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CHAPTER 8. The subaquatic realm of ancestors and other beings

In many rural areas, surface water sources have been the only source of drinking and utility water until relatively recently (the 1960s in Cuba; 1990s in the Dominican Republic\textsuperscript{316}). These water sources have also been a center of subsistence-related and cultural activities. According to international reports, in spite of many improvements the access to water supply remains insufficient in Dominican rural areas (JMP 2017). Simultaneously, droughts during 2014–2016 and the following severe floods have made the potable water scarce. In some locations, the long-lasting droughts have caused food shortages and were a motivation for people to move to urban areas (e.g. Loma Atravesada, province of Monte Cristi).

In regions historically related to the Cuban and Dominican landscape biography, sweet water sources symbolize i.e. fertility, life progression, and cleansing from sin; they are seen as a house of birth and death (see chapter 3). The universal value of water raises questions about how its symbolism has been constructed in contexts with a multicultural background. The subsequent section has a threefold objective. Firstly, it explores the explicit association of sweet water sources with indigenous ancestors in the context of the multiple meanings of places.\textsuperscript{317} This enables us to observe how the concept of health is often related to ancestral subaquatic dwellings and later to analyze how the diverse cultural historical backgrounds have been woven into the cultural memory. This chapter elaborates on the nexus between oral tradition and ritual engagement with water sources. Even though some narratives, tales, and testimonies might seem to have no clear or direct relationship with healing practices, they may be informative about how and why specific bodies of water were selected in the past for healing practices and were given specific (though fluid) meanings. Narratives are an important part of the broader knowledge of epistemic communities about the indigenous past and as such show about how the past is currently interpreted. These results will be assessed later in the light of the local history and educational discursive practices (discussed in previous chapters), which are replicated in practices such as healing rituals.

Dominican Ancestral Subaquatic Dwellings

The rich Dominican history is reflected in the diversity of divine beings that are represented by or associated with water sources. Among these divine beings are: Rey del Agua (“King of the Water”), the Divine Twins, Simbi (D’lo from de l’eau). In two interviews Iwas such as Ogún and Santa Marta or Catholic Saints such as Saint John or the Virgin Mary were associated with rivers and waterpools.\textsuperscript{318} Most frequently, rivers and parts of rivers are seen as domains of Indigenous Misterios.

Ancestral and divine forces residing in rivers, waterfalls, and pools are potentially beneficial or detrimental to human health. As dwellings of indigenous antecedents living in subaquatic houses or kingdoms they are potentially risky places for children and people with corriente del indio: these might

\textsuperscript{316} Again also this information is based on the interviews and conversation in the region. For the current status of the access of the drinking water in the region of the study see https://washdata.org/data.

\textsuperscript{317} The term Indigenous Ancestors was used as translation to the term “indio”. The term “Indian” was avoided as it carries for many of Indigenous Peoples of Americas negative connotations. Future studies could verify whether the same negative connotations are perceived by indigenous-descendants in Cuba (e.g. in La Rancheria, Manuel Tames Municipalities, Guantanamo Province or Fray Benito, Holguín Province. If the contributor used the term misterio this was also left as such.

\textsuperscript{318} One of the wells in the quarter el Pozito in Guayubín was the site of an appearance of the Catholic Virgen. She is said to have performed different miracles and also to have cured diseases of those who have visited her well. Dominican rivers were considered to be empowered on the day of Saint John through the whole island. Many people woke up early in the morning and without speaking to anyone bathed in the river, which was considered by many to bring wellbeing. The bodies of water are places of manifestations of Iwas and Saints. For the traditional healer Mrs. Esperanza from Guananico the rivers are places where both Santa Marta and Anacaona can incarnate: “When Anacaona arrived to me it was through the river...and my children were afraid that I would drown...and when Santa Marta arrived this was shameful I was crying when I saw this girl (referring to herself when looking on a video later), she was rolling down in the river.” Her former patient adds: “like a snake crawling.” The Iwas impersonated in the healer gave consult to people seeking their help.
experience soul loss, which could ultimately lead to their death. These water areas are also sites where the gift to heal can be developed.

Dominican devotees express their devotion to indigenous misterios at different water sources. indigenous misterios are approached as a part of annual celebrations of lwas. This was the case of the feast of Belie Belcán/San Miguel in La Jaiba, during celebrations of Saint John in El Hombre in Parado Mana or the feast of the Virgen de las Mercedes, or Christmas or after the harvest in the Bánica region. In addition, waterfalls and pools Hombre Parado in Mana, Enchanted Well at El Burén (Estero Hondo), as well as springs La Descubiera, pool La Zurza (closeby to Bánica), Charco de los Mellizos and Charco de los Indios (Chacuey), or Waterfall Socoa (close to Boyá) are loci of ritual baths and healing rituals wherein ancestral powers are invoked. Indigenous misterios are sought at some of these sweet water sources for the initiation of healers working with their powers. At some like places in Charco del Indio in Marmolejos, people dedicated offerings to Indigenous misterios, but these traditions have discontinued. Even more frequently, water sources are a setting for oral traditions about indigenous people living in these places. A few examples of such accounts are described below.

Recovering through remembering at La Descubierta
The recovery of Mr. Javier De Los Santos at La Descubierta spring will serve as an example of how the relationship between humans, health, and landscape is experienced and articulated. Also it will introduce the complexity of place meanings and illustrate how healing practices are informed by oral traditions.

When discussing the composition (botella) of herbal mixtures for curing at his house yard in Pedro Santana, Mr. De Los Santos (born and raised in Bánica) stated that approximately one week earlier he had fallen from his donkey and suffered bruises. In addition to the herbal treatment, another remedy was suggested. Returning to the origin of the injury, Mr. De Los Santos described himself as "being fastened by them". This adverse situation could be improved by reestablishing positive relations with divinities living in a spring near his former house in La Descubierta.

This spring is a sweet water spring located at the abandoned rural settlement called La Descubierta, which is approximately nine kilometers from Bánica. This settlement, composed of few houses of teja de maní, had been abandoned by the couple of Los Santos approximately three years ago when moving to into a walled house with running water and electricity in Pedro Santana (2.5 km from neighboring to Bánica). The spring is located at the foot of the hill of their former house. The spring flows as a stream through a ravine and further into the fields. It has been used as a source for drinking water and baths. In spite of the long-term droughts that have affected the region the spring preserved water.

The journey for the recovery was started with the preparation of offerings, which consist of coffee, peanuts, bread, corn, and bonbons. After a one and a half hour walk the married couple De Los Santos, me and my personal guard Richard Peña together we arrived at the foot of the hill of the abandoned settlement La Descubierta. Upon our arrival, Mr. De Los Santos went directly to the spring where the couple purified themselves with the water they had brought. Mr. De Los Santos took off the cap, kneeled in front of the offerings that were deposited in a container of calabash. While he lit the candles, his spouse poured the water in a circle around the spring in a counterclockwise fashion. Mr. De Los Santos offered coffee while saying: "Dorsú, Twins, and (his wife added: the King of the Water) and the King of the Water, come and receive this offering. To Dorsú, Twins and to the King of the Water." Afterwards, I myself and Richard were also invited to offer the corn and maní. On our journey back, when asked whether he felt alleviated

319 Being fastened is used as translation for expressions like "me tienen amarrado".
and if he sensed the presence of indigenous *misterios*, Mr. De los Santos confirmed that he got a chill and goose skin and therefore was convinced that he would quickly recover.

The question regarding the *indigenous misterios* was derived from our conversation that preceded the healing encounter: in that conversation Mr. De Los Santos associated different divine beings including *indigenous misterios* with water sources. His answer as to what the people in the past used to say about Indians or Ciguapas was: “I have heard about Indians, but I have never seen them. It was said that they were walking in water; they were walking under the water. They belong there ... People were preparing them food, because they were teasing them, so they were giving them corn to avoid that they would bother. In those times, some people knew them but not anymore. They were calling them with their names and then they came out. If you do not call their name, they will not come... I do not know where they were living... I can only tell you that they were taking away twins, because twins are from the water. I am dorsú, born after twins, so I am from water... To Dorsú, you have to also give food. They tease a person who then feels sick and so you have to give them food. You roast corn and peanuts. I will do it soon. You go to the river and call him...” From the further conversation it became clear that he was born after twin siblings who passed away at birth. Mr. De Los Santos is therefore forever related to them, and to the water domains to which they belong.

Mr. De Los Santos’ account indicates that the establishment of a balance between humans and beings living in the water pool is a central concept of health recovery and health maintenance. The affected health can be recuperated by taking care of the relations with ancestral and spiritual forces at places where one can easily communicate with them. This is clearly not only his personal view, but part of traditions inherited from previous generations, which consider that *lwas*, including indigenous ancestors, can be a “nuisance” if not dealt with properly.

The King of Water, Twins, Dorsú and indigenous ancestors are all associated with the water domain. In our conversation Mr. De los Santos associated these beings with each other. Although he did not provide us with more details on these spiritual entities, his relation to the deceased Twin siblings should be understood within the widespread Dominican belief that twins are born with the gift to heal, which if properly developed (by following some dietary restrictions, excluding vegetable and salt and maintaining their relations through the protecting Divine Twins) these persons can cure others. The figure of Dosú is integral to the twin cult in Haitian Voodoo, where Dorsú is a child born after the *Marasà*, the twins (Pressly-Sanon 2013).
Figure 40 Front view of the pool at La Descubierta, taken during the drought.
The water symbolism in Bánica landscape

The Divine Twins are called Marasá in Bánica (approximately 4.5km from Pedro Santana). Also Mr. León Alcántara associated Marasás with indigenous ancestors when describing how these are paid tribute to during the celebration of the Virgen del Carmen after which offerings are brought to the river: “This is done for marasás, marasás, it is called Indian from below the earth, from below the water. This you receive from up, you feel it up but it is not you, it is when you have it in your mind, in your head, you received it and you are turning. All this maíz, ajonjoli, bolon, menta, egg, and they make this mixture. You have it there, and you throw it and give it to people, and then you take the rest that is remaining and you take it and go to the river to throw the remaining into the river. And who was the Marasá? This was invented by the God... They throw it there, in the yard, in the bohío.”

From this account, it is also clear that not only the water domain but also the earth domain is shared by Marasá and indigenous ancestors. Also Hecfredes Gómez, spiritual leader and the organizer of the feast of the Virgen del Carmen, when asked whether ritual offerings are brought to Indigenous Ancestors, confirmed that these are occasionally made during the celebrations of Carmen, Saint Francis, and Christmas in an effort to enhance the communal wellbeing. During the feasts of Christmas and Carmen: “the food is brought to the river. I also go and bring food offerings there, and more people bring food, almost all people who are doing here a feast the next day bring a dish to the river.”

Other Baniqueros confirmed this custom and suggested that the offerings were

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320 In this conversation, Mr. Alcántara seemed to mispronounce marasás as majasás. Given the fact that the majá (boa cubana) was found only in Cuba and not in the Dominican Republic I have considered that he meant marasás because he spoke at different occasions also about twins. Future interviews should verify whether he did not really mean majasás, the serpents that might be linked to the narrative about the Great Serpent – see later (Interview with Mr. Alcántara, no. 170).

321 Interview no. 171314.
brought also to the twins at a specific part of the river where there are watermills. For Mr. Gómez, who was also officially initiated in 21 Division, rivers are the domain also of Simbi an dlo, who belongs to the freshwater, in contrast to Simbi Macaya who is from the salt water.

The river of Artibonito or other specific places in the river like Las Tres Piedras or La Chorrera are areas where inhabitants of Bánica seek improvement of their individual or communal wellbeing. Testimonies about the agency of deities at these places are related to healing rituals. One of them is told by Mr. Benjamin Alcántara, who attended one of the healing rituals before he converted to Protestantism:322

“There was a lady, Ana María, who became sick and said: ‘Let’s go make a petition to the river and throw food to the saints. The people arrived at a great pool with a waterfall, she placed a stone, the people started to make petitions asking to forgive this woman and they offered a lot of food, sweets. The lady suddenly drowned in the water and she was lost and nobody could see her. All of the people thought she drowned, they searched for her and in half an hour she appeared there (at the river) playing with the water, healthy.’

Another cleansing ritual is described by Mr. Filomeno Mateo Alcántara who was raised and educated by his grandmother. When discussing the baths in the rivers, he commented on how there is a vow that you make with your twin: “For the bath, you take three bonbons, and bring them to the river, three bonbons, you eat and you wash with soap, when assessing your problem. You eat and call the King of the Water and go in the middle of the river and throw it down and up, every time when you take a brush you throw it upstream and downstream...and you take it and when you finished you take the soap and wash with it...You throw it saying what you would like to say for this disease or this problem and when you have finished the bath the last piece of the soap which is left you do not take it back home, no, you throw it with the flow of the river and like this also your problems will flow away.”323

The meanings attributed to the spring at La Descubierta or the Artibonito river suggest that ancestral forces manifest in distinct water sources in the surroundings of Bánica. Besides the spring at La Descubierta, there is another renowned spring called La Zurza, which is situated under a small cavern at the north side of the Saint Francis hill in Bánica. Sulphur springs in Bánica have been well known and used for cures in this community since the end of 18th century (Moreau de Saint-Méry 1796). La Zurza is a sulfur spring that is appreciated for the cure of skin diseases but also for obtaining or maintaining spiritual health.324 The healing water of the spring and its location next to the cave was seen as evidence of the powers of indigenous ancestors. While the material remains (candles, coins), encountered at the spring, indicate that ritual bathing is still being performed, residents of Bánica and Pedro Santana observed that La Zurza has lost its importance compared to one or two generations ago.325

Also another spring close to Bánica was included among the places where one may mobilize the ancestral forces. For Mr. Arturo Valenzuela, grandson of a former healer in Pedro Santana, these traditions are only part of his memory: “The grandfathers had a belief about this water source. They used to say that it was here where the Indians lived. This was their belief, their culture, it was here where they were making their penance and it was fulfilling. They watered a lot of animals and designated a part of them to comply with the vow in order that the animals will not get sick and will multiply. They were making a feast on 21st January at the day of the Virgen de Altagracia and came and toss meals. I was already lurking from behind the bushes and when they threw the plate I came and to ate it. They tossed roasted maní, corn, bonbons, mint, killed black goats, hen, and made a great banquet. I was doing this (pointing with his hand to a

322 Interview with Benjamin Alcántara (no. 162).
323 Filomeno Mateo Alcántara (no. 171314).
324 Interview with Hecfredes Gómes, Bánica.
325 Interview with Hermania Alcántara.
direction) and hiding. In two or three hours I ate the food. For me, that was a religion that they had and their wishes fulfilled.”

The Valenzuela family comes from one of the founding families of Pedro Santana but he is uncertain whether this traditional activity was carried out before his grandmother. Mr. Valenzuela is sure that this tradition ceased when his grandmother passed away. The spring is no longer visited and cannot be visited anymore by outsiders because it is located within the area of the Valenzuela’s property.

Different water sources were said to be the domain of indigenous ancestors but also of divine beings. As Mr. De La Rosa de Oro suggested, Indigenous *Lwas* are some of the “Saints” living in the subaquatic world, which were created during God’s creation of land and waters. “God poured a lot of water into pools and rivers so every pool and river has a lot of saints who live underneath.” In Mr. De La Rosa’s account, the subaquatic world of rivers is not only a place of the Saints but also a place where the dead continue to live.326 The selection of the place is often motivated by healer’s revelations, the character of the place, the privacy to conduct the ritual or the patient’s faith in the presence of water deities.

The interrelation between different divine beings living in sweet water sources is sometimes ambiguous and needs more description. Symbolically, water is clearly a powerful vital source for renewal of health and wellbeing; it is an integral part of ceremonial places where vows are made or cleansing ceremonies are performed. Some of the springs, like La Zurza, seem to have been used in curing for more than 200 years. In general, the rich amount of examples from Bánica seems to be related to the fact that here this topic was a taboo but of a lesser degree than in the following case of La Jaiba. The ritual engagement with ancestral forces at some of the water bodies in La Jaiba will help us to understand how meaning and knowledge are transmitted in a context where the value of these practices is strongly contested.

![Figure 42 Aitibonito Tres Piedras.](image)

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326 Interview with Carmelita de La Rosa Oro (her native language is Haitian Creole). CR. “Indigenous is a saint, when the Lord made the earth, after making the earth he poured water in pools (noria) and rivers, but from that when he made it, he made a lot in noria, so every pool, every river has a Saint who lives underneath and that is why rivers and pools have a lot of Saints.”
Contested landscape of La Jaiba\textsuperscript{327}

La Jaiba is a municipality of Villa Isabela, situated in the Puerto Plata province. The inhabitant of La Jaiba sought to improve their health and wellbeing not only in the shrines of the healers but also at Charco Tamare, La Poza Encantada and Cueva Iglesia at El Burén, all in the surroundings of La Jaiba.

Charco Tamare

The pool of Tamare is a highly contested place. The followers of traditional healers, influenced by 21 Division, perceive the pool as a dwelling of indigenous ancestors. They believe that the ancestors, if they are taken properly care of, will be beneficial to individual and communal wellbeing. Representatives of a local evangelist church have condemned the offerings to the ancestors as acts of witchcraft. The residents of La Jaiba were hesitant to speak openly about the pool’s current spiritual significance. This hesitance could be explained by the fact that I failed to establish a trustful relationship with the healer who was the main cultural carrier of traditions at this pool. Yet, from different conversations it became clear that there are many religious conflicts in the community. This situation leads me to reflect upon the pool’s significance in the past, as remembered by the current population, and upon the importance of hearsay as a mode of cultural memory in the context of contested heritage.

Hearsay and other accounts facilitate useful information about the perception of outsiders and their role in the transfer of knowledge in the context of ongoing demonization of popular religion. The water pool Tamare is situated within a ten minutes’ walk from the village La Jaiba. This water pool is named after an abandoned sector of La Jaiba called Tamare at the bank of one of the creeks that flows into the Rio Encantado (“Enchanted River”). The former inhabitants of Tamare have moved to La Jaiba because when

\textsuperscript{327} The information about the possibly religious importance of Charco Tamare was kindly facilitated by Dr. Ulloa Hung.
the stream rose they were cut off from the main road. Even though residents did not provide more details on the name of Tamare they suggested that it is an indigenous name.

Since it opened approximately four years ago, the evangelical church has been gaining in popularity amongst the villagers, and with that the Charco Tamare has become a point of conflict. In fact, the ongoing religious disputes in the village have been literally inscribed onto the place as the evangelist father painted on rock walls around the pool the following text: “The Blood of Jesus breaks all satanic pacts. The devil came to kill and to destroy but Jesus came to undo all the devil’s work. Jesus is coming. Rescue me Jesus.”

During an informal conversation a representative of the evangelist church explained that the place itself and the river have been used for the baptism of newborn children because of the analogy with the river Jordan. Similarly, one of evangelist fathers saw a connection to God the Father also in natural places like one of the caves in the neighborhood. However, in his opinion the custom of bringing ritual offerings at Charco de Tamare should be abandoned because these are acts of heresy. It is clear that people who have previously attended the ceremonies at the pool have withdrawn from the participation in these rituals after their conversion.

In general, for many residents of La Jaiba the spiritual importance of the pool at Tamare has diminished, but there are some individuals who currently bring offerings at this pool to the indigenous ancestors as part of the celebration of the feast of Belie Belcán /San Miguel (28th of October), who is the patron of many Dominican healers. At one such occasion it was possible to observe generational differences in the perception of the value of this place. During the San Miguel celebration the healer sent twin brothers to take part in the ceremonial meal as an offering to the Indigenous spirits living in the pool at Tamare. This confirms the belief in ancestral agency. But the ceremonial meal sometimes did not reach the pool because these brothers thought it a waste to leave it there and instead they ate it. The twin brothers were aware of their potential to heal, but never developed this gift. They themselves never made an explicit link between themselves and the water domain, but the healer’s selection of them as those that had to bring the offering to the pool does not seem accidental.

The present-day offerings are seen as continuation of a long tradition, which goes back to the time of Julio Tejada, the mayor of La Jaiba and himself a healer, who lived around 1900.328 People recall that this healer used to perform healing rituals and religious celebrations. The accounts of past celebrations at Tamare resemble the descriptions of rituals for the Iwas in Dominican rural areas. Also, Rafael, an agriculturalist from La Jaiba recalled past celebrations. Living close by the pool he and his family prepared a ceremonial meal (including rice, goat, chicken, potatoes, coffee, and sweets). He described these beings as “Saints from the water spring, from the Indians”. After Rafael converted to evangelism he stopped bringing offerings to the pool, but confirms that: “there are people that bring them still, people that believe a lot in the Saints, these are Saints they believe in, they prepare them dishes, bring them rum and candles.”

This particular person gave his consent to discuss this topic after encouragement by his friends, who assured him that the author was already familiar with the custom.

Regarding the celebrations at the pool, other residents only had reminiscences from their childhood. It is clear that those who were excluded from the celebration also had some knowledge of these happenings. One of the contributors living in the settlement of Tamare never personally attended the celebrations, because, according to her, her parents were too strict and did not let her attend; but she knew that one of the key elements of the celebration was that dishes were offered to Indians living below the surface of the pool. In addition, she commented: “I knew that this place was something sacred for the people because

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328 In the village one of Tejada’s descendants is believed to have inherited his gift to heal.
there was a pool that belongs to the Indians, you understand, their houses because you could see a lot of their things, a lot of their dolls… Because they continued in La Tina my father told me.” This contributor drew a relation between the remains of indigenous ancestors and their agency: “They saw the Indians as well, they were not doing this without the faith because sometimes people do something because they believe that it exists but this was not the case, they were presenting themselves. Where I lived there, there were a lot of things left by them as they were before in this world… so you could see a lot of things, cups, and it was the Indians who made the items… We girls took these plates in order to play with them (the ceramics).”

Until recently, the previously mentioned objects could be found at different locations in the villages and in their surroundings (see for the exact location Ulloa Hung 2014).

For some residents, the indigenous artefacts found around La Jaiba had a spiritual significance. Some inhabitants cherished and kept these objects at altars with other icons of the Saints. One person highlighted their healing power. During my first visit to the pool of Tamare the following account was told to me: “This was the place where they were baptizing (initiation of new healers)…this was the place where they were curing... it is just a special group of people who come here... lwas incarnated in people (gente montada) still come here, because here they have seen Indians seated in the stone, they have seen people with long hair sitting here and still sometimes you can see a woman seated with braids in her hair. So if they emerge there they toss their hair here and there and every time the hair becomes braided” And he continues: “Up there was a house where a boy who was fourteen years old and never could walk and in the small field (conuco) he found a Virgin of the Indians. Hear this, the boy stands up and starts walking, and says: mom look, mom look. So his mother moved from there and in the time of San Miguel she was organizing vela for nine days and this Virgin was sweating there (on an altar). But, they stole her, someone came, and stole her.”329

The healing power of this particular statue has remained in wider public consciousness in the village. Mr. Eloi Cruz, an agriculturalist from La Jaiba, confirmed that this image was highly esteemed years after its rediscovery. The statue was venerated during velaciones (velations, vigils) organized around an altar at the family house. The figure was valued “for prayers because it was from the Indians.” One of the inhabitants described this statue as “a doll made from a dark stone. This statue was later stolen and sold to the national brewery for 500 pesos”.330 He compared its meaning with another case he knew about: “In Arroyo Caña there is a man that has two dolls and will not sell them… I do not know if he has them on an altar but he does not sell them because these dolls protect him.” Following up on my comment about pottery sherds gaining spiritual meaning, Mr. Eloi Cruz said: “It reminds us of the Indians, we did not know them but this brings us together. As we did not know them and it was ours, you know, and one could not know it, so you keep it there. I remember I found a very beautiful one (decorated ceramic) and I brought it to my mother in law.”

One member of the community took special interest in ancestral objects. He explained that his past search for ancestral objects and enchanted treasures was motivated not just economically but also spiritually, because he has corriente del indio. This meant he was advised and protected by indigenous ancestors. They indicated archaeological sites to him in a dream and guided him to avoid danger: “some nights I was lying down and they took me to many places and they warn you, this is good. The only good thing about this is that it you can see a problem that is going to happen. You see it first, for example when someone wants to hurt you, one night before you dream about it and see that there are people who want to

329 Interview no. 20140101.
330 I have decided to not reveal the name of this contributor as he might not be fully aware of the negative consequences that his testimony might have for him.
hurt you and the next day you will not go out or want to walk there.” He experienced not only the protective role of the indigenous ancestors but also their healing agency through a dream: “I have been in their (of indigenous misterios) church... In a dream they took me, and I stayed frightened where there was a priest, I did not dare to go because I got goose skin. There were more than one thousand candles and it was twice as big as the church but under the ground... When my mother was going to die I woke up because I also smoke and I got a strong stomach ache. I had like fifteen or twenty days, without eating, and one night my stomach was tied up. One night there came like five girls and women who already passed away and they went one by one and the last one untied the thing... and now I do not have anything (any sickness), thanks God...” The formulation of the experience of disease as being tied up and the health recovery as being untied, released, is also common in other regions.

In contrast to the idea of a spiritual relationship, which is materialized in rituals or dreaming of ancestors and places associated with them, some evangelists see Charco Tamare as a place of invocation of the Devil. The contested nature of such traditions does not necessarily lead to their total discontinuity but seems to influence the process of transmitting and interpreting them. In fact, the secrecy surrounding the traditions and the conflictive opinions about them may be one of the reasons to conceal them from public eyes but to keep them in memory. In this manner they might even reach more people in the form of hearsay. Furthermore, the contestation may lead to discontinuity of practice but that does not mean direct oblivion. On the contrary, some of the converted contributors still believe that the agency of indigenous ancestors may be experienced in some places. However, after their conversion they considered it incorrect to continue the ancestral worship. The cultural memory about the indigenous past in this particular location seems to be supported by the materiality of the place, with archaeological remains functioning as mnemonic tools.
Enchanted Well and The Church Cave in Burén

Charco Tamare is not the only place associated with indigenous ancestors and sought for the reestablishment of wellbeing. Some inhabitants of La Jaiba, especially women, were told to do ritual bathing for good luck at Poza Encantada on the north side of the hill called Burén, approximately 6 km from La Jaiba. Poza Encantada (“Enchanted Well”) is a pool at the foot of a rock shelter. The pool is located close to another ritual place, a cavern called La Iglesia (also called Holy Cave or Indian Cave) situated on the same hill. Both places were associated with indigenous ancestors by the specialists and the public at large.

As one of the contributors commented on the hesitance of La Jaiba’s residents to be formally interviewed on the topic: “There are many people who practice this but never say so... But sometimes they are seen at the cave.” Also here the offerings are brought to “God and spirits of Indigenous Peoples.” Mr. Cudo added: “There are women and men who go to this pool, bring meals, and bath but they do not like that it is said. Also when you go to the healer you cannot tell that you are going there... but now people almost never go, they do not believe in this.” In both places the presence of remains of offerings indicates that ritual activities took place recently. A traditional healer from Estero Hondo confirmed that these rituals have a certain level of secrecy. This secrecy seems to be related to the social stigma surrounding these practices rather than to a prohibition to transmit the meaning of this place to outsiders.

During our visit to the place, the traditional healer Mr. Benito described its meaning. Before going to conduct ritual baths with his patients at La Poza Encantada, he eventually went to the cavern La Iglesia del Indio (“the church of the Indian”), to direct prayers there to the indigenous ancestors. He described it in the following manner: “for them this was like a church, there was a Virgin of Altagracia which was painted on the ceiling of the church. There is an altar where there are many Saints, Saint Lazarus which is also portrayed there. There is also a Saint called Capú who has been husband of Anacaona, afterwards there is a Caonao... Capú was known for making miracles and spiritual works. Another Saint that we have used and that has done invisible operations was Saint Gregory/Saint Doctor. There is also Saint Roch/Saint pilgrim. They all are in the Church but it is characterized mainly by the old things that are indigenous (spirits/peoples), and you know that before they were walking around here. Including they (some people from Santo Domingo maybe archaeologists) have found here their little stick (tarito) and they took it to the museum that buys these things for a lot of money, and also a golden medal was found.” Mr. Benito explained further the historical connection of this cavern with indigenous ancestors, which is said also to be the reason why prayers are directed to them here. This ancestral link might also be derived from the water symbolism as the bottom of the Church is covered by approx. 50 cm of water.

Poza Encantada is a pool partially covered by a rock shelter that is situated at the south site of hill from the cavern La Iglesia. Like La Iglesia, the Poza Encantada is not exclusively an ancestral place but belongs to “many Saints”. Mr. Benito invokes here personally with divine help his patron Ogún. In his view, lwas like Ogún, Anaisa Pie, Metreseli, and the indigenous misterios (Anacaona, Capú, Caonao) relate to the

331 Some elderly residents of Estero Hondo confirmed they were coming to the cave La Iglesia “to pray and bring meals to Indians”.
332 Juan Cruz, a former teacher from La Jaiba, reacted in the following manner to my statement about a lot of people thinking that there are spirits living in the caves: “This was teaching of the past, this was one of the things that was taught by the Spanish, that people think that in the darkness are hidden the spirits, for this reason the cavern has this value, people still think this, including they were thinking that they were living in the water pool, so you were explaining and people were telling you: you are crazy to think this and my answer is no. Everyone who enters into the pool drowns, this was said. Everyone who says Cave of Indian should say Cave of Dominican...” And he continues: “But this was everything that they taught us. From the beginning because the history is written every time in the name of those who pay for it, that’s why the history is almost never real. There is a relation between the history and reality but the history is as they pay for it.”
333 At La Poza rests of candles and tobacco were found, whereas in La Iglesia the offerings included bottles of flowers, tobacco and decomposed dishes, including bread, maní and sweets.
334 As Tejeda Ortiz (2013) suggested, the lwas may have Catholic patron Saints. Some devotees would consider them the same while many initiated healers would not.
Division of water. For Mr. Benito, the presence of Ogún is perceived the most and there are clear signs of Ogún in the form of colored marks on the rock walls above the pool and reflections in the water. In a special song dedicated to Ogún, he asks him to come to help him in his work, “and after all others enter, if you want talk to them you can do so in the language they spoke in before.”

According to Mr. Benito, many people still visit La Poza, including his patients, having different occupations and social statuses (he was proud to say he was here with a civil judge), even people coming from distant locations such as San Juan. The ritual baths at La Poza are motivated by a variety of therapeutic purposes, such as warding off the negative spirits or resolving matrimonial problems. The function of bathing is to activate the good luck that is given by the gods. As he explains: “It also depends on the god, because if you have good luck because a god gives it to you... the god also says, help yourself first then I will help.” It is through the knowledge that the Divine Father has given him and through botanical knowledge that he can treat different corporal diseases, like infections, kidney stones, asthma, and anemia, using a mixture (botella) of different herbs. For the cleansing rituals, Mr. Benito indicated that one should light “candles of seven powers”, while chanting to “Small Saint Virgin”, asking her to “take away all the bad, take away all the bad and take it to the sea and throw it into the sea.” The components of the ritual bath are frequently: “sunflower to guide your good luck through the solar passage, pachuli, flores libertad, albahaca, rosa de piru, hierba luisa, hierba buena, mix from honey, coco de indio, perfume from the oriental wood, one perfume for home”.

Both Ogún and the Virgin are invoked during the rituals; the well is associated with indigenous ancestors. Regarding my question about how God made the “Indians” live under the water, Mr. Benito answered: “because they were old people, they were people like us...they decided to get into the water, you understand, because the Indians were living here before, ... because they were from the water...” The last reference to the indigenous peoples as emerging from the water could be easily linked to origin narratives from the South-American mainland of various linguistically related groups (see chapter ten). At a different occasion he answered the same question with the following clarification: “they owned this territory and were walking here on earth but also in the water and when Colón continued to attack them they went into the water” The water here turns into a dwelling place of the dead.

Mr. Benito elaborated further on the spiritual relation with indigenous peoples: “We are children of Indians and Spaniards. The Spaniards called this island Santo Domingo and the Indians called it Kiskeya. So they married and therefore we have race of Spaniards and Indian. There are people who do not feel this relation with the past. There are some people who are descendants but do not feel this relation, my wife has corriente del indio, la morena (dark hair, light skin) you have seen her. She receives Indian women if you want she will talk to you but she does not speak well, it is like in Latin... She has something from Indian because Indians had brown skin with good long hair and Spanish people were of your color but there is a lot of secrets, you know.” In his view then, the corriente is a spiritual connection, which is also linked to one’s physical appearance and ancestry. This interpretation is clearly embedded in his historical knowledge, which repeats concepts from the official historical discourse, e.g. the name for the island or the reference to Caonao, one of the glorified heroes of national history and the category of the Indian race based on skin complexion and type of hair.335 In short, the spiritual experience of the contributor is strongly informed by the official discourse about the past as well as by broader oral traditions wherein lwas and ancestral powers can be invoked at certain places and mobilized for own benefits. The fact that multiple saints, misterios and lwas are sought and used in cleansing ceremonies shows the fluid meanings of some of these sanctuaries.

335 Note that the “Indian race” is also one of the categories implying skin color on Dominican id-cards (see Moya Pons 2009).
Again, the material remains and broader oral traditions about these places seem to contribute to the continuous association of water pools, and in this case also caverns, with indigenous ancestors.

Figure 45 Cavern called La Iglesia close to Estero Hondo.

Figure 46 Mr. Benito in front of La Poza Encantada.
Indigenous ancestors at Dominican Altars

The association of indigenous forefathers with water is clearly displayed in Dominican altars, where they are represented in various forms, including icons bought at local botanical shops, objects like decorated artifacts, fossils, and stones of different shapes and colors that are placed in man-made wells. These items represent indigenous misterios and facilitate contact with them, other objects gain on special importance and uses because they proceed from ancestral sites. Some of these objects, like a stone in the shape of a dove, encountered at Poza Encantada, is used for Mr. Benito’s personal protection. Powder from the Charco Tamare is used as one of the ingredients of a botella in La Jaiba. The stones and calcic powders from caverns in Báñica and Boca de Mana are also considered to have protective properties and their water has healing powers. Popular artefacts founds at altars and households are also: thunder axes (petaloid axes), which are kept for their power to protect the household against thunder or for keeping water fresh. This is part of a broader worldview in which people can transform into intangible objects as well as into flora and fauna.

Figure 47 Mr. Benito in front of his altar, holding the image of Ogún in his hand. Below the altar lies a man-made pool for Indigenous ancestors.

336 Interview no. 30. The contributor answered my question “why do people put the ceramics in the water?” in the following way: “Ah God, to give them drink, to keep them in fresh cold environment.”
Figure 48 The Image of Anacaona and Venezuelan Trinity at Mr Benito’s altar.

Figure 49 Ancestral indigenous objects on an altar in Marmolejos, Puerto Plata.
Corrientes and ciguapas: counterpoint of the self and the collective

The relation between the agency of ancestors and health should be seen within the horizon of knowledge that epistemological communities have gained through informal education. Personal identification with indigenous ancestors is not just characteristic of traditional healers but also of individuals who might not develop this corriente further but are very aware of protection and different restrictions that this corriente implies.337

The head of one of my hosting families also had this awareness of having a corriente. The person visited the Catholic church almost on a daily basis, but on one occasion confessed not to be able to enter the river alone because of getting a feeling of dizziness and of being pulled by the river. Similarly, my guide Abel Gonzáles (from Monte Cristi) would not believe in 21 Division, but to a certain degree admitted the possibility of having the corriente. This was diagnosed when he suffered as a child from respirational problems described as an experience of drowning (ahogado). Since Abel’s childhood, his parents have been converted to Protestantism but they still were very concerned when he went diving because they believed this to be a particularly dangerous activity for him because of this corriente.

One recurring theme in Dominican oral tradition is water as a source of life and death, having both vital and dangerous potentials. The paragraphs above emphasized its vital force, but this is not to be disconnected

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337 As earlier mentioned healer Benito’s suggested that to have “corriente del Indio” implies to have a spiritual connection of indigenous ancestors which is also linked to one’s physical appearance and ancestry. This interpretation of corriente as a grace which is accompanied with different restrictions was also formulated by one of the contributors from La Jaiba. This contributor suggested that people with this corriente have to maintain well hygiene, regularly bath in perfumed waters and avoid some places in river because they are more likely to be taken away: “at night they take you to the river, they fall in love with you, throw you into the water, and you will not get wet, to be taken away to the pool is to die from being frightened.”
from its dangerous aspect. There are several testimonies and narratives that might be interpreted as warnings to be cautious and act with respect towards bodies of water. This applies especially to children and people with *corriente* would run a greater risk of being “kidnapped” or “taken away” at the springs or when swimming in deep pools. Some people who are abducted learn from the ancestral lesson, develop their gift to heal, or are rewarded in material ways. Others stay forever in the realm of the dead in their subaquatic world. This is also the case of the subsequent testimony about the violent death of a grandson of Mrs. Felicia Ulloa.

During my visit to the Ulloa family from La Trinchera (close to Villa Vasquez, province of Monte Cristi), Mrs. Ulloa shared her pain caused by the loss of her beloved grandson. His violent murder several months ago was described in terms of him having been taken away because of having the *corriente del indio*. While showing me the picture of her grandson, Elia, she described this tragedy with a shaking voice: “He knew he should not go to the river and that’s why he never did. So, when his friends invited him to the river, he did not know how to swim. He had the corriente, poor boy, his name was Elia, and I just got goose skin, he had the corriente... They (the indigenous misterios) keep these people. So it could be that they took him away. *They are secluded in the river Yaque.*”

This account was not unique, neither in referring to a murderer who had not been punished because of the corruption or failures in implementing the justice system, nor in referring to the realm of indigenous ancestors being a resting place for people with *corriente*. Similarly, different members of the Torres and Rojas families interpreted the death of drowned children in a small stream at La Peña, a zone of Marmolejos near Mamey, as the result of ancestral agency.

At another occasion, the *indigenous misterios* appear as givers of healing power to members of the Ulloa family. Like in the case of Elia, Mrs. Felicia’s sister Lola and her nephew (who passed away at young age) also had this *corriente*. In the description of Lola’s initiation we find elements that are common in oral traditions about the indigenous peoples. Mrs. Ulloa recalls (but not as a direct testimony) that her sister was taken away by Indians to a cave where there was a green pool. They combed her hair with a golden comb and immersed her into the water to recognize her *corriente*. Afterwards she was able to work with fifty-seven indigenous ancestors, who were invoked to heal, to assist with childbirth, and to act as a seer.

Many quotidian activities of the past such as washing clothes, bathing, or just swimming were done at rivers. Another repeated moral of narratives about the indigenous ancestors, which is spread throughout the entire island, is that one should be cautious at water sources. In Boca de Yuma, a former resident of La Gran Chorra (the settlement near the archaeological site La Aleta) described how in the past the people were going to wash clothes in a spring called Escalera: “In this spring you could hear water sounds/rings and when you came down you could feel that something sprung into the water because it splashed but we do not know what it was... Well the old people said that it was Indians of the Water but we have never seen them. People were frightened by this... You know the people, you know the old people talk like this.”

This contributor remarks bear witness to the mixed feeling that some of the contributors had about these narratives. Many of them regarded the narratives about indigenous peoples as tales or stories (*cuentos*). Many of these narratives included also stereotypical representations, indicating dissociation on the part of the narrators. The status of tales and the corresponding stereotypical representations is informative. In a certain sense “tales about Indians” might seem to be positioned on the opposite end of the continuum of the identification with the indigenous ancestors. This could to a certain degree be considered as forming a contrast with the above mentioned spiritual or a genealogical link formulated in the concept of *corriente*.

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338 Interview with Mrs. Ulloa.
339 A similar case was recorded in Boyá.
As much as these attitudes might seem divergent, they still constitute the cultural memory of the indigenous past in the broader societal context.

In some locations, instead of the character of indigenous misterios we encounter stories about beautiful Indian women similar to Sirens/Mermaids. The setting or the manner in which such a narrative is told, indicate that these are stories for amusement of the audience. Referring to the place Charco de India near to Imbert, Mr. Bonilla, told us: “This legend says that since 1800 people were living here and the legend says that an Indian woman was sitting on a stone combing her hair with a golden comb (Mr. Rivera filled in: seated on the rock), yes on the rock, when she heard people she went into hiding but some people were able to see her but they were scared because there were not many inhabitants here and this was before the railway...” Mr. Rivera added that this particular indigenous woman was seducing one of the male passersby who fell in love with her. The danger here is impersonated as the deceiving beauty of this woman, who is described as well formed, long haired, and naked. This often, slightly erotic account of a beautiful lady seducing a passerby is comparable to stories about sirens, other mermaid-like creatures and ciguapas. The latter are naked creatures, depicted as half indigenous women but with the distinguishing inhuman feature of feet turned backwards. The ciguapas have been incorporated into folk culture throughout the island as eroticized, dangerous, and deceitful creatures. In Marmolejos, the story of a ciguapa has been encoded into a popular song; Martin Nuesis recited its contents as follows: “In Nava, Samberes’ land they made a song about her. On the way from Marmolejos in the land of Samberes they captured a ciguapa, they captured one because she stopped, when a man captures/takes ciguapa and she gave a birth in the cave, the man went there and there were like one hundred ciguapas and all of them jump on him and tear him into pieces and there they found him dead.”

Ciguapas are “the Others”, for which the folk tales warn us. During my fieldwork, I did not meet anyone who would identify with ciguapas or would bring them offerings.

Dominican water sources are domains of a variety of ancestral and divine beings that can be salutary or detrimental to human health. Simultaneously, they also figure as settings for rich oral traditions. Similarly, in Cuba the cultural and religious diversity has been translated into a gamma of meanings attributed to the sweet water sources. Specific landmarks, like the subsequent example, function as places of memory that integrate this multifaceted symbolism.

**Beyond the written history: multiple meaning of Waterfall in Barajagua**

Saltadero is a small waterfall in the river Barajagua, which passes through the village that carries its name. Its multiple meanings speak about dynamics of the religious diversity, which is characteristic for this region. Both the waterfall and the village are intimately related to the history of the Virgen of Charity from Cobre, the patron Saint of Cuba. The importance of the waterfall as a sanctuary of this Virgin is evident when we listen to the testimonies of the contemporary inhabitants, which provide us with details that complement and expand upon the official historical version.

According to local history, the Virgen of Charity was brought from Bahía de Nipe to Barajagua before being relocated to her current location in El Cobre at the end of 16th century. In accordance with data collected by Peña et al. (2014), oral history about the Virgin at this location is often more detailed and situated within the local landscape, in which Saltadero is an important landmark. Mrs. Caridad Portelles from Barajagua explained the importance of this small waterfall: “When they brought the Virgin here to Barajagua, they came navigating over the river from the beach Mabiseña of Nipe. So it was there where the waterfall is that they brought her, and it was here where she passed by. There at the waterfall they made

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340 Interview with Martin Nuesis.
her a small house. Since then barges sailed here because this river was traversable.... Three Juans brought her... well they look like they are depicted on the picture." 341 The waterfall is currently a place for spiritual reflection and pilgrimage, where people may direct prayers and offerings to the Virgin, seeking her help, protection and spiritual support. 342 At the waterfall there are no material remains of the above-mentioned shrine. Its current occasional use seems to rely on the oral history and continuous performances of acts of devotion.

The Virgen of Charity is kept in high esteem, especially among the older generation that still recalls her miracles and patronal celebrations. During droughts or other crises in the community the Virgin was taken out in a ceremonial procession and carried by community members to the church of Cueto, while people were praying, singing and publicly performing penance, showing their commitment to the Virgin. Besides being invoked at her natural shrine, the Virgin was worshipped in the church (which has been inaccessible for a long period) and in family homes, where masses were celebrated.

The Virgin is accepted as a patron both by descendants of funding families and by people of migrant background until now. 343 The testimony of Mr. Escalona Galán, however, provides us with an exceptional information about how certain landscape features may be perceived and reinterpreted by new migrants and fused with pre-existing symbolism. This young healer of mixed Cuban-Haitian origins described the various meanings of Saltadero. 344 As he has grown up with the knowledge of Regla de Ocha, Haitian 21 Division, Espiritismo Cruzado and Catholicism, this waterfall has for him multiple significances, a place where candles are lit to the Virgen de Caridad: “Every time the Virgen de Caridad is the Saint of water, for Catholics it is the Virgen from Cobre, for Africans, Santería, it is Ochún and for Haitians it is Simbi, the queen of water. There it exists in (form of) a majá (Boa Cubana). El majá is mentioned as Majá of Saint Mary.”

While the whole river is representing Oshún, in the past people came also to Saltadero specifically to bring offerings to her. According to this healing specialist Oshún is “a goddess of love, richness, gold, of virtue of health, of women, and of twins. It represents women, the mother, that has her son, a lot of women pray for their children and mankind... many come to ask for cleansing, to pray, as part of complying with a vow and when they go to a foreign country, others who are getting married.” 345 The sacred narrative connects the waterfall and the river with other domains of deities like the sea, because “Virgen de Caridad and Virgen de Regla, which is Yemayá, are sisters. That’s why it is said that the river flows into the sea, therefore when everyone who is going to travel and is going to cross the sea, we invoke both Virgen de Caridad and Virgen de Regla as a protection.” 346

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341 Her testimony includes some details (such as that the waterfall was the place of the first shrine and river was passable by boat) that are not included in the historical sources. In contrast, his reference to the ethnic origin of the founders is likely to derive from the images of the Virgen depicted together with three Juans.

342 Interview with Caridad Portelles (no. 112355).

343 The narrative and the devotion to the Virgen are also well known among members of migrant families. Rosalina Segura Hidalgo, born and raised in Barajagua (origin: Spanish mother and Jamaican father; history related to the Cueto) adds: “My father was telling us a lot of stories. It was said that the Virgin was brought from Bánica, they took her in Saltadero, it is a camp and soon they hid it in Loma Saito. Some black gentlemen hid her, one of them was called Juan...” This again embeds the official narrative in the local landscape and adds background information about her appearance. I could not find a Cuban location for Bánica; it is possible that the Dominican town Bánica is referred to, where the knowledge about the serpent narrative is still alive.

344 Interview no. 122930.

345 A ritual expert of Regla de Ocha from Jiguaní explained that: “river is the life, cleanliness, tranquility, freshness, it serves to heal you, bless you, and purify you”. The initiation of the Osha Rule is done at the river. The river is visited for cleansing, for opening you the road (positive future), for love, for health, with the help of Ochún. Different herbs (e.g. rompesaraguey) or flowers are used for removing curses or bad luck. And personally he also appreciated the sun flower as it guides your luck.

346 Interview no. 122930.
The Twins, called *Jimaguas* or *Iheyes*, are messengers of the Virgin, doctors curing with herbs and protectors of children. As they are children of Changó one may direct oneself to them through the *álamo* tree, and their place is the Palma Real. In addition, they are accompanying the river, which is the domain of their mother, Oshun.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 51 Virgen of Charity afront of the church (during its reconstruction) in Barajagua.*

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347 Interview no. 122930.
Another divine being associated with the Saltadero is Simbi, the queen of the water, the guardian of sweet water sources, said to manifest herself as a majá (boa cubana).348 Mr. Escalona continued about the figure of the majá: “It is said that when a majá turns old, it sings as a rooster and goes to the sea… This is because it is a pact between the sky and earth. It is an animal that was walking but made a lot of incest which should not happen so God condemned it and said that so long as it will live on earth it will live dragging and when it turns into a adult age it will sing as a rooster and go to the water.”

The meaning of Saltadero within the broader Cuban and Dominican landscapes
This narrative about the majá is not particular to the Haitian 21 Division. Other contributors from Barajagua narrated about a mysterious giant serpent living in Saltadero. Ms. Segura Hidalgo suggested that some people were coming to see the majá in Saltadero, about which “it was said that he was singing like a rooster...and after singing he would disappear.” The majá living in the pool was related to the level of the water: when the majá left the water level would decrease. Another resident, Mrs. Caridad Portelle, called

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348 Simbi is also mentioned in Dominican Bánica. Note that in Palo Mayombe the simbi is a generic term for the forces vivifying the natural elements in the broader landscape.
this majá the Mother of the Water and said that she saw it when people were drawing the water from the last pool, the river where it was hidden.  

The personage of the serpent that sings as a rooster before leaving to the sea, was registered also at other Cuban and Dominican locations. Mr. Zaldívar from Fray Benito (province of Holguín) told us: “When the majá gets tired of walking and arrives at certain age it makes itself a serpent and it goes to the sea where it turns into a fish. I do not know what the name of the fish is, but people are afraid of it. I think it might be a whale.” He confirmed that the majá when being in the mountains also sings as rooster.  

One of the residents of Managuaco, Mr. Jeronimo Santana, devotee of Espiritismo del Cordón, told us about a curious encounter of one of the inhabitants of Guayacanes with a mysterious giant serpent. This serpent was said to live in the cave of Guayacán on the hill and it sung as a rooster. When this inhabitant of Guayacanes went to throw away a guanajo (turkey), in order to not contaminate the surroundings of the village, he saw this enormous serpent. Its appearance was interpreted as a sign of prohibition to contaminate this place. The existence of this giant serpent, said to be a guardian of the hill, was doubted by some but one contributor confirmed to have see its skeleton. The Great Majá also called Mother of Water personage is a quite widespread figure in Cuban oral tradition. The Mother of Water is described as an enormous majá, whistling, malignant and living in the rivers, wells and lakes. According to oral traditions edited by Feijoó (1996) the Mother of Water is a dangerous being that makes people disappear or drown, and sometimes may cause fever. Other narratives describe it as relatively beneficial because it preserves the water where it lives and is able to call the clouds (Feijoó 1996).  

The association of the majá with the deities living in the Saltadero seems to be based not only on the location but also on its importance for health and wellbeing. The role of the boa as an agent in healing becomes clearer when we looking at its historical background. In order to trace this, it is vital to cite more details from regional examples, which show how the significance of this narrative seems to have shifted from that of an indigenous sacred narrative to that of “a folktale”.  

There are comparable Dominican examples from locations such as Bánica or Boyá. One of the residents of Bánica, Mrs. Hermania Alcántara told us about a giant serpent, which was living at the hill and when it was raining descended with the rain from the hill, it was leaving a road behind in which a river was created and then it went to the sea. It had seven heads. When it became a serpent and threw itself into the sea it cursed those who saw it and did not kill it. It sings three times at night and takes with it everything that it finds in its way: it takes away everything that it encounters.  

This narrative was also known in Pedro Santana (neighboring to Bánica), where Mr. De Los Santos told us: “Before, the people used to say, there was a serpent on the top of the mountain which was singing as a rooster”. His spouse added: “I have heard that when the water level in the river increased they said that it was a serpent descending... sometimes there are serpents that bring all this amount of the river, this is what people in the past said... In that time for crossing the river Artibonito to Haiti you would have to find a very skilled person.” Later, Mr. De Los Santos linked this narrative to the destructive power of that river during the hurricane David, and suggested that the river was sometimes very dangerous and only skilled people could cross it. Similarly, in the version of Mr. León Alcántara the powerful current of the river was the serpent’s body; he suggested in fact that the “serpent is attracting the water, as his body

349 Interview no. 112355.
350 Interview no. 122438.
351 Interview no. 152123.
352 The recorder being out of battery, this information was based on the fieldnotes.
353 Interviews no. 102432.
enlarges also the river does."\textsuperscript{354} Another member of the founding family Alcántara, Benjamín, added: “the serpents that were raised on this hill were jumping into the river when it was raining a lot, in this way a current was formed and it was said that it carried a thing that is called a diamond, yes a diamond. When they threw themselves into the river, when they threw themselves into the sea, when they were going there they said cursed be those who saw me and did not kill me.”\textsuperscript{355} The narrative about the serpent was also known in Boyá. In the Boyá version, a horse stepped by accident on the diamond of the serpent and later was killed by it.\textsuperscript{356}

As one of the residents of San Rafael from Boca de Yuma, who was initiated in Haitian 21 Division, has argued, the figure of the great serpent should not be confused with the Danbala, the creator lwa, who is also living in the river. In the Haitian 21 Division Danbala is the ancient omniscient Serpent, the wise Papa Danbala upon which God has bestowed the mystical priestly knowledge or profound insight about the world behind the material world. The incarnation of this lwa is expressed by the transformation of the healer into a serpent or an eel when trying to cross a river, after which he would mysteriously reappear again. According to this healer, Danbala is not related to the serpent that is said to sing like a rooster, because the latter was a bad creature. He further explained that when the time of this serpent has arrived, when it turns old and it sings like a rooster, it goes flying by air to the river, where it is transformed into a bad fish or serpent. When it flies and it finds something on its way it divides it in two. This serpent sometimes turns into Khon, a bird, which for the same reason people avoid to eat.\textsuperscript{357}

In the Cuban animated landscape rivers and especially deep pools are considered dwellings of jigües. These have various physical characteristics and are mostly described as “small boys with black or indian color”. In the data collected at different locations their character was often described as puckish, molesting and scaring people but they also may fall in love with people and sometimes even be dangerous. They are said to appear in deep pools and rivers but also in trees (in particular the anacagüita) and other specific dwelling places.\textsuperscript{358} In Barajagua this was a small well somewhere in hills.

Mr. Alberto Pérez from Jiguani narrated about jigüe: “It is said that in this part of the river, where it makes a big curve, where there is an anacahüita tree, there is the well of jigüe. And they call it like this because many people say that they have seen there a jigüe emerging... They say that it had the form of a colored child and emerged in the vegetation alongside the river. So they say that there it was coming out, but I tell this to you because it is what the grandparents said and that’s why they called the well like this: it was very big and had great depth... It was used for bathing... I think this was really more like a legend... I was not bathing there, not because of the jigüe but because the well was very deep.”\textsuperscript{359} Mrs. Celida Hernández Reyes, one of the inhabitants of Jiguani, affirmed that a jigüe was appearing in the river Cauto, overthrowing passersby or even making them disappear. Another Jiguanicera comments on this part that

\textsuperscript{354} Interview with Mr. León Alcántara, no. 170: “After the serpents have grown up they turn into a bird (un pájaro), which was done in (unintelligible m. 19.36) ... sing like a rooster, and when they throw them into the river, after it has rained, they dive into the river, and create a blockade in the river like Artibonito, the Artibonito blocked, so that the water that streams grow, because this being pulls (attracts) the water together, the water raises and like this it can descend, and the river found a flat land, when the river Artibonito finds the flat part of land, it goes more than three kilometers because of this being and after that this being flows into the sea, and when this being goes to fall into the sea it gets to the hill in the sea, to this cave in the sea. As a boy I saw something from the old time because my father died at the age of 110 years.”

\textsuperscript{355} Mr. Benjamin Alcántara (no. 162) compares this further with the biblical narrative: “This is produced like the case of the caterpillar that turns into a butterfly because of the spirit that the Scripture describes. So this is like the case of the caterpillar. What do you think about an animal that turns into another animal? It is weird but for this reason you have to read the Scripture, this says that this is like the caterpillar that transforms into the butterfly.”

\textsuperscript{356} Interview no. 043546.

\textsuperscript{357} Interview no. 4227 with a traditional healer of Haitian origin, resident of San Rafael de Yuma living more than twenty year in the Dominican Republic. I was not able to verify what bird Khon exactly is.

\textsuperscript{358} The choice of the anacagüita tree may be related to its extraordinary character because of the exploding sounds when its seeds fall on the ground.

\textsuperscript{359} Jigües have figured also as a theme in oral poetry e.g. “El güije de la soledad” by Silvio Rodríguez, and even as the theme of a ballet play: El Güije by Alberto Alonso.
when she was a child she sometimes saw this jíguè at a small well and he was joshing her by sticking out his tongue (Mrs. Jínez Sánchez). During the fieldwork there were no ritual activities directed to jíguès. Unlike what Bachiller y Morales wrote in 1883, at present in the Cuban locations jíguès were not consulted for future telling neither were they considered to have the power to make people ill or to cure them (as suggested by Feijoó 1996). Future data collections and studies on this personage should clarify the picture.

The multiple meanings associated with Cuban and Dominican water sources reflect the rich cultural history of these islands. One of the cases from Managuaco illustrates how some of the attributed meanings may be based on a particular individual spiritual experience. Mr. Alcides Campo Tarragó, one of the adherents of Espiritismo Cruzado in Managuaco, explained that one night he had a revelation about a spiritual being that to my knowledge was not registered elsewhere. About this revelation in dreams he shared with me: “This what I will tell you, I have not heard from anyone nor have I read it anywhere, this came to me in a dream, ... you are the only person that has heard this story because I have not told it to anyone (pause). She is an African lady, I know her with her name Sitochi, she is the African queen, the Queen of the Sweet Waters. This girl was carrying water in a basket, so I do not know if it was because of the droughts, but she is searching for the water and at this moment the basket breaks but there is something divine that makes the water and she turns into the Queen of Waters.” Afterwards, he again emphasized that he had learned this through a revelation. Although he said not to make petitions for rain, he made a statue representing Sitochi which he keeps on his altar.361

360 Bachiller y Morales (1883) described jíguès as mysterious beings living in the water and presenting themselves as small “Indians” who could kill those who passed by just by looking at them. There were some in the lagoon of María Luisa in Bayamo.
361 Interview no. 122424.
Caribbean waterbodies as reservoirs of indigenous past

The bodies of water figure often in Caribbean cultural memory as ancestral places, as a domain of the dead, but also as a locale of renewal, of healing power and new life force. Before progressing to other features of healing landscapes, I would like to comment on the symbolic elements that are present in the narratives mentioned so far. This is will provide us with some preliminary insights into the complexity of the cultural memory connected to the water bodies. Again, following the objectives of the project, the hypothetical links with the indigenous past are highlighted.

Water sources are dwellings of different divine beings including the Divine Twins, King of Water, Simbi (D’lo) and indigenous ancestors. Occasionally they are also inhabited by Iwas like Ogún, Santa Marta, orishas like Ochún, Catholic Saints such as Saint John or the Virgin Mary (Virgen of Charity) and other spiritual beings like the Cuban jigües.

The symbolic meaning of Twins and their relation to water sources seems to be historically related to Kongo and Dahomey beliefs. In Kongo beliefs, children with a special distinction, such as twins (marassá) and albinos, are associated with simbi (plural bisimbi), which are spirits of localities, inhabiting rocks, gullies, streams and pools. These spirits are able to influence the fertility and wellbeing of those who live or pass nearby, and they may have a negative impact if they are not treated with respect (Macgaffey 2009). Members of lineages into which twins have been born are, therefore, in the domain of the simbi agency (Macgaffey 2009). At the beginning of the 20th century bisimbi were considered to be embodied as persons of different color (green, red, black), or as pythons, lightning, gourds, mortars or pots (Kavuna 1915 in MacGaffey 2009). Throughout West Central Africa such spirits exist under different names: they are the tutelary spirits of particular territories and the principal animating forces of power devices and magical objects (MacGaffey 2009). They incarnate as twins. In Kongo belief the spirit of such children born with special distinction is nkisi Nitimu a Maza, literally translated as “The King of the Water”. This corresponds with Dahomeyan toxosu, which has the same literal translation. In Dahomeyan worldview, toxosu, those who are born with a special distinction, such as twins, become spirits of the rivers and guard the entrance to the kingdom of death. Toxosu are under the rule of the king of the children that are born with special distinction, and under that of the group of Damabala or Dambada Hwedo, powerful unknown ancestors who have entered loko, a silk-cotton tree or mountains (Herskovits & Herskovits 1933: 30).

In the Caribbean the West African concept of the King of the Water and the special importance of twins may have fused with the Arawakan figure of four divine twin brothers, who played a main role in Pané’s fragmented text about the origin of the sea. The sea originated as a consequence of a great flood that was caused by one of the Twins who broke the calabash wherein the remains of the son of the Creator (Yaya) were located. The motif of the great flood as origin of the sea returns also the creation narrative from St. Vincent as registered by de la Borde in 1674 (Gullick 1976). In the latter, Longuo, the great master of the Chemees (spirits) was angry with the first people because they did not offer him cassava or ouicou and as a punishment he sent a flood so that most of them drowned. The only ones who survived were those who fled to the hills, the peaks of which became islands. The twins are also actors in the great flood narrative that was collected in the 1940s by Lalung (1948) in Dominica. Briefly, the main plot can be summarized as follows. Jaya buried his only daughter in a calabash, which he placed at the foot of a mountain. Later he

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362 Breton registered various names for twins: amayem (sg.), máao (sg.), mataönum (pl.), mónico (sg.), monochicoüarium (pl.), and oüarium (pl.). De Goeje registered the word Ibiju for twins.

363 The twin motif is important in many parts of the Americas. Compare the figure of Makunaima and his twin brother Pia in the Amazon or the Guayanas; as well as Tominkaru and Duid for the Wapishana. In Mesoamerica the twins (Sun and Moon) are related to “the Grandmother”, the patron deity of the sweatbath (temascal). The Popol Vuh, a famous Maya-K’iche’ sacred text, describes their descent into the Underworld and their victory over the deities of death.
opened it and therein he found whales, manatee, sharks, and other big fish. Four twin brothers went to see the pumpkin because they wanted the fish. When the twins opened it the water gushed out, they got scared and let the pumpkin drop so that it broke. The whole plain was covered with water and only peaks of mountains remained visible above the sea. Thus the Antilles and the mainland were formed. This narrative resembles Amazon flood narratives about the destruction of ancient human life and its recreation (e.g. Luengo López 2009 for the Añú; Perrin 1987 for the Wayuú).

In both narratives from Hispaniola and Dominica the great transformation emerges from the fruit, the vessel in which the remains of the deceased were deposited, perhaps symbolically referring to beliefs in an afterlife, where death is followed by a new birth or by a transformation leading to a new creation. From this perspective the present-day use of calabash (higüera, güira364, Crescentia cujete) for depositing offerings at pools dedicated to twins at La Descubierta, or as musical instrument (to invoke spiritual beings in Pedro Santana), can be related to the symbolism of the indigenous origin narrative. Simultaneously, its symbolic use can be related to ideas and practices in West African regions, where different types of calabashes (Lagenaria siceraria, L. brevilflora and Crescentia cujete) are important elements in religious ceremonies (e.g. in Benin and Nigeria). They are symbols used by the Fon peoples to describe the universe, and they represent the unbroken cycle of life among Yoruba (Quiroz 2015). Among the present-day devotees of Cuban Regla the calabash belongs to Elegba and the pumpkin to Oshun and Orishaoko, and they are used in baths to attract good fortune (Quiros-Moran 2009).

The African “King of the Water” is similar to the “Master of the Water”, a common figure in the Amazon cosmologies, often a boa constrictor. The serpent figure appears also in Pané’s account on two occasions. One of first possible allusion to this narrative cycle when the friar mentions briefly that the behique can be resuscitated and healed by a serpent. Secondly, when he mentions the figures of Boinaiol/Boinayel (transl. Whitehead 2011/Arrom 1974) whose representation together with another zemí (or cimiminì) called Maroia/Márohu (Whitehead 2011/Arrom 1974) was found in a cavern that was hold in a great esteem, and when visited in the period of droughts it started to rain. Arrom (1974, 1975) translates this term as brown snake and adds in Amazonian worldviews this represent the mother of water. Breton registers various Kalinago’s words for a serpent, one of these ūanâche is described as a big serpent that turns towards the constellation called baccámon or Scorpion, when this raises in the morning. At last, also another element of pools as place where divine being Guahagiona bath himself in order to cure him from boils unites this text with the current meaning of pools as healing places. This narrative seems to be related to the contemporary narratives about great boas from Cuba and Dominica, which in turn have direct parallels in the Lesser Antilles, the Guyanas and Suriname. The first historical reference to the great serpent in Lesser Antilles is from Bouton in 1640 in his description of the French establishment on Dominica: “They say that there is a serpent in Dominica which has the power of making itself large or small and that it has a ruby or gem of the same luster in the middle of its forehead. It takes this gem off when it wants to drink and puts it back afterwards. No one may go or dares to go and see it in its cavern unless he has fasted for three days and abstains from his wife. Otherwise he should not be able to see it, or he would be in danger of being bewitched by it, that is to say, killed” (Bouton 1640: 1-2).

Three centuries later, Taylor (1941) in his ethnographic study of the Caribs on Dominica registered a local narrative about a giant snake that can crow like a cock and in whose head a stone of dazzling brilliance is set. Being one of the main progenitors of humankind, Bakámo, having the body of a snake and a man’s

364 In Kalinago: huíra (Breton 1665).
head, can transform himself into a normal man to help and counsel people. In the past, he was carried out to sea where he became the constellation of that name (in Western astronomy: Scorpio) (Taylor 1941 cited by Whitehead 1992: 312). Another version of this narrative mentions the two brothers as those who have received the arrowroot for charms: “There lived in Salybia two brothers called Maruka and Sinimari, famous for the charms they made. They would go up to the House of the Master Boa ... who, when all the earth was soft, made the Boa's Stairway at Sineku. He is big, big, big; has a diamond crest on his head; and he crows just like a cock. Well, when they had found him, they would take powdered tobacco and burn it before him on the blade of a paddle. Then that boa ... vomited ... boa arrowroot. After that, the boa would vanish, and in his place a naked young man would appear ... and asked Maruka and Sinanari what ... they wanted ... He explained to them how to employ the arrowroot in order to make their charms. (When) Maruka and Sinanari ... felt old age ... they went away to 'the other country'. They reached the shores of the Orinoco and plunged into its stream ... They emerged upon the opposite bank ... (as) two young lads; and upon the water ... there floated two empty turtle shells. They never came back to Dominica; and at least one of them died, but the other, was thought to be still living” (Taylor 1952: 273).

Also the mainland themes of healing, Twin brothers and Divine Serpent coincide with the data from the Caribbean. To illustrate this with one example: de Goeje (1942) registered a tradition according to which the First Divine Healer, Harliwanli, from whom the other healers originate, was the older of two twin brothers. Harliwanli received from the Oriyu, the Serpent Mother (a water deity) the basic ingredients for healing and the instructions how to use them (tobacco, calabash and two white stones for the rattle). Similarly, on the mainland it is said that charm plants (Calidrium bicolor) originated from the Divine Serpent (Penard 1907).

The thematic coincidences between these mainland narratives and contemporary narratives about the Great Boa from Dominican Republic and Cuba provide us not only with more time depth, indicating a long continuity, but also with more details about the symbolic associations of water bodies, healing and ancestors. This fits well within the broader Amazon cosmology about the restorative and destructive powers of water. On the basis of the aforementioned comparisons, we conclude that the Great Boa narrative is part of the indigenous heritage. Most likely it was a well-known part of the pre-colonial religion and cultural memory of these islands. During the first half of 16th century it may have been communicated by the local indigenous people to the newcomers and so have become integrated into the newly formed culture. This hypothesis is plausible given the widespread dispersal of the narratives about the Great Boa in Cuba which seem to be modified versions of the Great Serpent narrative. One could argue that, given the large-scale raids and expeditions capturing indigenous people from the Lesser Antilles and the mainland, it is also possible that this motif may be indigenous heritage of non-local origin that was exchanged in the early colonial period. However, in the light of the intensive pre-colonial interactions between the islands and the mainland (as demonstrated by archaeological research) this seems less likely.

The Great Boa narrative may have provided a basis for syncretism or rather symbolic synergy with the above-mentioned beliefs from West Africa or with other water gods and beings like the miengus, who are said to be beautiful, mermaid-like figures with long hair that live in rivers and in the sea and bring good fortune to those who worship them. These, in turn, have parallels in European beliefs about water beings

365 In this narrative the twins are the children of the Sun and the Moon. The moon, their mother, is firstly guided in her celestial journey when following the father, but later when she got angry at them, twins take revenge by not indicating the way anymore, and therefore she is lost and later killed. In this version the twins escape the danger by using their healing art (Goeje 1942).

366 Also Okojum is linked to Twins (see Penard 1907: 102). Curiously, the eel and firefly are seen as symbols of the force of Okojum (Divine Beings of the Water) or the Divine Serpent. There are interesting coincides with the earlier accounts. As earlier mentioned some Dominicans and Cubans suggested that cucuyos are souls of deceased persons. One of the contributors from Boca de Mana declared that his uncle could transform into an eel.
like sirens and mermaids, which may have added their part to the process of synergizing worldviews, leading to the contemporary narrative about the mermaid-like indigenous woman that could be the Mother of the Water.

Again, it is highly complicated to reconstruct the exact form and meaning of the water symbolism among the indigenous peoples of the Greater Antilles. Sweet water as a source of life and death has played a prominent role in various worldviews around the world. At least, in regions historically related to the Caribbean water sources are important and empowered places. My colleague, Adrian Gomes, Wapishana PhD researcher from Guyana, after reading the previous account about the Dominican water bodies commented briefly on the importance of water resources among the Wapishana: “...we value the water sources, springs and certain deep pools for we believe that these are sacred places with deep spiritual meanings. These sacred sites are kept by powerful spiritual beings. Therefore, every Wapishana is taught to respect these sacred places.” This respect is expressed by avoiding different activities which might disturb these sites. Mr. Gomes continues to explain that among the Wapishana: “At certain sites, it is customary to offer tobacco or farine (a local cereal made from the cassava or manioc) to appease the spirits whilst passing the site on a journey. If no offering is made, one might become sick at a later time. We carry out our ceremonies and spiritual practices through the guidance of the marunao or the shaman who provides healing and spiritual guidance. However, persons who seek spiritual healing are not obliged to go to these spiritual places. Rather, the patient goes to the home of the marunao or the marunao comes to the home of the patient for spiritual healing. Hearing the prayer or seeing the ritual in situ is the customary law if one wants to learn about a ritual or prayer. This is how the Wapishana people pass on this particular knowledge to their fellow villagers. A person who now knows the prayer can now use it to heal others. Therefore, one should not be surprised if a Wapishana, when asked information about a ritual, he or she does not seem willing to divulge the information."

The indigenous people of Martinique at the beginning of 17th century had a similar prohibition. An anonymous narrator visiting this island between 1618 and 1620 observed that it was prohibited to wash vessels in the currents of the river because this would bring thunder, rain and floods (Anonymous de Carpentras 1618-1620 in Petitjean Roget 1995). The narratives about indigenous spirits that are dangerous for certain persons seem to be a warning to be cautious at certain parts of the rivers which could be dangerous. Future studies should verify whether these beliefs were connected to the prohibitions to execute certain tasks like fishing or washing.

Concluding remarks
The Cuban and Dominican water sources are memory places, whose meanings are composed of sometimes fragmented past cosmologies of diverse origin situated in shared landscapes. The great sacred serpent narrative indicates an (unconscious) engagement with the indigenous past, which can be entangled into the symbolism of posterior periods. Unlike other landmarks a small water pool might not directly call our visual attention but nonetheless it may be of great importance for local history. The multiple meanings and symbolic associations of special parts of rivers, waterfalls, pools, and similar places seem to be testimonies of the universal value of certain landscape features, whose symbolism, rooted in different worldviews, converged spatially in the Caribbean context. To a certain degree this universality of landscape symbolism created the conditions for producing fusion, but also the space for masking people’s own spirituality. We may compare the development of the meanings of these places with the flows of the rivers themselves. Some meanings would spread into new evolving landscapes, which themselves change, expand where
possible, merge with other flows, erode on their way, dry out, submerge into subterranean and re-emerge as new small spring without seemingly apparent connections yet sometimes leaving profound imprints in these landscapes and also memories.

The next chapter focuses on another important landscape feature: the caverns, as natural sites wherein the historical memory has been inscribed and is being constantly re-inscribed through oral traditions and performances of rituals.