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CHAPTER 7. Healing in sacred and animated landscapes

The health of peoples living in agricultural settings depends on the ecological knowledge that they use in daily practices. For believers, health is influenced by divine agencies and spiritual entities, which can manifest their healing powers through different features of the surrounding natural environment including the embodiment of diverse spirits, **lwas**, **misterios**, spirits or **orishas** in the healers (be they mediums, **babalawo** or **caballo del misterio**), through the illness but also healing virtues of plants, places and other landscape features. Different religious systems in Cuba and the Dominican Republic have their own theories about diseases, which are sometimes related to such divine manifestations in the surrounding landscape.

Adherents of 21 Division mentioned that everything that has existed is part of the creation of **Gran Dios**, The Supreme Creator, and therefore must be cherished. All living beings have a protective **misterio**. As a result, **lwas**, are to be found in all of the four elements: water, air, earth and fire. The **lwas**, also frequently called **misterios**, are intermediaries of **Gran Dios**. There exist different divisions of **lwas**. Every division in 21 Division has its own element, which it dominates and works through. The most frequently mentioned groups/divisions of **lwas** are the following. The Legbá division with the main **lwa** Papa Legbá is the first to be asked for permission before any spiritual activity, and as such belongs to all elements. **Los Ogunes** (e.g. Ogún Balendjo), which are the warrior deities, and **Los Belies** (e.g. Belie Belcán), entities fighting against injustice, work through air. The fire element belongs to **Los Petroses** (Gran Buá), dreaded warrior deities, and **Los Candelos** (e.g. Papá Candelo), protective deities. **Los Candelos** with **Guedes** (e.g. Barón del Cementerio) are beneficial for business and belong to the earth. The Indian Division belongs to the water element. Other divisions, like Congo and Marassás, can work with all elements of nature.

In Cuban Regla de Ocha, the **ashé** is the vital energy of **Olodumare**, the God by whom the whole universe is created. **Orishas** and the dead also emerged from Olodumare, and are present in all four natural elements. The symbolism of specific landscape features is explained by their sacred biographies (**patakis**). These also clarify the relationships between the histories of **orishas**, and landscape symbolism, which often turns out to play a role in the ceremonies. The symbolism expressed in the ceremonies often refers to links between **orishas**.

Together the orishas of the ritual specialists from **Regla de Ocha** specify the healing location and method of spiritual work during a consultation. One of them, Ms. Eloisa Marina Peréz from Holguín explains: **“When I am going to do the spiritual work I ask where should I do it, whether at my home, at the four corners, at a plant, river, sea and so on. I ask and they give me signs and tell me where the work and cleansing should take place. This is also shown when doing the investigation with the shell (caracol): the shell gives you a song through Elegua. Every deity speaks to you through Elegua. And it tells you where it should be done, at the four corners, manigua (a uncultivated terrain of herbs, and shrubs), at the door entrance, to pass a dove around your body and throw it away on a hill and so on.”** Guided by the consultation, ceremonies are then performed at different locations. Elegua, the principal messenger, the Bright Star, who has control over the roads and destiny, is sought at crossroads. Prayers and spiritual works with the Obatalá can be performed at a mountain, with Ogún in hills and **manigua**, and Babalu-Ayé at hospitals or at El Rincón in Havana. Ritual baths invoking the power of Yemayá are carried out at the

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256 For more on the 21 Division in the Dominican Republic see Tejeda Ortiz (2013).
257 Ceremonies are initiated by paying homage to Oldumare, and his other manifestation, Olofi, the connection between the earth and sky). Then the sun is greeted, the owner of the heaven Olorun, and successively the great stars (Irabo) and moon (Shuwa). The rest of the ceremony is conducted as accustomed for the specific **orisha**.
258 Interview no. 49.
259 For more information on the symbolism within the Regla de Ocha see Cabrera (1954), James Figarola (1989), or Meighoo (2013).
seashore, those of Oshún at river banks, and spiritual help of Oyá is sought at cemeteries. In addition, orishas can manifest themselves through different natural phenomena (see also James’ 1989 principle of multiple representation). For example, Oyá is the orisha of the four winds and lightning. Earth, parts of sacred trees, and plants from these places are brought to house-temple settings.

Famous Catholic pilgrimage shrines like the church of the Virgen of Charity, the church of the Virgen de Regla or El Rincón de San Lázaro are of great value for followers of Regla de Ocha because these three saints are seen as symbols of particular orishas, namely: Oshún, Yemayá, and Babalú-Ayé respectively. Devotees of Catholicism and Regla de Ocha visit in thousands the sanctuary of the Virgen of Charity and Oshún close to Santiago de Cuba. In Cuban East sacred places located in Havana such as El Rincón or Havana Bay are also well known. Thousands of pilgrims seek improvement of their health when praying to Babalú-Ayé and Saint Lazarus at El Rincón or when they come to fulfill their vows to the Virgen de Regla or Yemayá at Havana Bay.

Similarly, for Cuban Espiritistas de Cordón (Spiritists of the Cord) the visible world is parallel to the invisible plane from which the spirits of the deceased can intervene in the world through their medium, invoked individually or collectively through the cordón ceremony.260 Dividing spirits into different groups (called comisiones) according to their nation, race, and profession, Cuban Espiritistas believe that in some places the contact with the spiritual world is more easily facilitated.261 In the majority of cases, Espiritistas consult at centers/temples, but the connection can also be facilitated outside, at specific places where the spiritual presence is sensed. Special natural or historical places, like caves, mountains, and cemeteries are considered to be powerful spiritual places. Some places might be considered powerful because of a long tradition of the use. Inhabitants of Guao, a settlement close to Jiguaní, recalled a traditional healer and espiritista, Cecilia, who sent her patients to San Pedrucón, a Saint that represented himself as a rock, in order to make a vow and leave their offerings in the form of hair, nails, and money. The faith in the healing effect of San Pedrucón seemed to be lost, but when San Pedrucón was removed because of road construction, current inhabitants brought him back as a sign of respect to their parents and grandparents. Some places might also be represented through objects found there. For example, Jiguaniceros protect their houses with stones from the fortress that according to oral traditions was built by Spaniards and indigenous peoples. In the past, spiritual sessions were organized on the top of the hill close to the fortress.

Catholics and Protestants (Evangelistas) in both locations believe that, alongside traditional sacred places like churches, chapels or pilgrimage places, other elements of nature may also reveal divine signs; for example, a particular form of clouds may be related to the manifestation of a Saint in certain places, trees or plants. The dead too were sometimes seen as being able to influence wellbeing and health. Roman Catholics would search for spiritual help and cures in churches and chapels. Some of these might have been constructed at places of Marian manifestations in trees, like the Ceiba tree at the Templete in Havana or the Virgen de Higuey. Also other places where the miraclouse appearance of Virgen de Mercedes at Saint Hill near La Vega are until now the popular pilgrimage place. Many devotees ask the Saints and Virgins to cure illness and to help in different life struggles also at natural holy sites such as Cavern of Saint Francis in

260 For more on cordon ceremony see the work of Cordóva Martínez & Barzaga Sablón (2000).
261 Josefina Pérez Yero from Cienfuegos described the cordón as follows: “We make a circle, the outer part are the brothers, that ingrate the cord, the head man (leading figures) and the head women, the first finishes with a man and the second with a woman. They are four heads. Then there is the hammer that is the inner circle where the biggest potential resides, a place where they work the most. My grandmother left behind her songs calling for works (llamadas de trabajo) y to help those entities. There is only the tone, and the rest we add. It is how would I describe you this tone: “Lolelale, lolelaela”, like this. Afterwards I have to add what I would like to ask for, how I will call the spirits. Like this we have these calling songs and we have the labor. When we speak about labor it means that the commission of spirits is already there. So you speak about llamada when you call the spirits and then commissions, you speak about labor when the commissions and calls are in the cord...”. A similar description was giving in Jiguaní; unfortunately, this was not recorded. The reader might find also different youtube videos made in Monte Oscuro in Cuba.
Bánica. Similarly, Evangelistas seek contact with God during the church services, but some of them such as Angel Montilla Guerrero from Boca de Yuma, following the example of Elijah, search for that contact in caves because of the privacy that such sites offer.

Cuban and Dominican religious traditions, in spite of the various differences between them, coincide in paying homage to ancestors and to the dead. Ancestors are considered to be those to whom one has a personal family linkage, but also those who are more remote. Ancestors and the dead in general have a central role in Cuban Spiritism. At Dominican (popular) Catholic altars, photos of deceased loved ones are often accompanied by a glass of water and a lit candle as an expression of devotees asking for guidance in times of personal need. Ancestral agency is searched for in sites that are historically associated with their presence. The Egungun, remote ancestors in Regla de Ocha, reside at places of their heroic events, often palenques (fortified settlements) and other monuments commemorating their resistance to the colonial rule (e.g. the Maroon Monument in El Cobre). Egungun reside also in manigua, on the hill, or at other places where their presence is perceived through material remains, even archeological sites, or where that presence is sensed by healers or devotees. Similarly, in the Dominican Division, some historical places, such as La Negreta, the Sepi Sepi sugarmill, and some sites with visible material evidence of indigenous occupancy are locales where ancestral forces might be mobilized to enhance one’s own or collective wellbeing. Lastly, particularly powerful healers from the Dominican past, like Liborio Mateo or Bibiana Rosa, are ritually commemorated and invoked in places associated with their life and work.

Figure 21 San Pedrúcon in Guao near Jiguani, Cuba.

263 James Figarola has written more thoughts about the death in the Spiritism of Cord (1993a) and summarized some widespread Cuban beliefs (1993b).
264 See also Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert (1997).
Figure 22 The protecting plant and stone at a house in Jiguani, Cuba.
Figure 23 Siguaraya tree afront of a house-temple in Niquero, Cuba.

Figure 24 Ceiba and nganga in house-temple in Niquero, Cuba.
Other spiritual beings in Cuban and Dominican landscapes

Besides places that are recognized in different local religious traditions, there are other parts of the Cuban and Dominican landscapes that are animated by spiritual beings. These beings can frighten and incommode people, but in general are not thought to cause illnesses or severe harm. Among the beings that are said to appear sometimes in the Dominican countryside are the *galipotes*, described as men who transform themselves into an animal, plant, or object. Some have argued that they have, in general, malicious intentions, to steal, or to make trouble. The status of these beings differs, from beings seen as evil, or beings that just bother people.

These may be compared to the Cuban *cagüeyros* are described as men who can transform into animals, such as pigs, dogs and, birds, but also can mimic or transform into plants. *Cagüeyros* figures also in narratives about revolutions and during the war, wherein some men were able to transform themselves into a tree stump or a tree branch to escape dangerous situations in East Cuba. Similarly, in Dominican Boca de Mana, Mr. Julian de la Rosa narrated about his uncle: “I have heard stories about this, about the people who were able to receive spiritual entities (se montaban). I have heard a story about warriors who were here in this country, that when the guards were searching for them to imprison them, they transformed into a stump, a guineo plant with a one ripe fruit in the cluster of bananas. My grandfather was always telling this story. I also had an uncle that knew an eel’s prayer, and who could transform into a fish to cross over the river. A person that transformed in a stone or an animal by means of spiritual invocation - these people were called *brujos*.” Curiously, this uncle, who is said to be one of those “*brujos*”, i.e. spiritual specialists practicing dark spells, was rescued at the end by his grandmother, the famous healer Bibiana de la Rosa. In few cases, such spiritual specialists were considered to have the ability to tie up or take away a soul.

Other frequently mentioned beings in Dominican rural areas are the *ciguapas*, described as naked indigenous women with their feet facing backwards. *Ciguapas* live in forests and on mountains; sometimes they come down to the village to steal salt (see below), and throw earth into the pot when people are cooking. Another kind of beings known from the Cuban countryside are the *jigües/guajes*, small human-like figures with dark skin who live in dark pools and parts of Cuban rivers. *Jigües* are said to frighten and trouble people, but in a playful way, rather than to cause real illnesses. On both islands, *cucuyos* (fireflies) are representations of the dead, and are therefore respected, and never killed. Lastly, owls are respected for announcing the death of someone known to the observer in both regions of the study.

The visible and invisible worlds can interact in various ways through landscape symbolism, but within the scope of this study it is not possible to mention all the different examples collected during the fieldwork, especially as many of these do not have a direct link to healing practices in the present. Now, before discussing the healers as one of the major components of the local healing landscapes, it is important to address the concept of illness itself.

265 One of the inhabitants of Barajagua, Rosalina Segura Hidalgo also described cagüeyeros as causing troubles but also as offering help: “It was said that an old man that worked at night building house on his own, that cagüeyeros were helping him. These are beings that throw stones and earth from trees. They climb and can make you troubles at nights. J: Do they live in trees? RS: They live in caves. J: So, were peoples afraid of caves? RS: Yes, people were afraid to go to these places, because they could tie you up, they throw earth at you, or to your meals when you were cooking. J: Into what cagüeyro can transform? RS: In dogs, or birds.”

266 Ms. Rosalina Segura Hidalgo told a narrative about the use of a cucuyo to light the journey at night: “There was an old man who had caught a cucuyo to light his journey on the way home, but when he came and went to release him, el cucuyo said to him: and now you have to leave me where you took me from.”

267 One of the Cuban respondents suggested that to have bats at home was seen as a negative as they might take away the person. Others saw them as molesting people when cooking by throwing earth into the meal; they could even tie one up. This might be related to the pre-colonial worldview as bats are discussed by Pané and representations of bats appear as decorations of archaeological ceramics.
The indigenous heritage in the traditional ecological knowledge

This chapter was an introduction into ecological knowledge as displayed in foodways, crafts, house building, and agricultural activities. This ecological knowledge inherited from different generations and from diverse cultural backgrounds is being reactivated while dwelling in a particular environmental setting. The interpretation of traditional ecological knowledge in terms of indigenous cultural continuity remains a highly speculative and challenging endeavor in the Greater Antilles without definitive conclusions. The first step in the voyage of deciphering the history of traditional ecological knowledge within this domain is to review historical and ethnographic parallels.

The present-day foodways illustrate how the contemporary inhabitants connect to their ancestors. Paleo-/archeo-botanical research (Rodríguez Suárez & Pagán Jiménez 2006, 2008; Pagán Jiménez 2002, 2007; Pagán Jiménez & Oliver 2008; Newsom 2008) has confirmed the early colonial descriptions and suggests that some crops such as cotton, maize, beans (Fabaceae fam., *Phaseolus vulgaris*), higüera, guácima, jobo, ñame, maní/cacaguáte, batatas/boniato, yautía/malanga, mavi were already cultivated centuries and sometimes millennia prior to the European colonization.²⁶⁸

When compared to the Fernández de Oviedo’s description (2002 [1535]) the present-day use of native crops such as yucca displays certain continuities in ways of preparation, utensils included in its preparation and associated vocabulary (*burén, sibucán, jibe, naiboá*). The utensils for its preparation may have been slightly modified in the early stage of the colonial period, when Las Casas (2002[1527-1566]) mentions that “prensillas de husillo” were used. Similarly, a detailed comparison of contemporary consumption of guáyiga with archaeological evidence and historical sources (Rodríguez Suárez & Pagán Jiménez 2008; Pagán Jiménez 2016) offers a promising avenue for further research.

The distribution of crops like yucca and corn reflects the paths of the colonial voyages. Both crops were introduced in 16th century Africa. In the 1550s, cassava became a provision for the Portuguese ships bringing West African captives to the Americas. Corn cultivation was already well established in the Cape Verde islands by the 1540s (McCann 2001). At present, corn is used for dishes carrying New World indigenous names such as *guanimos, pinol, or tamales* but also *gofio* that have parallels in the Islas Canarias by the 1820s (Alonso de Herrera 1818: 210), and others like *chenchén, chaká* that are most likely related to the early incorporation of corn in the diet of enslaved people.

Other important crops like plantains in turn reveal the ancestral influences from Africa. Plantains (*Musa paradisiaca*, guineo *Musa sapientum*) were introduced to the Caribbean during the early colonial period and are components of various popular dishes: Dominican *mangú* (also *mofongo*), and Cuban *fufu* (mashed green plantains with yucca) seem to have a parallel in the West African dish called *fufu*. Similarly, yams, a common source of food on Portuguese ships, according to De Oviedo (Oviedo 2002 [1535]) were introduced with enslaved peoples from the African continent and formed an important part of their diet on the island since the early colonial period.

Like the inhabitants of the Old World, those of the New World integrated exotic crops into the local diet without anyone questioning their origin. The contemporary foodways display an integration of both native and exotic crops, combining those as dishes or products created or marked by a long process of transculturation.

²⁶⁸ Among the plants that have been identified in the Caribbean archaeological records are: Spondias sp, Annona sp., Crescentia sp., Bixa Orellana, Hymenaea courbari, Inga sp., Piscida sp., Persea Americana, Malphigia sp., wild cherry, cotton, guayaba (Psidium guajava), Acrocomia media (corozo), Colubrina sp., Genipa Americana, Zanthoxylum sp. Chrysophyllum sp., Manilkara sp. Or Sieroxylon sp., Pouteria sp., Melicoccus bijugatus quenepa, Guazuma ulmifolia, Sterculia sp., Siphonoglossa (health care), Trianthema sp., Xanthosoma sp. Canna sp., Zamia sp., Arachas hypogaëa, Phaseolus sp., Calanthea sp., Marantha sp., Oenothera sp., Setaria spp., Capsicum sp., Passiflora sp. (Newsom 2008).
A similar process of fusion of skills and ecological knowledge may be observed in crafts displayed in housing areas. Many aforementioned plants used in housing area have been described for their utility by different historical sources. Precious wood, like roble, *caoba*, mahogany, gained European attention from the beginning (Oviedo 2002 [1478-1557]).

Fruits of *higüeros* were used as vessels, plates and cups among indigenous peoples (Oviedo 2002 [1478-1557]). The know-how of preparing rope from the agave plant, for example, was documented by Oviedo (2002 [1478-1557]) and later among the Kalinago (Taylor 1948). Nowadays this technique is still known and used among the population of Cuba and the Dominican Republic (e.g. in Fray Benito and Boyá). Palm varieties were used for house construction (*cana*, *yarey* and *guano*), for furniture (*yagua*), and basketry (Sánchez Valverde 1785 in Deive 2002). Other plants like *sábila* and *peonía* are of exotic origin (Acevedo-Rodríguez & Strong 2012) and possibly link present-day inhabitants with the African ancestry.

Basketry was in the past supposed to be an indigenous legacy. Several designs (e.g. Fig. 87) are similar to those found on the island of Dominica but others remind us of contemporary Spanish basketry. In Jiguani, for example, the basketry has a long tradition and is a source of income of various Jiguaniceros until the present. Some of the employed vocabulary as *jaba* (a type of basket) seems to come from an indigenous language (*haba*). Magüey, bark of bixao (possibly *bixa*) were used as materials for indigenous basketry (Oviedo 2002 [1478-1557]). However, generalizations proceeding from the design or the type of material used may lead to hasty and unwarranted conclusions. In order to assess any continuities from pre-colonial times, more studies are needed to map the situation on both islands, taking into account as well the possible influences of ancestors of various backgrounds including those from Caribbean (Taylor & Moore 1948), Europe (cf. Moreno 1998 on Canarian basketry) and Africa (Rosengarten 2013).

Another plant that connects the present-day Cuban and Dominican populations to their indigenous predecessors is the tobacco. Because of its importance in economic and religious life, there will be more comments on tobacco in the following chapters in order to analyse its multiple meanings from a historical perspective. Here I will just make a short remark about some of the customs associated with its cultivation such as the work in *junta* and the use of the lunar calendar.

Similar patterns of labor exchange to *la junta* have been practiced among the peasants in other Caribbean islands as well as throughout Mesoamerica and the Andean region. In Haiti this custom is known as *combiété* (personal communication Sony Jean 2016), in Dominica and St. Lucia as *koudeman*, from *coup de main* (Stancioff 2018). Barrow (1992) has argued that it has African antecedents.

The lunar calendar was used in European, West African and Caribbean agriculture. When cultivating (e.g. *corn*) indigenous peoples of Hispaniola took into account the moon. The sowing was done after the new moon until the full moon, but never when the moon is waning, because as the moon wanes also the crops (Oviedo 2002 [1478-1557]). When describing the *caoba* Oviedo indicates that this should be felled when the moon is waning. The same reasoning about that the fertility of the garden or field is influenced by the waxing moon is to be found among Dominican agriculturalist and was also registered among Kalinago (Layng 1983). There are numerous parallels for this in other parts of the Americas as well.

Pané’s and Breton’s accounts demonstrate that the moon had a great symbolic importance in the indigenous worldviews. The cavern from which the sun and moon came forward was very much respected among indigenous ancestors in Hispaniola (Pané 2011 [1498]). Similarly, the Wayuú identify a cavern as

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269 Fernández de Oviedo wrote about roble and *caoba* used for furniture in the major church of Santo Domingo, which were so beautiful that they should be shipped to Spain. *Caoba* was also used in *trapiches* for the wheels and building material.

the site of origin of the Sun, the Moon, and the first Wayúús. Among the Kalinago the Moon was the father of Hiali, the first forefather of the Kalinago nation. Again, the coincidence in the worldviews as to the importance of the moon for the agricultural cycle could create a point of encounter where indigenous thought merged with European and West African beliefs.

The same can be said about the concern to secure the source of the peasants’ lives. Spaniards have been praying too to the Virgin of Holy Waters or San Isidro for centuries, asking them to regulate the weather conditions. Chapter 10 will analyze into more detail the connections and associations of the Virgin of the Holy Waters and her sanctuary with the indigenous ancestors.

The custom of sharing the fruits with the Earth and associated diving beings (King of the Earth) or spirits residing in the landscape expresses the common preoccupation of agriculturalists around the world with the outcome of their harvest. This study registered such customs in settlements or regions with long-term presence of indigenous descendants. Corn, yucca, batata, maní, beans, but also other meals (rice & beans) are offered to the earth in Boca de Mana, Jiguani and Chorro de Maita or brought to the river or ravine in Bánica. Among the offerings there are native but also exotic crops. As this custom is common among indigenous peoples elsewhere in the Americas, one might consider it to have an immediate indigenous origin. In British Guyana, for example, before cassava-roots are going to be harvested, a drink is brewed out of the first batch and left on the field as an offering (De Goeje 1943). A libation is a common tradition in many West African religions.

In Boca de Mana these offerings are brought to the Earth, in Jaiquí to the field (after a vela to a Saint whose name is omitted), in Jiguani to Saints, in Bánica to the Indigenous Ancestors and to the King of the Earth. In accordance with the teaching of the 21 Division every division has its own Master (jefe) and the Earth has its own King. These are literal translations of names of certain West Central African deities that are called Kings of specific domains (Macgaffey 2009; Herskovits & Herskovits 1933). Similarly, we find in Mesoamerican and South American contexts indigenous beliefs in divine beings called the Master, Owner, Lord or Lady, King or God identified with a specific domain. An example is the Mixtec Iha Sau, “Lord Rain”, whose name is generally translated as the “God of Rain” (cf. Posselt Santoyo & Jiménez Osorio 2015). We should be aware that translations may have been influenced by Western epistemologies so that some details of the indigenous or West African worldviews are lost in the process.

The gratitude for a successful harvest would be expressed in offering a celebration on one’s own costs to the neighbors, or those who have help carry out different tasks. This custom was found across different religions and seems to be related to the junta tradition, which was so widespread in the past. Cuban Regla de Ocha devotees present offerings to Ilé Ògéré, an orisha (spirit) representing the earth (Edmonds & Gonzalez 2010). The sacred biography of this orisha suggests that humans should give the earth an offering of fruits, just like the earth has given her fruits to them. Humans should show gratitude for the favor and affections that the earth gives them by producing materials that are used in daily life. Ilé nurtures people and after their death they nurture her with their bodies, which the earth has maintained for so many years.

Parallels to Dominican and Cuban earth offerings are found in Haitian customs. Before the rice was gathered from the fields in the Haitian part of the Atibonito valley a small part was shared with the friends who helped during the cultivation family, with the unknown ancestors, with the Haitian and African dead, and furthermore the dead twins, albinos, and other deceased persons, for example those who drowned or were lost at sea (Herskovits 1937). Similarly, the corncobs of the first maize harvest would be offered to Jesus Christ, the Saints, the Twins, and the Dead by throwing them to the four cardinal directions (Herskovits 1937). Analogous harvest festivals for yams or rice have been celebrated throughout West Africa, e.g. by the Ashanti in Ghana (Herskovits 1937).
Epistemological and ontological overlaps may mask how divine and spiritual beings were originally honored or how their symbolism fused with belief systems introduced from elsewhere. Instead of devaluing these traditions as superstitions or foreign intromissions, we should take their long-term existence as an invitation to reflect upon the centrality of the ecological knowledge in the wellbeing of communities in rural areas around the world. This is also true for protective figures like Water Binder or for the religious specialists combating plants’ pests, which have been documented in the Americas as well as in Spain (Christian 1989). Bakás (described as phantasms) are said to have correspondences with bakru, which might derive from the West African beliefs about little folk (Herskovits 1937). Courlander (1960) suggested that there is a possible link between them and the Congo-Guinée deity Bakulu Baka, or Bakaku Baka, who can devour persons, and who like the Haitian Baká sometimes live in the mapou tree. Customs aiming at protecting the fields and crops, for example by prescribing that women during their period should not enter the fields, have their parallels among the Kaliña (Artist 2016). The blessed guano leaves as protection of homes from thunder may equally be derived from the symbolism of the palm in Catholic beliefs, as from similar meanings in pre-colonial Caribbean religion (cf. the mauriti palm described by de Goeje 1943) or in Regla de Ocha and other Afro-Caribbean beliefs.271

These examples illustrate the complexity of the historical analysis of Dominican and Cuban traditional ecological knowledge. It cannot be overemphasized that indigenous heritage should not be seen as more traditional, rural or “primitive” than the European or African. Certain aspects of contemporary ecological knowledge clearly contain elements of ancient indigenous knowledge. On the other hand, it is clear that this traditional ecological knowledge is a composite of beliefs and observations that combine the pre-colonial legacy with elements introduced from Europe and Africa during the colonial period. It is telling that specific origins of contemporary ideas and practices often cannot be established. The syncretism has been intense: different ontologies have been merged to reinforce each other, forming a new unit, a true synergy of knowledge and symbolism from different cultural backgrounds.

Illness and cure
Beliefs concerning illness vary between and within cultural and religious systems. Many share the idea that illness is caused by a disturbance of the equilibrium between individual and external factors. In general, an illness may have material, human and/or divine causes. The material causes, like for example viruses, bad hygiene, and food poisoning, are considered to be the most common causes of an illness. Common illnesses such as flu, constipation, kidney infection, or stomach ache are often first treated at home. As these illnesses are common, medicinal herbs needed to cure them are well-known in the public sphere, and this knowledge is exchanged routinely between family members, neighbors and friends. For instance, the flu, is cured by a tea made of guanabana leaves; the fever by tea from ozua, quinoa, or mara; and for parasites, children are given guatapanal, guahabo, or apazote (for Latin names see the appendix).

Illnesses may be interpreted in line with culturally specific syndromes or religious explanations. As a result, new illnesses like chikungunya, an infectious disease that broke out in 2014, was interpreted by some as being caused by “bad air” (mal aire). Bad air can be a malicious spirit moving with the wind, which can penetrate the body of the patient. At the same time bad air can refer to air pollution, or diseases transmitted through the air. So it is both a culturally bounded syndrome, and also a culturally specific way to describe observable phenomena.

271 Another example is that of the protective power of thunderstones, which can be traced to West Africa but is equally present among the Kaliña of Suriname (Pernard 1907).
The equilibrium between the individual and external factors is also maintained through preserving an internal balance between conditions that are characterized as “hot” or “cold”. These qualities are not necessarily related to actual temperatures, but stem from a cosmic categorization system that shows similarity to (and possibly a relationship with) the classical theory of humoral balance.\(^{272}\) In order to keep the balance, people in Dominican border regions pay attention to which crops are cold or hot as imprudent consumption could be dangerous and might cause harm if the body is in the opposite state. Sometimes the hot and cold rule is applied for medicinal plants.\(^{273}\) Accordingly, washing one's hair during a hot day with cold water is believed to cause illness.

Illness furthermore can be caused by social imbalance, i.e. by the disturbance of the good relationship of an individual with the community and humankind but also with the divine forces. Malfunctioning health could be an indication of a problem in the relationship with the divine beings, possibly caused by their whims, or their punishment for violating some social moral code. In 21 Division, the relationship with God was maintained through divine messengers, the \emph{iwas}. Among Catholics, illness is often perceived as a divine punishment for not living up to the Holy Scriptures. Obviously, the explanation of illnesses as being caused by violating some social and moral behavior code is not applied indiscriminately to everyone.\(^{274}\) In addition, divine messengers, and other invisible agents can cause an illness, like the dead, and the ancestors. Especially in Cuban Spiritism, the dead are important actors in wellbeing. Cures and ailments are all related to the agency of the dead. A case from Jiguani may serve to illustrate this. Mr. de Los Santos narrated that one of his grandparents became sick and passed away because he chased away one of the dead from his place in a disrespectful way. The consequences of his threat were a high fever and later the grandfather’s death.\(^{275}\)

One of the cultural syndromes that will be discussed in a later paragraph is the concept of soul loss or capture. The experience was often described as the soul being tied up (\emph{está amarrado}) or being taken away by a \emph{misterio}, an \emph{iwas}, or an ancestor (\emph{el misterio se lo llevó}).\(^{276}\) Soul loss is induced by divine beings like the \emph{iwas}, or ancestors, but also by other dark spiritual specialists. The expression of being taken away refers to displacement of the soul, which can result in temporary or permanent illness, which may lead to death. Mental illnesses are often described in terms of the soul having been taken away. In a subsequent chapter, several cases will be discussed in which illness is related to the agency of the indigenous ancestors. The

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\(^{272}\) See on more this theory the work of Barbara Tedlock (1987) or Chevalier and Sánchez Bain (2003).  
\(^{273}\) This custom was described earlier by Brendbekken (1998). In Mexico the idea is that the disturbance of equilibrium between the two (cf Yang / Yin), causes illness and that in order to restore the balance one needs to take cold herbs for hot diseases and vice versa (personal conversation with M. Jansen 2018). According to Prof. Jansen it is likely that the contemporary view is the consequence of synergy between an ancient dichotomy between the influence of the Sun and that of the Rain and the hippocratic idea.  
\(^{274}\) One of the examples to be mentioned is that a blindness of an individual from a Holguín province was interpreted as a punishment for the fact that he allegedly had violated an underage girl.  
\(^{275}\) Mr. Los Santos (born 1929) Jiguani told about what happened to his grandparents who were living in a small settlement called Caimanes: “One day when the children were going to get water in the river, before they got there at a paddock they saw a man without a head. They were frightened and returned quickly home. Their father first did not believe them until he saw with his own eyes. His first reaction was to pray but when the dead did not want to leave he took a weapon, so the dead left, disappeared behind the cayo de gcucimas. Soon after he went on pilgrimage to el Cobre. On their journey they had to overnight in a house where the day before someone passed away. That night the dead did not leave them a sleep. The day after, they again had to search for a water in house, where the lady when she saw the man asked him to come and to be seated. Under his chair a huge spider appeared and when it started to get to him, the woman told him: “Listen to what I am going to say, the threat you made you are going pay with your life, this is going to cost the life. When you arrive home, you will become sick and will not get better because the place where you have seen me, the place where you threatened me, this is mine, and I am there every time when I want, everything that you will take will turn into salt and tears, and you are going to die.” Afterwards he was given also a protection (resguardo) for his son, that he would not pass away during the pilgrimage. And it seemed that the thing that he (the son) was carrying passed on the horse. Then they went to el Cobre to fulfill their vow, and when they returned, exactly as the one said the man arrived with 40 Celsius of fever and lay down into a bed from which he never woke up again. He passed away as the woman said because he has threatened the dead.”  
\(^{276}\) The Haitian Creole has a term for the soul loss: “pran bonange” (personal conversation with Sony Jean 2017). The technique of tying up someone to someone else is quite popular magic among Dominican and Cuban women who often practice tying up the name of their husband or lover to a small tree branch in order to keep him at home.
ailments induced by the indigenous ancestors are often described as a result of a misbalanced relationship, and the ancestors’ whims.

In addition, illness can arise from a social imbalance caused by social conflicts.277 The illnesses within this category are often described as induced by another man or ritual specialist through an evil eye, spell, or witchcraft. The evil eye refers to someone’s gaze on another person with admiration or envy, which might lead to illness or even a death. For that reason, a compliment is often followed by the expression “May God bless you”.

People are frequently frightened of becoming the object of different kinds of spells. For protection, they use different amulets (resguardos).278 The objective of these amulets can be to harm the health or wellbeing of another person, to influence someone’s behavior in terms of attracting the person, and influencing their decision processes. Spells harming others are referred to as witchcraft. Harmful spells can be induced by inserting some secret ingredients into the adversary’s food or beverage. Mariano (from Guananico) gave a testimony about such an incident. About twenty years ago, Mariano brought his sister to a doctor because her belly was inflated. After visiting an official doctor who could not help, he brought her to a healer living near Santiago de Caballeros. The healer gave her a bath, and herbs which caused her to vomit the exogenous object that was in her body, which appeared to be a snake.279 Mariano commented that his sister was carrying a snake because of something someone gave to her in a meal or beverage.

People consult spiritual specialists when they want to improve their general wellbeing, like becoming luckier, getting a job, receiving more love, dominating a person, or attracting clients to a business. People seek the help of ritual specialists in other matters as well, before going to court or winning other types of personal disputes, or trying to ward off a negative spell from an adversary, or to return it to them. With the exception of one ritual specialist, none of the healers wanted be associated with malicious spells.

Healing specialists
Besides the official medical care, people in rural areas have remedied their health with traditional healing practices. In general, a patient combines and complements different treatments. Healing practices often draw on a wide cultural repertoire of possibilities and creativity, assuring that if one remedy does not work out, new solutions are sought. When people in rural areas become sick, if the doctor is far away, unaffordable or not specialized in the illness, they often seek help of non-institutional care providers like religious specialists, healers, herbalists, sobadores (massagists), diviners, and other caregivers providing home treatments. Sobadores are called upon especially for constipations (empacho), while santiguadores are approached for the evil eye, culebrilla (Herpes Zoster), or St. Anthony’s fire. Traditional healers are consulted for a wide range of illnesses and issues concerning physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

Dominican healers
Dominican healing experts are often referred to as curanderos, “healers”. A few contributors have referred to them as sabios, “wise persons”.280 Those specialists who were formally initiated often referred to themselves as caballos del misterio, “horses of iwás”. The latter name refers to the fact that the body of the

277 This model is to be compared with attributes ailments and illnesses to thoughts or emotions from oneself or from another person overlaps with the psychological explanations as being caused psychological stresses.
278 One of the more frequently mentioned resguardos was to take the water from seven different tinajas or to tie up a stone. Different seeds are used to make amulets. Especially popular are those of Dominican plants like azabache, framboyán, chakara, peonía, macramé, haba, or sambo. Popular in Cuba are: ojo buye, santa maria, jiki, jiba, cedro, monuro, úcaro, pionía, jala jala, guayacán, caguyrán and the before mentioned azabache (Sapindus saponaria L.).
279 The snake in this context could be interpreted as a symbol of the evil.
280 Personally I would prefer this term instead of healer but only four contributors (out of hundreds) referred to them as sabios. None of them was a healer himself.
healers, or more specifically the head, is the medium through which the misterio or lwa (terms used often interchangeably) descends. The lwa chooses his servant (servidor, a term used by the specialists themselves), not the other way around. If the healers are considered to practice spiritual works causing harm and illnesses, they would be called brujos, “witches”. This pejorative denomination was used by people who, in general, despised the healers’ belief system on the basis of prejudices and misunderstandings, rather than on the basis of knowledge of the kind of spiritual works that the healers perform.

Dominican healers work with one misterio who is their guarding lwa. The healers are said to be born with or receive the virtue to heal (tiene don). In the Dominican 21 Division, every person has a guardian angel / divine being that is his protector and guide during his entire life. Similarly, this is the case in Cuban Spiritism and Regla de Ocha. In all three systems there are specialists who have developed skills to communicate better with their guardian, and later developed further their ability to contact with the invisible world.

Before healers are initiated, they receive different signs, like revelations and dreams, which indicate the special virtue and calling of that person. Many of the healers are said to neglect, or to refuse to accept, the fact that they have been chosen by the lwas to serve. This denial can lead to incarnations of lwas at public places in unexpected moments. The virtue is often said to be more pronounced (through frequent revelations, and involuntarily incarnations of lwas) after a severe illness or loss of an important family member (often a mother or a grandmother). This period of their life would be a decisive moment for the prospective healers to further develop their gift to heal. The denial may also be related to the stigma of the 21 Division, as well as to the burden of the responsibility and the obligations that come with this task. As a consequence, different Dominican healers mentioned that their initiation was preceded by their rejection of the gift of healing, but this rejection lead to an illness. The cure for the illness was only possible by accepting this virtue and dealing with the divine beings.

The narratives about events preceding the initiation have many overarching features in both regions. To mention just one example, Mr. Reyes from Jiguaní described the beginnings of his work as follows: “I started as an Spiritist, developing myself in the spiritual realm. After, when I was about 18 years old, I started to travel to Havana because of my disease. I started to turn my back on my spiritual field, I did not want to work with this. I remember that I took my Saints and stored them, I think that I did it because of the fear of what other boys would say. I was in the process of adolescence. I began to reject that, and began to get sick. I had to go to Havana to treat my illness, I was hospitalized for two months at the Surgical Clinical Hospital of Rheumatology and then they sent me to the Oncology in El Almejeira. Then I began to visit spiritual people and santeras in Havana, and they told me that I have to develop the grace that I have, that I was afraid of, that afterwards I am going to be rid off all of this. So I went back to exercise the spiritual work and started to throw the cards. I began to improve and get out of the illness, and from there I succeeded in becoming a saint. Since then, the Yoruba rule, the rule of Osha entered into my life.” One of the shared themes in the narratives about becoming healers is that the denial led to an illness, which could be only cured by developing one's own gift in the spiritual domain.

On both islands people consider that neglecting the gift of healing can be dangerous for the individual. Mrs. Mayra Dominguez, a traditional healer from Villa Isabela, works with Belie Belcán lwa pertaining to the air domain, and Maria Lionza pertaining to the water domain. She works with Maria Lionza because

281 In one of the interviews with a ritual specialist from Monte Plata she described an involuntarily incarnation of Indigenous Misterio. The excerpt from this conversation is as follows. On my question where Indians live, the healer answered: E: I have heard that they live below the water, but I think that it is not possible, because people are not fish, they have to live in caves. Actually, I have only seen one, in 2002, I was introduced, and I was about to die. JP: How did it go? E: We were going to Bayaguana, it was around 1 am. I see a tall, strong man with long hair coming towards me. I lost consciousness and woke up after three days.
through the family line she inherited “el corriente del indio”282; “We Dominguez are under the protection of the Indian race, because the majority of the old people had el corriente indio.” The expression ‘corriente del indio’ could be freely translated as a spiritual connection with the indigenous ancestors. This spiritual connection in some cases would be based on a presumed or real genealogical link, manifest in a few physical traits like color and type of hair, or other arbitrary aspects of racial categorization like skin color, but sometimes also on the person’s interests in culture and the history of indigenous peoples. Mrs. Dominguez narrates further: “When I was a young girl, I was afraid but then I spent three days in the river and my father and mother said that I was dead, but I was not, because I felt how they raised me up and I saw everything and everyone, all people and I spoke to them... This was in the river Yaque in Santiago, because, after I left school my mother sent me to bring food to my grandmother. She prepared me a bag with the meal and I went to the river and felt the river was pulling me inside... Yes, the river is dangerous but not for me anymore. I got lost and my parents were searching for me and my father angrily said: she will return, they will bring her back...”. In this excerpt, Mrs. Dominguez refers to the widespread belief that people who are guarded by the indigenous ancestors should avoid bodies of water because they run the risk of being taken away by the misterios that are living under water. Born with the gift of healing, for her this danger is even greater, and in order to be able to better direct this corriente Mrs. Dominguez had to be initiated. Her case resembles others from other Dominican regions, where the initiation as a healer is linked with travelling into the invisible subaquatic world. In Bánica, a former healer called Cusah (since deceased) is said to have gone to a place of indigenous ancestors, and after her return became “another person”, she could heal people.283 In a similar vein, the grandfather of Mrs. Carmela Alcántara (78 years old) gained his healing grace by living under the water for seven years, after which he reemerged with a misterio and the power to cure. Not only healers but also Dominican midwives were said to receive their skills after having been taken away by the indigenous spirits to their subaquatic kingdoms. In the past, midwives were said to have had such spiritual encounters with indigenous ancestors.284

In order to control these forces, which are like involuntarily possessions, healers have to be initiated or baptized by another, more experienced healer. An initiation is often referred to as a baptism, and normally takes place at the temple of more experienced healer, but it can also be performed outside of the healer’s temple, like at a river, cave, sea, or one of the dwellings of the iwas. Thus, healers who are said to have indigenous corriente are first examined by a more experienced healer; their religious education culminates

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282 For further information on corriente del indio see also the account of Mr. Morillo from Caño Miguel, interview with healer Benito from Estero Hondo.
283 Interview with Hecefredes Gómez.
284 One narrative of midwives’ spiritual encounters with indigenous ancestors was told by Santos Morillo Martinez from Caño Miguel (Puerto Plata province). Mr. Morillo narrated further about his great grandmother: “I will tell you a very old story. This was told to me by my grandmother. Her name was Saturnia Fermin and they searched for her but I do not know at what place it was, maybe it was at Castillo. Her brother used to say that his mother was taken away (his brother Lindo inserts: The Indian lady) they took her to this cave and entered her into a deep water and took her on back. This was not a dream they took her to help with child labor. They took her to this cave and she stayed some time, I do not remember how long exactly, maybe it was a week or three days. They were counting it and she was there for some time. When she returned they gave her an object. I do not know if it was a lump of gold or some other golden thing... They brought her back because they were not allowed to keep her. It is possible that it was in a cave at Ranchette or in the sea. From there we have this Indian race or a branch of our family tree. From there we all have this corriente, that we are from this race we carry this. Now I am not doing it but when I pray to Indian forces I say it like this: I hope you will help me with these people who are mistreating me and put them in front to stop seeing me.” Sometimes the Morillo brothers gave the indigenous misterios a water offering on their small family altar in their bedroom like they use to do regularly for their deceased mother. The above family history fits within the widespread oral tradition about people from underwater who were searching help from midwives (e.g. in the location of Imbert). Also in the following version where the main characters have switched roles the river is a source of birth: “Once upon a time there was a man who saw that his wife is in labor and searched for the midwife and found her in the river, come and I will go to deliver the baby and when she finished she told him to come bring me back and at the same place where he took her, she disappeared.” Here rivers are symbols of life, more specifically of birth. In this light, the previous narratives about being taken away by indigenous ancestors could be interpreted not as referring to a place of death in negative terms but as referring to a place where life continues for the dead who have “corriente del indio” in the subaquatic world.
in a concrete ceremony during which they are prepared to receive the spiritual beings (*montarse*). For the indigenous *misterios*, this initiation takes place at altars, water pools or caves.

**Consults at altars**
The cause of illness is established during the consultation with the healer in his temple. A healer’s altar is situated in a room in his/her house or in a small wooden house separated from the main house. Among initiated healers, it is custom to construct shrines following strict ceremonies in order to create good conditions for the *lwas* to operate. In every temple, there is a principal altar with images and other representations of the *lwas*. In the middle of the altar, patients find the main protector’s image, a statue of the *lwa*, or objects representing them (e.g. a sea shell for Yemayá). The location of other *lwas* is often based on their family relations or hagiographies. The offerings are embodied in the lit candles, aromatic oils, flowers, perfumes, and ceremonial foods. Under the altar on the ground are Guedes, working with the earth element and a small human made water pool for indigenous *misterios*.

Healers can be consulted every day, but many healers prefer to work on Tuesdays and Fridays. During the consultation, the healer calls the *lwas* by smoking tobacco, blowing the smoke calmly up into the air, and consuming rum (depending on the *lwa*). Healers often light a candle or use a glass of water as a means of communication. When the *lwa* descends, and enters the body of the healer, he/she calls the patient by ringing on a small bell to enter the temple. The incarnation of the *lwa* leads to a transformation of the healer’s identity. This identity shift is expressed materially through the clothing (e.g. the color of the scarf) and personality. The behavior of the *lwas* varies according to their personalities. Sometimes the *lwa* shows his power by extraordinary behavior like eating the glass, or drinking alcohol in a quantity that would be dangerous for a normal person. Based on the indications from the patient, the *lwa* establishes the cause of the illness and its remedy. The healer might receive the remedy from the *lwa* when dreaming. In Cuban Spiritism and *Regla de Ocha*, remedies are also obtained via divine beings and spiritual entities, when these incarnate in the bodies of intermediaries but also through their manifestation in the healer’s dreams. During the consultation, the patient might address different kinds of material, mental, spiritual, and physical health issues. Among the frequently suggested cures are baths, cleansing, and herbal mixtures. The herbal mixtures are frequently prepared as tea, or as a combination of different herbs preserved in bottles. Another common means of rehabilitation (physical and mental, balance between the patient and the divine world) is dedicating a prayer, making an offering, fulfilling a vow or participating in a celebration of *lwas*.

In Dominican 21 Division, the patients of the healers are expected to participate in the celebration of the patronal *lwa* of the healer. During these celebrations, the altar is cleaned and decorated with fresh flowers, and ceremonial meals, often including *moro* (rice and beans), peanuts, and corn, are served at the altar for the *lwas*. The *lwas* descend later, after having been called by a group of drummers using special *palo* drums and singing hymns. When the *lwas* descend, the devotees and the *lwas* dance, sing, drink, and eat together. In various celebrations that the author attended, after the principal *lwa* arrived at the celebration, other *lwas* of visiting *caballo del misterio* also arrived. Besides the *lwa* whose day was celebrated, other *lwas* would also be given offerings. By attending these collective celebrations of the *lwas*, patients publicly display their belief in these spirits, and their gratitude for being healed. Through their attendance and contribution – by helping with the organization of the ritual, by bringing alcohol, preferred meals and offerings, or by playing and singing for the *lwas* – the patients express their care for the *lwas* and their respect for the healer.
To a certain degree, the lwas may be considered to be specialized in certain problems. For example, Belié Belcán, (San Miguel), a popular protector, is consulted for all kinds of illnesses but especially to ward off malicious spells, while his wife Anaisa Pie (Santa Ana) is the queen of love, consulted in case of matrimonial problems. In a similar way, specialization can also be found in Regla de Ocha, where orishas like Yemayá are consulted for ritual cleansing, for travels, to open the ways, San Lázaro is consulted for curing sores, leprosy, and pain. The indigenous ancestors do not seem to have any specialization, rather in 21 Division they are in general associated with the power of the water element (both in its constructive and its destructive aspect), which is widely employed in different healing rituals in order to obtain positive wellbeing and for resolving health, relational (family, protection against enemies) and economic problems.
Figure 26 A part of Giovani’s altar dedicated to the indigenous Iwa, in Bajo de Haina, Dominican Republic.

Figure 27 Estela Pérez, healer with her house-altar, Loma de Guayacán, closeby to Mamey, Dominican Republic.
Figure 28 Ancestral indigenous objects at the altar of Estela Pérez from Arroyo de Agua. This is normally covered by water.

Figure 29 A part of an altar dedicated to indigenous misterios, region Boyá, Monte Plata.
Healing Plants

Plants accompany people during their life from birth until the end. In fact, plants act upon people even before birth and continue to do so in the afterlife. Herbal mixtures are used to increase fertility, applied for cleansing the uterus after birth; they are used as amulets for the protection of children and given to babies as their first food. At the end of the corporal life, special meals and teas are prepared for the people assisting at the burial; other plants are used to help the spiritual essence to leave, and serve as offerings to the dead. Plants are particularly important in the countryside in times of illness when they are used for curing physical, mental and spiritual ailments.

Dominican healing plants

A wide range of diseases is treated with medicinal plants. Among the most frequently mentioned illnesses that are treated with herbal medicine are common illnesses like flu, gastrointestinal diseases (flatulence, indigestion, diarrhea, stomach ache, parasites), and urinary infections (*mal de orina*). Green medicine was also used for controlling blood pressure, cleaning kidney stones, or more broadly for inflammatory and infectious ailments.

Medicinal plants often have multiple uses, and are frequently used in combination with other plants in infusions such as teas, baths and *botellas*. *Botellas* (bottles) are popular Dominican herbal blends, named after the bottles in which they are kept. Different parts of the plants (mostly roots, barks, leaves, seeds) are cleaned, boiled (for a variable amount of time), flavored, and preserved with alcohol in a bottle. The exact composition of the recipe is kept as a secret within a family, or as a personal secret of the healer. Recipes for *botellas* vary according to whether the mixtures aim to cure a specific illness or whether they are
prepared for a whole range of illnesses, for example when all the plants with an anti-inflammatory or laxative effect are combined.\textsuperscript{285} Among the popular \textit{botellas} are those for vaginal infections, cleaning blood, and for fertility for women and men. The number of the ingredients of botellas varies. On average, at least twenty different plants are used in one botella, but some contributors like Ms. Estela Sadi from Cruce de Guayacanes, mentioned more than sixty ingredients of her botella, which is used for a whole range of infectious diseases.

The usage of plants is based on long-term experimentation. In addition, the selection of plants seems to be guided by their perceived character. Plant qualities like flavor and scent, and their being categorized as warm or cold have implications for the choice of plants for a specific ailment, and the quantity in which they are used. The scent of the plants (bitter or sweet) seems to be decisive in their use in sweet and bitter baths, the former attracting positivity while the bitter smelling plants are used to drive off negativity. The cool and warm plants are characterized according to the environment in which they are grown, their properties, and their effect on the body (warming up or cooling down). These characteristics have consequences for their use: for example, the fresh cool plants found at the banks of rivers are used for inflammatory diseases. Likewise, the hot character of \textit{anamú or sábila} affects the quantity of the plant that can be given as a remedy. The hot and warm distinction of plants is important in border regions for dietary restrictions. Some crops are considered hot (e.g. pineapple) and others cold, and they have to be eaten in balance to maintain good health. Sometimes the doctrine of signatures is followed, paying attention to the shape of different parts of plants in indications of their use. Lastly, when plants are dioecious, sometimes the gender is important.\textsuperscript{286}

The existing rich knowledge of medicinal plants would fill several volumes. Many plants that were described by the first accounts for their economic use have in the present besides their economic also medicinal use. To mention one example, Oviedo (1535/2002) elaborates quite extensively on the importance of corn. However, he does not mention aspects that we find in the present-day uses: corn silk is a very popular ingredient in botellas, it is used as a remedy against stomach ache and fever, for cleansing the uterus after the childbirth, and for lowering cholesterol. Another obstacle in understanding the historical continuity of medicinal uses of specific plants is the great variety in their uses across different regions, households and participants. One of the first Caribbean plants that has fascinated Europe with its medicinal properties was guayacán, used then for curing syphilis. Nowadays, this plant is still used to treat rheumatism, skin infections (\textit{rasquiña}) and to wash clothes. Furthermore, when comparing the first accounts of Caribbean flora with present-day accounts, the former often lack the information pertaining to what kind of illnesses these plants were used for. In spite of much incoherence in the data, the current use can at least partially help us to estimate past medicinal uses. This is also the case for plants that have been recorded among Afro-Caribbean healing specialists during the 17\textsuperscript{th} century in the Cartagena trials, where their uses were not specified. To mention just three: \textit{anamú} serves for catarrh, botellas for infections, warding off malicious spirits and the dead, and \textit{tuatua}, known in the Dominican Republic as \textit{tatúa}, is used for stomach ache.\textsuperscript{287} Lastly, Pringamosa roots (\textit{Urera baccifera}), in combination with other herbs, are used for bottles that combat infections.\textsuperscript{288}

\textsuperscript{285} The herbal mixtures inducing purging (vomitive effect) were called \textit{tomas}.

\textsuperscript{286} The gender might also indicate a different species as in the case of \textit{broquelejo macho} (\textit{Piper peltatum} \textit{L.}) and \textit{broquelejo hembra} (\textit{Piper umbellatum} \textit{L.}), both native to the Tropics.

\textsuperscript{287} Cuban Catholics explain that as this plant has its own \textit{misterio}, the remedy from tuatua is related to the collection process: when the leaves are gathered in the upward direction they are used against vomit, and when gathered in the downward direction against diarrhea.

\textsuperscript{288} Although Gómez identified this plant as \textit{Urtica dioica} the author is convinced that in the Dominican Republic pringamosa is \textit{Urera baccifera} (\textit{L.}), which unlike the first is also native to the West Indies.
From historical sources, it is clear that the colonization of the Caribbean also implied the import of exotic flora to the region. Plants of exotic origin were used for both medicinal and ritual purposes. Following the study of Moret (2013), it has been hypothesized that the origin of the plants could provide insights into sociocultural histories. Following this study, it could be hypothesized further that also indigenous botanical knowledge was more likely to be preserved in the settlements in which the indigenous people and their descendants were present throughout the colonial history. In Boyá, it is clear that the majority of healing plants are from the New World (see attachment). Nearly eighteen percent of these plants were brought from the Old World, some of them, like cundeamor, ajanjoli, and sábila, from the African continent. Exotic plants were used in combination with native flora. For example, ajanjoli, sábila, yerba de calentura and a small bloom from guano were used for protection against malicious spells (witchcraft). Guano, native to the West Indies (Coccothrinax spp.), still popular for construction and weaving, was already used by ritual specialists in the Caribbean in the 17th century (Gómez 2017). Guano replaced palms known from Europe and Africa. Following Catholic teachings, in Boyá now guano is also called Saint Guano; it is blessed on Palm Sunday and later used to ward off the storms, which would harm homes and harvests. Another popular category of plants in Boyá includes those mentioned earlier by Oviedo (1535/2002) as plants that were similar to Spanish plants, but existing in Hispaniola before their arrival. In Boyá, albahaca morada was added to baths for protection against malicious spells, and verdolaga was used in teas against stomach ache and flatulence. Vervena, the sacred plant from Calvario, was used for indigestion. All three plants were recognized on the genus level (Ocimum spp.), and are believed to be of pantropical origin (Trianthema portulacastrum L.): the Spaniards considered them the same as those known at home. Another exotic plant, cundeamor (Momordica charantia L.), also used as an abortive in other locations, is used for treating diseases like smallpox, introduced during early colonial period. Smallpox was also treated in this location with bruca hembra (Senna obtusifolia), and piñón (Erythrina berteroana Urb. or Jatropha curcas L.), all native to the New World. A similar tendency to treat new exotic diseases with local plants was clear during the chiquinguya epidemic, which was treated in this location with Juan Prieto (Varronia curassavica). This supports the argument that remedies for introduced diseases might be also found in local flora during the early colonial period.

As in Boyá, in many other Dominican locations we find plants of exotic origins being used in ritual contexts. This is especially the case for plants used for protection in early modern Europe, like albahaca, artemisa, mejorana, mostaza, pachuli, romero, ruda, and sangre cristo, which are also very popular plants in the present-day, for protection, cleaning from spells, malignant spirits, and bad luck, or bringing good luck, success, and love in the Dominican Republic (see Table 6). The widespread use of plants like rue, basil and the orange tree is related to the fact that all three plants are still used during baptism. The orange tree (exotic) is a prominent sacred tree, related to the manifestation of the Virgen de las Aguas Santas and also regionally thought to be related to the manifestation of the Virgin of Higüey. Again, exotic plants are used in combination with others – for example in order to drive away the malicious spirits azahar, lemon flowers and orange tree leaves are used. This combination would be used in baths with ingredients like water, holy water, floral waters and perfumes bought at botánicas.289

Another important local category consists of plants that are the dwelling places of Saints, lwas, spirits and other kinds of misterios. Regardless of religious affiliation, many contributors agreed that plants of use, and especially medicinal plants, were to be respected and protected. Mr. Benjamin Alcántara, a converted evangelista from Bánica, told about an accident that occurred many years ago to a former inhabitant of

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289 Azahar is popular in Spanish cleansing rituals until present. Certain species, registered as having ritual purposes among the Kalinago in Dominica (Hodge 1957) have also been used in Boyá and Jiguani.
Bánica. According to his words, every large-size, beautiful tree has a misterio. A narrative about one of these, a jobo tree, illustrates how the agency of the misterio residing in this tree can be also detrimental to the human health. Instead of following the warning to leave this tree in its place, this Baniquero went to cut the jobo tree and consequently was fatally injured. Jobo, ceiba and higo are associated with a misterio, and as such cutting them down is prohibited among Baniqueros. The jobo tree (Spondias spp.) was used to treat smallpox in this particular location. This is just one example among many trees that are inhabited by divine beings or spiritual entities. Across different locations, trees like almácigo, mango, naranja, guano, piñón, palm, ceiba, caña brava/bamboo, jabilla, and higo were regarded as having misterio.

Dominican landscapes are empowered by different miraculous plants. The power of plants is explained by sacred scriptures and teachings based on the underpinning beliefs of Catholicism, and 21 Division. One of the frequently mentioned trees was Guano, which is blessed on Palm Sunday. Orange tree and pino are also said to have miraculous properties on Holy Friday. Others like cedro, together with plants like verbena and Rosa de Jericho, are described in the Bible and were used for protection. Other trees were known in local religious histories as places of Marian manifestations. As the Virgin of Higuey appeared in the orange tree, the people in the surrounding area also used the leaves of orange trees for protection, bringing good luck and for curing cold, flu, anemia, and hepatitis. The hierophanies of Virgins in flora also occurred more recently. In Mamey, the Virgen de Altagracia appeared in a plant and so an altar was built on the property of the owner of the plant. In Loma Cabrera, the Virgin Mary appeared in a mango tree. The media news items confirm that these manifestations were reported in different locations prior to the fieldwork. As such, the Marian revelation in a palm in Hoya Grande de Licey, the Virgen de Mercedes in a palm sector in La Gina in San Francisco de Macoris (2011), and the Virgen de Guadalupe in a Jabilla tree in San Juan (2014), entered into the memory of the wider public.

Some trees like ceiba, jabilla, bamboo, and palm were also agreed to have a misterio associated with them in 21 Division. However, there was often disagreement about the character of the misterio. As some of the lwas can be both detrimental and beneficial, followers of other Dominican religions emphasized the negative character of the lwas. For some Catholics and Evangelists Ceiba and Jabilla would be trees of the devil. The same trees are ultimately powerful and also miraculous for adherents of 21 Division. From their testimonies, it is clear that the ritual in which the agency of the lwas residing in these trees is invoked can be applied with different aims. These rituals are often directed at the removal of negative spells and at recovering one’s wellbeing and health in general.

290 Benjamin Alcántara, who has been working in agriculture his whole life, narrated about the prohibition to cut the jobo tree: “Look this tree is prohibited to be felled, it is tamarindo, it produces things, and the other you can cut because it does not. J: Was there a tree that had a mystery (misterio)? A: Yes, there are trees with misterio. Every huge tree full of leaves and branches (frondoso) every trees that is beautiful. There was a tree called and a man that went to cut it during the clearing of the forest in a ravine. This man already cut down the forest, the field (conuco) is already enclosed, only the huge jobo tree is left. He got a boy, because listen to me that the misterio really exist, and when he says tomorrow we are going to fell this jobo tree. When he wakes up in the morning, a guy arrives. The man arrives and greets him and they start to have a conversation and there is this old man until the sun is high in the sky and this man still there. He gets the boy and says come here, get the ax and go cut the tree because the man is still here. The boy went and goes to cut the tree with the ax, prú prú prú. And the man goes out and the other follows him, and the other tries to distract him, says this and that, but the first man says this is not possible already, go away, ay ay. When the boy cuts it, the man leaves, and the old man goes to where the boy is, and when he arrives he says him give me the axe, and when he goes to give a tree a blow like this pú and there at the same spot he starts to scream ah ah ah and the boy he brake his spine. R: did the tree felt? E: the boy already cut it, but the old man went to cut it in pieces... and they bring him home and there he stayed crippled until he passed away with the broken spine. So it was he who tried that did not go the one who hit him. R: he was avoiding him to go, and he kept avoiding to go. J: Let’s say that it was punishment? A: Yes, it was a punishment. There he stayed until he passed away. J: do you remember it or have you heard this? A: I knew this man he was the husband of Mamita who already passed away. J: Look, do people say about the ceiba that it is prohibited to cut? A: Yes, it is said you cannot fell it. J: Why? A: Because it is a tree that they say that has a sin misterio hecho, this was a tree how the story says holy. J: Do you know what kind of misterio was living there? A: Yes, this misterio of a saint. I have not believed in this. J: But it is not important if you really believed it, I am interested in what is said. A: And it was really existing and it still exists really in higo it exists.”
Figure 31 Mrs. Torres with her daughter who is protected with a bracelet against the evil eye, Proyecto, Mamey, Dominican Republic.
Activating the Healing Virtue of Dominican Plants

The healing virtue of plants is conditioned by following certain rules that apply to their collection. The collection of plants typically is done in accordance with the lunar cycle. Plants collected during the new moon are considered to be useless. Tree bark is preferably collected from the east side of the tree, the side on which the sun shines in the morning. During the collection of medicinal plants with Luperona at Villa Isabella Mr. Lucillo Torres explained to me that medicinal plants can heal only if permission is asked. In his case, he asked permission silently before gathering each plant for his botella. This custom was widespread in the Dominican Republic and was practiced by both adherents of 21 Division and Catholics. The permission had to be asked not only for the plants used in ritual baths like salvia, albahaca, and vencedor, but also in the case of plants that were to be collected for botellas, in order to cure physical ailments.

In the Dominican Republic, unlike in Cuba, the person collecting the plant addressed the plant by the plants name, followed by a short explanation of the objective of the gathering, for example: “marjoram (mejorana), marjoram, marjoram, give me the permission to take you with me and use you for a bath”. Mr. Heefredes Gómez from Bánica also suggested that if leaves are collected before daybreak, it is necessary to shake the plant a bit, talk to it in order to wake the plant up: “Wake up if you are sleeping, I need you for

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291The contributors from Bánica and Sabana Larga suggested both West and East.
this thing, and then she wakes up.”

The prayers are often said quietly or just internally without uttering them.

Some contributors were convinced that every plant has a virtue and a misterio. One of the contributors, Mrs. Dorotea Mejía, a former traditional healer from Boyá explained further: “Every plant has a misterio, every plant like we who are born in this world, because for sure you think that you do not have a misterio, but you do have because this misterio have chosen you to have this work that you are doing, so you have this misterio because everyone who is born on this world is born with a misterio. There are people who say that it is not the case but, if they had not their misterio they would not come to this world, isn’t it true? They would stay in the space, lost there.”

By asking the plant for its consent to be collected the healing virtue is activated. Mrs. Dorotea Mejía asked for permission in the following way: “Maria de los Remedios I need this plant for… (makes a pause), in my hand I receive this in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit.” And she added: “If you take such a thing without praying to the God and the Virgen to whom do you think this can be beneficial? To nobody. Everything comes because the Lords permits it.” She also remembered that people have been asking for permission directly to the plants and clarified that this was done because: “I had the faith in the plant, that the plant could help me and do what I wanted her to do, so I was asking her to provide me the permission… And this is done with every plant. If this one I am going to take for the bath, I will take it for bath, If am going to take it for the bottle, I take it for the bottle, I take it with the misterio she has, because she has a misterio, maybe I do not know what misterio it is, but if you think of her when wanting to prepare the bottle she herself gives me the strength and power. This is because of the misterio that she has.”

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292 Interview with He crefdez Bánica. He suggests that this has a scientific explanation because when touching it the process of the acquisition of the oxygen changes.
293 Interview with Mrs. Dorotea Mejía from Boyá.
Cuban Medicinal Plants
The medicinal use of plants in Cuba is as rich as in the Dominican Republic. In general, herbal mixtures for oral use are prepared in the form of teas and contain fewer ingredients than the Dominican *botellas*. To illustrate some of the medicinal uses, the data from Jiguani are summarized in the appendix. As previously indicated (chapter 5), Jiguani is a location with a long presence of indigenous people. Like in the Boyá case,
it is clear that the majority of plants used in this location were native to the New World while others were of Old World origins (25%, including 8% which were of both origins, or could be recognized on the level of taxa). Many plants mentioned in Boyá are also used in Jiguaní, and sometimes they are used in a similar way (see e.g. apasote, albahaca, anamú, guanábana, guyaba, higüero, bejuco indio, piñón, ruda, and tobacco). Roman Catholicism and Espiritismo del Cordón are the two major religious affiliations in Jiguaní. In local Espiritismo every commission has its own plant. These vary according to the teachings of different centers and associations. Several plants that are exotic to the regions were used in the ritual realm too. For purifying baths, we also find plants native to the New World like amansaguapo, quebracho, espante muerto, hierba de aura, and caimito de cimarrón, but also exotic plants like vencedor. For clearing the mind, one combines three albahacas, mentas, and vervenas, and drinks these together with clear water from different sources. Some contributors (e.g. Mr. Orestes Iganacio Zalazar Gonzáles) use aromatic herbs like vencedor, salvia, quebracho, caitimo, and yagruma in ritual baths because of their aromatic character. Again, similar to what is the case in Boyá, the scent of certain plants is considered to attract positivity or ward off negativity, so for example baths of anamú (which has a strong, rather unpleasant smell) were used to remove dark spirits of the dead, which were sent to harm their victims. In the case of a whole household being persecuted by malicious spirits, seven branches of anamú are tied up with a red ribbon and placed behind the door.

The religious diversity in Cuban society implies that certain features of the Cuban landscape have multiple meanings. The ceiba tree is one example. As in the Dominican Republic, in Jiguaní and also other locations the ceiba was said to have a dark and a clear side, where rituals for the improvement of general wellbeing take place. The ceiba is said to fulfill all kinds of wishes, good and bad. The latter concern also are said to be asked for by ritual means after midnight. This fits within a broad national belief that the ceiba is a sacred tree: in Cuba it is widely acknowledged that the ceiba tree should be treated with respect and should not be cut. Among Catholics in rural areas of the East, the ceiba is believed to have offered refuge to the Virgin Mary. When the Virgin was a fugitive, the ceiba opened to shelter her, and covered her with spines to protect her and Jesus in Cuba. Both Catholics and Espiritistas have respect for the ceiba. As Mrs. Rosalina Segura Hidalgo from Barajagua puts it: “The ceiba everyone respects, because she has saved the Virgin. People were putting candles there and were leaving yellow flowers.” At the foot of the ceiba we may indeed find candle holders, images of San Lázaro, bundles of plants, fruits, coins, corn, peanuts, the rest of the cocoa, and calabashes, all product of continuing ritual practices. A combination of different plants in a bundle is usually deposited at this sacred tree in Barajagua. As the lifespan of the ceiba spans several generations, it is also widely believed that it is the place where the dead go. The status of local ceibas is reinforced by the fame of one ceiba at a templete in Havana where, on the night of 15th December, just before the day when Diego Velazquez established the city of Havana at this place reportedly celebrated the first mass on the island, pilgrims circle the trunk of a ceiba three times while praying with love and faith and offering coins. For followers of Regla de Ocha, the ceiba is the most sacred, it is the mayor tree of monte, the main force, a place where different orishas can gather. Firstly, the ceiba represents Iroko, the female materialization of Obatalá: “Obatalá has various paths, there is female and male, ceiba represent Iroko, the female denomination of Obatalá. There is Obatalá Ayaguna, who is a warrior. Obatalá Osaliñan, Ochalá (female), Obamoró (male).” For some, the ceiba is a place where all orishas go, or at least some like Changó and Yemayá. 294 The example of the ceiba shows that symbols from local flora sometimes synthesize different meanings from diverse religions.

294 Interview no. 190331.
The diversity of the interpretations of landscapes further increases when we consider Palo de Monte, Catholicism, and in some zones, Haitian Vudu. In short, trees such as guano santo, palmera, cedro, anacagüita, and piñón were perceived to be the domain of divine beings and spiritual entities across Cuban religions. In addition, herbs of exotic origin such as albahaca, artemisa, anamú, sábila, vencedor, vervena, mejorana, and ruda are used across different religious affiliations for ritual purposes.

In religious contexts, the selection and the application of plants are related to the narratives of their origin and hagiographies. Some of these are described according to principles of Regla de Ocha. During consultations, plants are advised as remedies that can be ingested, or be used in baths, served as offerings, and be used for the preparation of amulets and sacred objects. The selection of plants is based on the (spiritual) “owners” of the plant, the orishas. These orishas have different specializations for curing illness, and different preferences regarding offerings. The intrinsic characteristics of the plant, its medicinal properties, its growth form, color, scent, the hardness of the wood, the life cycle, including the durability, are often associated with the character and specializations of their orishas. The color of the flowers, for example, can be linked symbolically to attributes such as dress. Ochún, associated with the Virgen of Charity and like her dressed in gold, is offered yellow flowers like marilope or botón de oro. Similarly, red and white flowers are offered to Changó (palm), associated with Santa Bárbara. The hardness of wood is seen as crucial and is associated with personal characteristics of orishas, symbolizing the resistance of Ogún the Warrior. The name of the plant may also indicate its use as well as its patron orisha: abre camino is of Elegua, vencedor of Changó. As for the form of growth: a plant whose parts get entangled with others could be used for a spell on another person in order to entangle his or her endeavors. It is possible that the association of the plants and deities in this way functions as a mnemonic tool, to remember what plant serves for what ailment, as the deities are often specialized in specific illnesses. As San Lázaro helps to cure sores and leprosy, his plants are those that serve this purpose.

The knowledge of what each plant is and of the orisha to which it belongs is transmitted during initiation. This knowledge is important for healing ailments, but also for distinct ceremonies in which herbs play a role. According to Mr. Harvin Ramirez Reyes from Jiguani, bayoneta and pionia (pueriyeye) have to be present during all ceremonies. Each orisha has its own group of plants. Ogún’s plants are yerbafina, rompesaraguey, atipola, peregún, aguacate, caña santa, and cortacalentura. Ogún’s vessel is a bath with verdolaga, hierba fina, mastuerzo, peregún, buereyeye, and bleo blanco. Marpacifico, embeleso (a blue colour), orosín, and cucaracha morada, all belong to Yemayá, an orisha who protects travellers and opens the roads. In the case of marpacifico, it is the name that indicates its use instead of its color (red flowers). Lastly, among the plants that belong to Obatalá, the owner of all ideas who lives on the top of the mountain, are guanábana, almendro, seso vegetal, algodón, and the ceiba. Offerings to Obatalá can be made at a mountain but also at the foot of the ceiba tree.

Knowledge of the religious underpinnings for the selection of the plants is of importance when preparing offerings that are to be served to orishas during celebrations. Santa Bárbara: harina de maíz with meat, Yemayá: natilla, and again tobacco is a popular offering. Other plants are used for the preparation of sacred objects. Bambú is used for a ceremony to Anatu, for whom a knife is used later for an animal sacrifice. These are just a few examples of the multiple meanings of Cuban flora for adherents of Regla de Ocha.

295 Cuban Haitians consider also mapú, higuero, ceiba, higo, bambú, jabía to be sacred trees.
296 There are more cases, for example: the sunflower in Espiritismo del Cordon in Jiguani represents the Indigenous commission, but it represents Shango (Santa Bárbara) in Regla de Ocha in the same location.
Figure 35 Mr. Harvin Ramírez Reyes, initiated in Regla de Ocha and Mrs. María Palomares, my guide from Jiguani, Cuba.
Collecting Healing Plants in Cuba

Among adherents of the Roman Catholic church and the Cuban Espiritismo, some of the plants like romero and mejorana, are offered a coin (or are rewarded by coin) if later used in baths. Many of the prayers and requests for permission are specific to the particular moment, when the plants are collected with a particular objective (mentioned in the prayer). In Espiritismo Cruzado, the healing virtue of the ceiba, being a sacred tree, was addressed in the following chant, accompanied by ringing a small iron bell: “*They baptized me in La Cañambo, in La Cañambo they baptized me, all Saints you have to come to this ceiba tree, Mother Ceiba is my godmother and my godfather is the caguayran tree. They baptized me in La Cañambo, in La Cañambo they baptized me. All saints must come to this ceiba. Glory to God, glory to the Orishas!*”  

In general, trees that are famous for being used for rituals in other religious traditions (e.g. the use of the palm oil tree in Regla de Ocha) are also respected or avoided in those religious traditions.

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297 Interview with the healer from the temple of Charity and Peace in Niquero.
298 Close to Niquero there is a popular ritual place where a huge ceiba tree is surrounded by palm trees. Before we entered this place together, one of the local devotees of Spiritism said: “Give me the license to be able to reach you and to be able to see and recognize the capacity, and the things
In the realm of Regla de Ocha, it is believed that not everyone can collect the plants used for healing. In order to be able to collect plants, one has to undergo liturgical and philosophical training. One of these specialists is the osainista, a specialist who has profound knowledge of the medicinal and other sacred properties of the plants. Before the collection he performs a ceremony that prepares the plant for the specific problem that it is going to be used for. This ceremony begins with a ritual dedicated to Osain, the orisha of all herbs, and nature itself, considered by some to be the Lord of the Mountain, Dueño del Monte (manigua), who is asked to give his consent to enter. The reason for the visit is explained to him and offerings (tobacco) are given. Afterwards, a specific orisha to whom the plant belongs is asked for permission. These plants are used as offerings to these divine powers or as a cure in which the corresponding orisha is invoked. Orishas have their own histories, characters, and preferences regarding the plant offerings. Some plants are manifestations/representations of the orishas themselves. Every herb has its own song, which empowers the plant and helps with the specific problem that the patient has.\(^{299}\) The objective of the collection of the plants is crucial. Thus, for example, when gathering a plant that will later be used for the protection of one’s home, after praying to Osain, one would ask permission also from Ogún del Monte, San Silvestre del Monte, and Santa Inés del Monte. As plants like yaya, and yagruma belong to Changó, a prayer would also be dedicated to this orisha.\(^{300}\)

Poetic remembering of flora
The transfer of knowledge about the medicinal and ritual use of plants does not seem to be restricted to specialists. Healers, however, have an important role in their communities, as they are the ones who usually have a more profound and detailed knowledge about the variety of medicinal uses and rich symbolism that the flora can have. As well as healers, herbalists, therapists, and midwives, also agriculturalists, caretakers, patients, participants of collective celebrations, and other members of the broader community can acquire (snippets of) knowledge about the ritual and medicinal value of plants. As for the means of transmitting botanical knowledge, in addition to traditional means like oral tradition or participation in healing consultations, one should consider collective ceremonies (cordón, celebrations dedicated to lwas, orishas, and Saints) as well as the role of institutions and available literature. Especially in Cuba, Radio Rebelde’s programs explaining the specific characteristics of medicinal plants contribute to the valorization and preservation of the medicinal flora. Also, research into the medicinal properties of plants together with the affordability of books and the distribution of herbal remedies through official institutions, like green pharmacies, all seem to contribute to the preservation of botanical knowledge in Cuba.

The centrality of the flora in the daily life of humans also offers itself as a theme for oral poetry. In this way, oral poetry is a means of remembering and transmitting knowledge. This can take the form of sacred speech, invoking the powers of the orishas, but can also be designed with the aim of teaching the broader public. The latter possibility seems to explain the popularity of the siguaraya tree. The siguaraya was recognized as sacred, and was respected across different religious affiliations. Some of the contributors immediately recalled this tree as the first or as the only one that needs to be paid before taking its leaves and even referred to a song from Oscar de Leon which talks about its power. This tree cannot be cut down without asking permission beforehand, because it is an orisha.\(^{301}\) In Regla de Ocha, the siguaraya, as well

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\(^{299}\) Interview with initiated person of Regla de Ocha in Holguín.

\(^{300}\) Interview with initiated person of Regla de Ocha in Holguín.

\(^{301}\) Similarly, also Puerto Rican singer Héctor Lavoe has written a song “Rompezaraüey”, with similar lyrics indicating that one should be cautious of the Saints and do the ritual bathing.
as other trees like palm, belongs to Chango, but also to Ellegua, important orishas. It is considered to be a tree for the fundamento, and for nganga. Nganga is an animated subject represented in an iron vessel with a combination of secret ingredients, i.e. human remains, and parts of specific kinds of trees. Details such as which specific orisha is associated with this tree were not known among the contributors, who were not familiar with the teachings of this specific religion.

From Jiguaní there is clear evidence that the knowledge of the spiritual importance of plants is transferred through religious music at healing ceremonies in Cuban Espiritismo del Cordón and Espiritismo Cruzado, but also through songs that are sung in a secular context. The latter songs may transmit certain information about the spiritual importance of specific landscape features. Mr. Anaya, a renowned decimero in Jiguaní, who grow up in spiritualist tradition, sang us this song:

Voy a contarle una cosa que muy admirable es,
Voy a contarle una cosa que muy admirable es,
De una calabaza que he cosechado en mi choza.
Una ceiba portentosa la guía,
Podré igualar para empezarle a contar de la calabaza mía.

Partí y adentro tenía diez máquinas y un central,
La calabaza tenía una mina de oro y plata,
Y muchísima fruta y mata que ni yo la conocía,
Una arboleda tenía de marañones y zapote
Una iglesia y su sacerdote y un pastor y muchas ovejas
Y en cada esquina una vieja empinando papalote.

La calabaza tenía algunos misterios más,
De diez cordeles y un majá y más de cien mil jutias,
Cerca de mampostería, un cuartel y su escuadrón,
Y allá por mediación, ramal de una carretera,
Y si no me equivoco era la catedral de Japón.

En una semilla había más de mil habitaciones,
Quinientos puercos cebones y mil objetos de cría,
Una luz también había cambiante como la luna,
Y el que quiera tener una Santo que se la mande, (Santo soy yo)
Que calabaza grande como esa no hay ninguna.

This song contains playful references not only to a powerful ceiba tree but also to an admirable calabaza full of miraculous symbols of richness and fertility. In Regla de Ocha, the calabaza (Curcubita maxima or Curcubita pepo) is also used in rituals for attracting good fortune and positive developments when praying

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302 Interview no. 19033.
303 Secret ingredients including human remains are brought together to create a new sacred and powerfull object, nganga. Among the powerful trees used for nganga are: la ciguaraya, el jibá, la yaya, la cuaba, el jiquí, el caguairán, la guácima, el carbonero, la algarroba, la guajaca. Interview no. 190331. For more information see Dodson et al. (2008).
304 Decimero is a type of singer or poet who is reciting or singing décimas, which are ten-line stanzas. Some of these are sung for amusement. The topics of these décimas can vary from love to politics. They are often improvised and include ambiguous cues, critique or jokes.
to God and Ochún, who is said to be the (spiritual) owner (*Dueña*) of the pumpkin. Cubans also use pumpkin seeds against parasites and for the prostate. Similarly, Dominican *Auyama* (*Curcubita pepo*) is believed to be a symbol of fertility. Mrs. Elia Torres from Villa Isabel recalls: “It is said that when a pregnant woman moves with the plant leaves there are going to be more auyamas. Other people say that when the auyama has many flowers these are collected, and spread over the street where people step on them like this there will be more auyamas, but I am not sure if it is the truth.” Auyama is also medicinal, for cleaning the uterus after childbirth; the seeds are used for eyesight, and are also said to be good for constipation, against parasites, and for the heart.

Oral poetry, as an important means of transfer of information, can be vital for the preservation of knowledge, not only concerning medicinal uses but also concerning other uses. Mr. Santos Anaya knew another song about a *maraca* made from *güira*:

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En el mundo se desata, oye el canto que me inspira
Ahora te voy a explicar como se hace la maraca
Se coge la güira, se le abre un hoyito, se le sacan las tripas y se pone a secar
Y ahora por buenas razones se le echan las municiones
Se coge un palito, se le abre un hoyito y ya está, oýela como resuena ya
Pobre mi maraquita, oýela como re resuena ya.
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*Maracas* are still one of the major traditional instruments used in Cuban and Dominican music. During fieldwork I could observe their use only twice, in both cases in Cuban centers of *Espiritismo* (one in Barajagua and the other in Niquero) and I saw them on altars in Pedro Santana and Bánica. As Mr. Anaya suggests, *maracas* are made of *güira* (*Crescentia cujete*), which has also been used for the preparation of another traditional musical instrument of a similar name: *Güiro* and in the Dominican Republic *Güira*. While Dominican *Güiras* are now made of *Guayo* (metallic graters), they are also an important component in sacred chants for making the *lwas* descend. In both islands, *Crescentia cujete* (C: *Güiro, Higuero, Jigüero, Higüero, Jícara*) has been an important material for domestic utensils like plates, spoons, and water receptacles (of a different type, but still called *higüero* (*Lagenaria siceraria* or *Agenaria vulgaris*). Like *Curcubita maxima*, *Crescentia cujete* has also medicinal uses. The inner part is used in *botellas* for cleansing vaginal infections, and cleansing after giving birth. Leaves are also used for bruises, and blood circulation.
Figure 37 A sacred ceiba surrounded by palms in Niquero, Cuba.

Figure 38 The statue of San Lázaro/Babalú Ayé at the foot of the ceiba in Niquero, Cuba.
Ancestral roots and rhizomes

Having presented the general features of animated landscapes in the Dominican Republic and Cuba, some etiologies, the roles of healers, and their interaction with medicinal plants, we may observe several similarities when reading these in relation to historical descriptions or more recent ethnographic accounts.

The above-mentioned healers fulfilled a whole series of ritual services to their communities like spiritual protection, life advice, guarding the life and wellbeing of the community at large. Their multifunctional role could be compared to that of other religious specialists, e.g. shamans in Siberia, the *pyjai* of the Kaliña people, different ritual specialists among the Wolof, or Spanish healers. The first more detailed written reference to Caribbean indigenous persons who cured other people (Pané 1498) calls them *behiques* (or *bohuti*, in Las Casas: *bohique*). According to that source, *behiques* are intermediaries between the living and the dead, and between the living and divine beings. A healing session was initiated by an action in which the *behique* and the patient purged themselves (with a plant called gueio, gioia, gueio, or zacón), chanted (ritual prayers) and inhaled cohoba (snuff). Similarly, Kalinago ritual specialists, called *boyé* (*boyáicou, niboyeiri*), contacted the invisible world through tobacco smoke and chanting (Breton 1665). More specifically, *boyé*’s made “*the god descend, after which the deity is to be seated and to have a meal and drink*” in times of illness and at other occasions (Breton 1665). The contemporary use of tobacco by Dominican and Cuban healing practitioners as a means of communication with the invisible world resembles the one described by Breton. One of the documents dated to the end of the 16th century when

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307 In this identification, Arrom (the editor/commentator of Pané’s text) followed Ortiz who suggested that this plant could be a plant used in the Guyanas called *weya*.
discussing the habits of indigenous peoples of Hispaniola explicitly says that this plant was considered to be sacred (AGI, Patronato 18, N.1, R. 13). The ritual importance returns in the origin narrative about Maruka and Siniimari who received arrowroot from the Master Boa to make their charms. The exhalation of air or tobacco smoke in the process of saying a prayer or chant intended to facilitate the arrival of positive spiritual entities was also registered among indigenous peoples of Suriname (De Goeje 1943; Henfrey 2002).

The communication with the invisible world that takes form through dreams, visions, and an embodiment of divine entities and spirits in 21 Division, Regla de Ocha and in Cord Spiritism have their parallels in other parts of the world. There isn’t consensus about whether the soul (or one of the different souls a person may have) leaves the body during a dream but the general idea is that when asleep the devotees – also those who have not been initiated – might sometimes communicate with the spirits of the deceased or with divine entities. Again, this type of experience can be found across different worldviews including those of the Wayuu (Perrin 1987).

The interaction with the divine being may also occur through its incarnation or embodiment in the medium, caballo del misterio or babalawo. Århem (2016) compared this with the ideas of Amazon perspectivism and South-East Asian animism, where it is characterized by the occurrence of a particular set of cultural expressions. In animism the spirit possession, ancestor worship, animal sacrifice and attention to a panoply of nature spirits were seen as normally accompanying each other. In perspectivism the magical flight and metamorphosis were argued to be the predominant elements of the altered state of consciousness. Within perspectivism, shapeshifting is seen as necessary for adopting the other point of view that is important in order to harness the wellbeing of the community. According to Århem’s model the present-day Caribbean expressions of this relation fit more into the South East Asian model of animism while the shapeshifting resembles transformations in the origin narratives described by Pané or those from the mainland by de Goeje (1943).

Following strictly Århem’s model it would be unlikely to find Cuban and Dominican shapeshifters such as galipotes, cagüeyros or bakás whose major characteristics was their ability to transform from a person into an animal or object in a system where also ritual specialists may incarnate or embody a spiritual entity. Yet, both are common in the Cuban and Dominican context.

Based on the fragmentary sources it is difficult to reconstruct how the communication with the invisible world was experienced and articulated by the indigenous behiques. Both Pané and Breton suggest that this specialist approached the invisible world in an altered state of consciousness, and that the divine entities were believed to be present at the location. Among the Kalinago these divine beings were believed to be seated – and in one occasion also to enter – in the body of the men and to speak through them (Breton 1665, p. 6). Breton’s interpretation might have been influenced by Catholic beliefs about demons, which could possess human bodies but which also could be exorcised.

Many West African deities and semi-divine beings have multiple representations/manifestations and may transform their appearances, and so may the religious specialists, which in the colonial idiom are typically referred to as “witches”, i.e. persons considered to exercise “black magic” (Herskovits 1938). The present-day dominant incarnations of lwas, spirits and orishas (e.g. the focus on the head) display West African influences. Among the Yoruba (Bascom 1969) or Fon (Herskovists 1933) the body can be a vessel

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308 While in 21 Division and Regla de Ocha the ritual specialist is the person that voice and incarnate, in the Cord Spiritism the medium that falls into trance passes the spiritual entity to a medium that can voice it.

309 See also Du Tetre 1650.
or medium for the spiritual beings.\textsuperscript{310} Among the Garifuna (Bianchi 1989), who are seen as carriers of both African and indigenous heritage, this relation is described as “possession”.

In spite of the constant demonization of the agents of such transformations in Europe and the Caribbean, the idea of shapeshifting was not completely alien to non-Christian European worldviews (e.g. the Norse Loki, the Greek Proteus and the \textit{Metamorphoses} of Ovidius), and it has persisted through the centuries. Future investigations that would collect more information on the ritual specialists that articulate these relations as physical transformations and incarnations of the divine and spiritual entities have great potential to contribute to the studies of these religious expressions worldwide.

Parallels with the aforementioned concepts of illness may be also observed in other cultures. Some of these concepts such as the evil eye or soul loss are ways how the experience of the illness is described across different cultures, including Fon, Spanish, or Garifuna (Herskovits 1933, Christian 1989, Bianchi 1989).\textsuperscript{311} The coral beads along with a jet bead commonly used in 16\textsuperscript{th} Spain for protection against evil eye was found in a indigenous child’s burial in Chorro de Maita (Valcárcel Rojas 2013). The presence of these objects might also be explained as an integration of popular Catholic beliefs (with North African influences prior to 1492) among the indigenous ancestors. Such integration might be even more likely as it fitted easily within the indigenous or African worldviews, which held similar ideas. The fact that multiple plants and amulets, like the Saponus saponaria (jaboncillo, mate negro) is also called called jet, are used for spiritual protection until today, suggests that this concern about one’s protection is an intrinsic part of the Cuban and Dominican religious tradition.

Soul loss as a possible explanation of illness is also found in West Africa and in Spain, where sorcerers were said to be responsible for soul capture (Hoyos Sainz 1947). In Spain the soul of a deceased person may roam around, return to the place the person once lived, and in this condition it may be harmful; as a remedy sometimes food is placed in the grave-yard (Machado 1886). The capture of one of the souls has also been described in the Dahomean context, the idea of a double-soul being widespread in West Africa. Also in the Americas the notion of soul loss, fright (susto) or of the soul being taken by a spirit of the earth is a common part of the theory of illness.

Locally, the analysis of details about soul loss may follow various lines of interpretation. One of the Baniqueros explained that the incarnation of ‘Carib spirits’ is an experience that feels like being devoured from inside. This description might be derived from the stereotypical image of Caribs as cannibals that are believed to have violently attacked the peaceful Arawaks. The phrasing of this explanation may have been influenced by the Haitian Creole concept of \textit{lwa kap manje}. My colleague Sony Jean commented on this (in 2018): “\textit{Lwa kap manje, literally translates as: the lwa is eating him/her. In Haiti this expression is used to refer to sick people who are troubled by lwas. It could be a person who has an arrangement with the lwa to protect the family, to improve economic problems, or something else. When the person doesn’t fulfill the promise, if he/her doesn’t make ceremonies for the lwa, or doesn’t offer the lwa food, the lwa as a revenge can attack this person or a member of his family. There is another meaning of this expression. A person can force a lwa to eat another, because of the dispute between these persons. The hater can force a lwa to make the other sick until this person passes away. This is considered an act of sorcery.” In this context the cannibalism refers to the soul, or part of the soul, which is consumed, and thus does not encompass physical cannibalism, as suggested by Chanca and as illustrated by Bry’s infamous images of persons eating a fellow

\textsuperscript{310} Among Fon and Yoruba the deity enters into the head. This resembles the present-day ritual incarnation of \textit{lwas} and \textit{orishas} explained to me during fieldwork.

\textsuperscript{311} In the light of research that correlates the emotion of envy with the psychological and physical wellbeing of the envying person (Smith et al. 2010), the evil eye concept may summarize the ancestral insights about how such feelings can disturb social relations and one’s own mental health.
human. Descola has confirmed that the cannibalistic ingestion is executed by Masters of Animals who punish Jívaro for their excessive hunting (1996). Similarly, the Araweté believe that components of the soul are eaten and immortalized by the gods (Viveiros de Castro 1992; see also Århem 2016).

Among various peoples that speak an Arawakan language as well as among other indigenous peoples of the Americas illness and death were commonly seen as a result of neglecting certain prohibitions, disrespecting certain places, or of an imbalance between the natural environment and people.

The prohibitions of felling certain sacred trees have in the past often been interpreted as guarding and enhancing the ecological diversity. In the context of healing practices it is clear that the violation of these prohibitions can have negative consequences for health. The powers residing in the flora are both potentially detrimental and beneficial to humans. The customs to ask the tree, plant, or their keepers or spiritual beings that are residing inside for allowance to cut them down or collect them is one of the cultural referents to the importance of a respectful relation between man and natural forces. Similar practices may also be found in both the Americas and Africa. When a tree has a spiritual power this has to be placated before cutting it (for example when clearing the fields, cf. De Goeje 1943). In Regla de Ocha there are similar views, which are likely to have originated in West Africa and which may have fused later with ideas already existing in the Caribbean.

Injuries, illness or bad luck can also result of violating the prohibition to fell ceiba trees in the Cuban context. In Cuba and the Dominican Republic the *ceiba pentandra* or ‘silk cotton tree’ is protected in this manner. Also among Caribs speaking groups in Suriname it is forbidden to cut the silk cotton tree because it harbors different spiritual beings including the Amarari serpent, snake grandfather, who is a powerful helper of the healers (Van Andel & Ruyschaert 2011). Many Cubans consider the ceiba a sacred tree, one that protects the Virgin and is the marker of the place where all deceased depart. As in Cuba, the ceiba is a sacred tree for many indigenous peoples in Middle and South America. For Patamuna (Guyanas) and Mayas this silk cotton tree is a connection between sky and earth, between divinities and humans. For Patamunas it is the First Tree. It was also the beginning of the creation of the first animals by the first ancestors. At the same time, it is also the place where bush spirits and dark shamans can conceal themselves (Whitehead 2003).

The ceiba is widespread throughout the tropics so that the enslaved people coming to the Caribbean likely recognized the tree (Voeks & Rashford 2013; Stedman 2013). In Ghana there is also a prohibition to fell this tree and it is thought to be inhabited by various spiritual beings, while in Benin and Gabon the ceiba is a sacred tree too (Quiroz 2015). For followers of Regla de Ocha, the ceiba is the most sacred, it is the mayor tree of *monte*, the main force, a place where all orishas can gather including Irokó, Changó, and Yemayá. In Benin and Gabon another sacred tree is known: *iroko* (*milicia excelsa*), which like the ceiba is a very large tree (Quiroz 2015).

Another example of an injury that was a consequence of a violation of the prohibition to cut the *jobo* tree (the hog plum) was in Bánica. The parallels in the symbolism of the plum-tree among the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and those of Guyanas offer us also new light on the sacred narratives as analyzed

312 A Dominican contributor referred to the devouring being as a person, in this case just “Caribs”. This could provoke misunderstandings, as to whether the statement refers to a person or to spirits. Like in other interviews, this contributor confirmed that he is referring to spirits. Without convincing archaeological evidence to support European reports about cannibalism in the Lesser Antilles, one of the possible avenues to understanding past descriptions of such acts is to consider the flaws of intercultural communication. Arens (1979) and Sued Badillo (1978) has previously deconstructed the historical portrayals of cannibalism among the Kalinago of Lesser Antilles.

313 Different lines of evidence like morphological divergence within African Ceiba, fossil pollen of Ceiba 13 000 old in Ghana, trade of a cultivated form of C. pentandra from West Africa dating to the 10th century indicate that Ceiba was not introduced into Africa by European traders (Dick et al. 2007)

314 Interview no. 190331.
by Pané. The first women of the Arawaks, Makushi and Warao were fashioned from a hog-plum tree, a tree that has an extreme vegetative power (De Goeje 1943). In one of the Arawakan narratives, Nahakoboni, an ancestor healer, carved his daughter out of a plum-tree. The healer cut and carved the timber so skillfully that his daughter became a woman lovely to gaze upon. Even Yar, the sun himself, wanted that daughter as his wife (De Goeje 1943). In Suriname, this tree is the dwelling of the Serpent Spirit (probably Amarari, like in the case of the ceiba tree), which is the reason to not cut this tree (Van Andel & Ruysschaert 2011). In Pané’s narrative about the origin of the women who descended from trees, the quadruplets with their coarse hands caught them and tied an inriri, a woodpecker, to them, which thought they were wooden beams and subsequently carved out their sex. Although Pané did not specify what type of tree these were, they may well have been jobo trees as these were most likely considered powerful or sacred: later they figure in his text as the trees wherein primordial man was transformed into by the Sun.

The sacred value of the hog plum tree can also be seen in its medicinal and ritual use. The jobo tree (Spondias spp.) was used to treat smallpox in this particular location and in Jiguaní the same tree was used for baths and cleansing. In North-West Guyana its leaves are used as an abortifacient and to cure sores. The Kalinago from Dominica used Spondias mombin for a fermented drink, a tea to treat a sore throat, to purge after parturition, and induce lactation (Hodge & Taylor 1957). Like the ceiba also Spondias mombin has a pantropical distribution. At present, in Benin it is used for spiritual protection against weapons.

If we consider that the indigenous and African meaning of trees like jobo or ceiba played a role in their integration into the Caribbean religions including Catholicism, the selection of the ceiba tree as the first place of Catholic mass in Cuba seems not to be accidental but rather a skillful manipulation of power on the part of the colonizer. From this perspective, ceibas with images of the Virgin as encountered in rural areas of Eastern Cuba are unique testimonies of the synergy of Catholic, indigenous and African beliefs.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the guayacán is yet another tree that may have had special religious significance in indigenous worldview. The majority of wooden objects found in the Greater Antilles were carved from the Guaiacum sp. and some found in Hispaniola also from Carapa sp. (Ostapkowicz et al. 2012). Together with the palo sancto, the guayacán was used in early colonial times as a remedy for syphilis (mal de buás, mal francés); furthermore it figures as one of the trees used by AfroCaribbean ritual specialists in the 17th century (Gómez 2017). Nowadays it is used as a remedy for rheumatism, syphilis, and blood toxins while it is also for spiritual protection and for packing the amulets of Eshu/Elegba in Regla de Ocha (Quiros-Moran 2009).

The expressions of gratitude, devotion, vows, and care for a balanced relationship between the visible and invisible world through (votive) offerings occur in many different worldviews including those unrelated to the Caribbean region. While the details about the aim of these offerings are left undescribed in Caribbean historical records, Pané and Breton mention that offerings were brought to divine beings to the house of cimiche or a cavern, on ceremonial days. The Catalanian friar mentioned that those ritual offerings were dedicated to the zemi, with which people engaged after the healing rituals while Breton explains that before the start of the ritual the divine beings that had arrived were to be seated and received with a meal and drinks. Among the indigenous peoples of Guadalupe and Dominica “at the beginning of every revel or feast, they offer him the first morsels of the banquet. In a corner they put amatouting (which is a sort of low stool made of rushes like their baskets) for him and place the best cassava they have upon it, along with gourds full of ouicou /a kind of beer/, which is their usual drink. They do the same when they clear a wood

315 Across the two islands a poem about a woodpecker or carpenter which made his woman of wood is retold for amusement of the public. This poem later tells about the infidelity of the woman and the naiveté of the man, and may also mock the hagiography of the biblical carpenter Saint Joseph. While the trope of woodpecker/carpenter also returns here it will remain an enigma as to whether this poem can be considered the remains of a desacralized origin narrative or if it is just a result of a local poetic creation.
to make a garden. They believe that this god eats what they offer him” (Breton 1929: 5 [information from Dominica and Guadalupe 1635-1647]).

Concluding remarks
The final part of Chapter 6 indicated that tracing the roots of present-day beliefs and customs is a highly challenging task, especially in the Cuban and Dominican context. According to Ortiz, the main output of a completed transculturation is characterized by a change of character. Can we however chart the lines of these developments as chronological relations of cause and effect within such a complex reality characterized by a ceaseless synergy of connections and mutual influences? Do we find below the surface roots or rhizomes that are typified by nomadic growth, heterogeneity and semiotic chains, the origins of which are not traceable? The contemporary symbolism of ceiba and jobo seems to be rooted in the indigenous religious worldview. It is typical of this worldview to respect the landscape and nature as living elements, spiritual entities with personality and narrative identity, which interact with humans in different manners.

Human insights into the flora, the environment and the miraculous working of nature have led the different peoples worldwide to speculate about the source of life and have become a point of departure for human spirituality across different cultures.

Consequently, sacred landscapes, soul loss, spiritual incarnation and metamorphosis could be recognized and “translated” between different symbolic universes in their historical exchange, but at the same time this interaction gave rise to changes of meanings and destruction of cultural memory, so that new elements may seem to have no relationship with the indigenous worldview.

Likely the reference to the soul(s) as part of indigenous medicine and local symbol systems should be understood as a parallel to the role of psychology in therapy in modern western culture. Soul loss then may be compared to trauma, for example, and the role of spirits to that of memories, values, symbols, archetypes and emotional connections. In the indigenous healing traditions of the Americas and Africa these spiritual or psychological aspects were completely integrated with herbal medicine and other physical treatments.

This Chapter introduced some forces of the universe that manifest themselves in healers, plants and other natural elements, which together form the Dominican and Cuban healing landscapes. The following Chapter 8 will highlight the role of the indigenous ancestors in the healing practices at Dominican water pools. Cuban examples (in Regla de Ocha and Espiritismo) will be investigated in order to advance our understanding of the importance of the indigenous ancestors in the broader regional context.