for rain: “when I saw my harvest sad, I would enter in the middle of the harvest, open the arms and say: Gran Poder de Dios, don’t let me lose the harvest, and I was believing a lot in this because, look, doing like this, opening my arms watching my harvest nearly lost, it was raining and my harvest did not vanish. I have had every time a good harvest.” Mrs. Olivo also warned that when praying, money should never be offered. She explained that: “Once after coming from the field I was relaxing and told to Ana Luisa: don’t hurry and it will rain soon. I bought water for 50 cent (she laughs briefly) and I was relaxed. Listen, that night felt a flood, and it destroyed the well and everything, so she was angry with me and says: for what reason did you pay without a shame. I say: Ana Luisa, what do you think, if I bought water it was not even for a penny (chele), but there were many people who bought for fifty.” (Interview with Mrs. Olivo from Jaiquí).

\textsuperscript{248} Interview with Mr. Felipe Ortiz from Naranjo, Boyá.

\textsuperscript{249} The symbolism of the red and white scarf will be further discussed in relation to the protection of the crops against the evil eye. In general, red ribbons are used until now in Spain against evil eye. Red stands also often for Santa Barbara/Chango, who is the owner of the thunder.

\textsuperscript{250} The weather is to be prognosticated on the basis of general observations of the moon, wind, behavior of the animals or cabañuelas. The latter is a Spanish belief that the weather on the first twelve days of the year is indicative for the weather of the twelve months of the whole year.
small streams, or other places. In more detail: “Well, before, there were some people, not some, a large majority, all, who went to offer the harvest to an Indian, so when the harvest was before consuming, if it was a rice or whatever, the first meal was prepared for the neighbors, but before eating it, the first (portion) was thrown to the river in the ravine.” The first half of the offering was said to be given because of a previous commitment the person had made, while the second half was given in order to assure a positive relationship for the rest of the year. This can be done in every harvest. In Mr. Rosario’s view, the earth has power and it has a (spiritual) ruler: the King of the Earth (El Rey de la Tierra). According to him, the status of this ruler is expressed in his name: the King of the Earth is more powerful than indigenous ancestors. He clarified that besides the King of the Earth, there is the King of the Wind, the King of the Water. He added that “nearly everything has a king because it is as a bee that would disappear without a queen”.251 This is in accordance with the teaching of the 21 Division that every division has its own Master (Jefe).

In Cuba, Mrs. Celida Hernández Reyes, the oldest inhabitant of Jiguani, also recalled the food offerings to the earth as an expression of gratitude for a successful harvest.252 Mrs. Hernández recalled that after a harvest was collected and sold, people organized from the money a celebration that in itself was an offering. For this celebration, they would prepare specific meals and invite their friends and believers. To cite her own words: “The aim of this was to show respect.” In other locations, sharing the first crops from a harvest between neighbors by offering a small feast was also part of the collective work in a junta. For example, in Jiguani the harvest was shared with the beings from the invisible world. Mrs. Hernández explained that some people from Jiguani also brought food offerings to the field: “A dish was prepared, which was later offered in the place where you cultivated your harvest, they have served it on plates, not old broken ones, but on plates, you put it in the corner of the place where you planted and there you left it and dedicate it to whom they were offering it…they did not say to whom, they were saying it for themselves and dedicate to whom it was.” Also, this contributor was not sure to whom the offerings were dedicated, but she suggested that “they were not spirits but Saints.”

One of the inhabitants from Chorro de Maíta in Cuba, Mr. Juan Gutiérrez recalled that in the past it was common to prepare offerings to the earth. Without much talking to anyone, the grandparents and grandmothers put ñame, boniato, malanga in a basket (jabita), buried it in the ground while saying their prayers.253 This contributor explained that it was a custom in the past when the harvest was still huge; now that the harvest is poor there is nothing to offer. Sometimes the appreciation for gifts received from the earth would not be communally driven but rather a matter of individuals expressing their personal gratitude. One Cuban contributor of Haitian origin said that one day she just went to do it because she felt it was a correct occasion: “One day I gave the food to the earth, in a hole I put congri and meat, and I gave some words. This is the reason I do not lack food, I gave it to the earth.”254

The food offerings are one of the means to secure the balance between the invisible world and the visible world, which affects the wellbeing of rural communities. Other customs aim at protecting the fields and crops. One of these was restricting the entrance of women during their period to these fields.255 Another widespread traditional practice is to protect one’s crops against the evil eye, plant pests, for example: a specialist is called upon to combat these pests with secret prayers. In Jiguani the remedies for plagues include tying up three points of a yucca plant.

251 Also others have mentioned the Rey de la Tierra. Altagracia Vargas says that Caonabo and Rey de la Tierra are brothers.
252 Interview no. 140726.
253 Interview no. 144748.
254 Interview no. 140726.
255 In different Dominican locations it is believed that the characteristics of women would transfer to those crops. Mrs. Elia Torres from Villa Isabela explained that, although she does not personally believe it on the basis of her own experience, it has been said that: “si uno se marchita las matas se marchitan, los plátanos no sé qué problema es el que tienen que los plátanos se dañan las cebollas, ajos, etc. se pudren.”
Dominican fields are sometimes protected by beings called bakás. Bakás are mostly described as mostly taking the appearance of a domestic animal with supernatural powers. Their status varies from having intentions to protect one’s property against evils, thieves, or other misfortunes to trespassing the accepted moral rules when doing so. Their agency is used to explain the quick enrichment of a person. Especially where there are animosity and resentment among neighbors some persons can be accused of having baká. Baká has been in views of a large part of contributors believed as rather harmful being that be obtained through a pact with evil or at least because of black magic. Multiple other rituals for protection of fields can be mentioned, but for now, it is clear that the harvest is the center of attention for wellbeing in rural communities.

Concluding remarks
This chapter revealed how ecological knowledge is central to the wellbeing of communities in rural areas. Furthermore, it illustrated how for the people the economic significance of flora, and in turn the communal wellbeing, cannot be separated from religious convictions. Regardless of the origin of these beliefs the present-day ecological knowledge is a testimony of how diverse Caribbean ancestors were able to adapt to the changing landscapes. The subsequent chapter will describe some facets of this ecological knowledge as employed in healing practices. Concretely, after presenting the general features of animated landscapes in the Dominican Republic and Cuba, it will introduce some etiologies and describe in general lines the roles of Dominican healers, and their interaction with medicinal plants before these are used as a remedy. All these daily activities take place in a landscape that is animated by forces that may influence the health and wellbeing of individuals and entire communities.